The Swedish Higher Education Authority

Self-Assessment Report for the ENQA Agency Review 2020

Contents

List of abbreviations

ENQA   European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR   European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ESG   Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

HEI   Higher education institution

HF   Higher Education Ordinance

HL   Higher Education Act

INQAAHE   International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

NOQA   Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education

QA   Quality assurance

QAN   Quality Audit Network

SUHF   Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions

SFS   Swedish National Union of Students

UKÄ   Swedish Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslersämbetet*)

Foreword

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has chosen to undergo an external review conducted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) at a time when we believe the review will be of particular benefit to the agency and to the higher education sector.
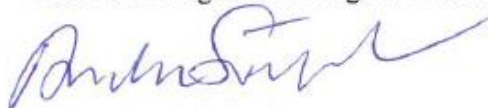
UKÄ's current cycle of external quality assurance activities is delivering important mid-time results, while at the same time planning for the next cycle will soon start. At this stage, the ENQA review gives us an excellent opportunity to receive external feedback on how we fulfil our quality assurance mission, and to reflect on our strengths and challenges, before we start preparing the new cycle in close dialogue with our stakeholders. This self-assessment report is the product of committed involvement from UKÄ staff and stakeholders, and we are confident that the SAR process as such has already contributed to our organisational learning and development.

A new management system for the agency has recently been implemented, and this process of internal quality assurance interacts timely with the ENQA review. In addition, the review will provide valuable input to an ongoing government assignment to follow-up and assess the national quality assurance system.
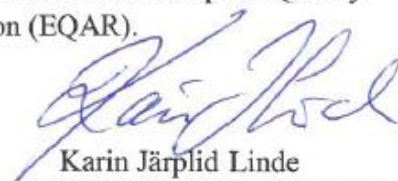
UKÄ's remit has recently been extended to include the assessment of higher education institutions' quality assurance of research processes. We see this as an important but challenging development. Feedback from ENQA's review panel on our current activities will be of great value to this process.

This is UKÄ's first external review for ENQA membership, although UKÄ and its predecessors have a long experience of external quality assurance, and our predecessors have been a member of ENQA. International cooperation is a high priority for the agency, and ENQA membership will reinforce our legitimacy as an external quality assurance agency in an increasingly international higher education landscape.

UKÄ hereby commends its self-assessment report to the ENQA Board and the review panel. Based on the outcome of this assessment, UKÄ, currently ENQA affiliate, seeks membership in ENQA. The review will also serve as basis for a request for inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Anders Söderholm
Director General

Karin Järplid Linde
Head of the Department of
Quality Assurance

1. Introduction

The Swedish Higher Education Authority's (UKÄ)[1] self-assessment report is divided into 14 chapters, and follows the structure outlined in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews.

Chapter 2 describes the development of UKÄ's self-assessment report (SAR), and the internal process initiated to prepare the agency for the application for ENQA membership and registration on EQAR.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of higher education in Sweden, and of the evaluation and quality assurance of higher education.

Chapters 4 describes the history, profile and activities of UKÄ, including external quality assurance, legal supervision and inspection, and analysis and statistics.

Chapters 5-6 describe UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, their rationale, processes and methodologies.

Chapter 7 describes UKÄ's internal quality assurance, including the agency's quality policy and management system.

Chapter 8 describes UKÄ's international activities, and the agency's membership in international associations and networks.

Chapters 9-10 evaluate UKÄ's compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG), Part 3 and 2, and are intended to be read in cross-reference with, above all, chapters 4-7.

Chapters 11-14 provide information on UKÄ's stakeholders and their opinions, the agency's SWOT analysis, and UKÄ's current challenges and areas for future development.

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[1] In Swedish: *Universitetskanslersämbetet.*

2. Development of the self-assessment report

The development of UKÄ's self-assessment report (SAR) and related activities has been organised according to the agency's regular project model.

As soon as the Director General had decided that UKÄ should undergo an ENQA agency review and made a formal request to ENQA, an internal project was set up. The head of the Department of Quality Assurance was assigned project owner, and a project manager was appointed together with a core project team of three staff members. A tentative project plan was developed for the review process, and once the terms of reference were agreed upon, the group started drafting the SAR and planning activities to involve colleagues at all levels and departments in different parts of the process. The development of the SAR has taken place in close connection with the development and launch of UKÄ's new management system and with an ambition to have a transparent and inclusive methodology. The project management has had regular meetings with the project owner, and checks with the Director General and UKÄ's top management team.

A project reference network with representatives from all departments has supported the project team with documents and served as an informal sounding board providing feedback.

General information on the purpose of the application for ENQA membership, registration on EQAR, and the SAR process has been presented to all UKÄ staff at monthly staff meetings as well as department meetings. For stakeholders, a brief backround, relevant links and information about the application process, including a timeline, is available on the agency website.

All departments and, when more relevant, units or working groups participated in mini-workshops conducting a SWOT-analysis focusing on the agency's performance in activities relevant to this external review. Similar activities were also conducted with stakeholder groups, UKÄ's Advisory Council, and the top management team. Results were sorted thematically and summarised in the SWOT-analysis presented in chapter 13. For staff at the Department of Quality Assurance, the project team hosted two workshops were participants reflected on questions like 'how do we know that we comply with ESG 2.2, 2.3 and 2.5', and gave examples of good practice and identified areas of improvement.

In the later stages of the process, two international readers were invited to review parts of the draft, for suggestions on structure and comprehension. At the final stage, the head and deputy heads of the Department of Quality Assurance, and a limited number of colleagues who had not been part of the project group, commented on the draft report.

The SAR process can be illustrated by the following timeline:
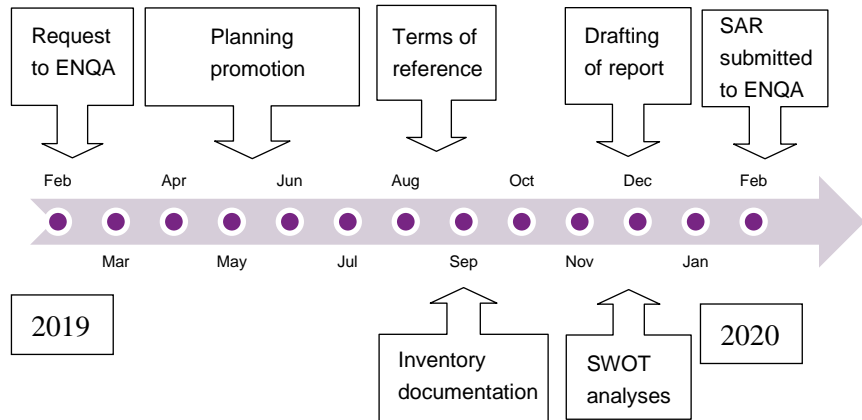
3. Higher education and quality assurance of higher education in Sweden

The chapter provides an overview of the Swedish higher education system, including higher education providers, laws and regulations, and programme and degree structure.[2] The evaluation of Swedish higher education is also briefly described, including but not restricted to external quality assurance.

3.1. Higher education in Sweden

The Swedish higher education system is relatively flexible compared to many other countries, in part because the educational offerings are largely course-based. All first- and second-cycle education consists of courses that may be combined into programmes, but there are several large programmes leading to a professional degree that are more strictly regulated. In addition to programmes that lead to the award of qualifications, higher education offers a wide range of freestanding courses, many of them offered through distance learning, partly or entirely online. Students may select their own combination of courses, and if these combinations meet stipulated requirements, a qualification may be awarded.

Traditionally, Swedish higher education does not only involve educating youth after secondary education. It also includes possibilities for continuing development for professionals. Many students take courses without planning to graduate, and it is common to return to higher education after previous studies. This results in a higher average age of students than in some other countries.

3.1.1. Higher education institutions

The majority of higher education is provided by public higher education institutions (HEIs), comprising around 90 per cent of the registered students. The Riksdag (the Swedish parliament) decides on the

> Sweden has 17 universities, 18 university colleges and 13 other higher education providers.

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[2] For further information in English on Swedish higher education, see *Higher Education Institutions in Sweden – 2019 status report*, https://english.uka.se/about-us/publications/reports--guidelines/reports--guidelines/2019-08-14-higher-education-institutions-in-sweden---2019-status-report.html.

establishment of public HEIs, while the Government decides whether a university college has the right to become a university.

There are 48 higher education providers in Sweden[3]:

- 15 public universities

- 16 public university colleges

- 2 independent universities

- 2 independent university colleges

- 13 other independent higher education providers.

Sweden has a uniform system for higher education, and the same legislation applies to all higher education, regardless of provider. Both public-sector HEIs and independent education providers are required to participate in the national evaluations of higher education. The primary difference between a university and a university college is that universities enjoy general entitlement to award degrees at the master and doctoral levels, while university colleges must apply for permission to award third-cycle degrees in specific areas. Most independent higher education providers are small and only have programmes in one or a few areas.

HEIs have two primary missions: to provide higher education and research, including collaboration with the surrounding society. More precisely, the mission of the HEIs is to provide education based on scholarly or artistic practice and on proven experience. HEIs are also to carry out scholarly and artistic research, and development work. HEIs are also to collaborate with the surrounding society, inform about their activities, and ensure that their research results are beneficial to society.

Public HEIs are government agencies in their own right, and are immediately under Government supervision. Under the auspices of comprehensive legislation, HEIs make most decisions independently. This involves, among other things, organisation, internal allocation of resources, content and design of courses and programmes, the number of students admitted, and what research they conduct. The Government determines what qualifications may be offered and requirements for them in the form of scope and objectives. The right to issue qualifications may be designated in part by legislation, and in part by special authorisation decisions from UKÄ or the Government.

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[3] A map of Sweden with all HEIs is published on UKÄ's website, https://www.uka.se/fakta-om-hogskolan/universitet-och-hogskolor/var-finns-universiteten-och-hogskolorna-.html.

The Riksdag decides on funding for education and research in higher education for each HEI, while the Government defines the HEIs' educational assignments in their public service agreements.

HEIs receive separate funding streams for education and research directly from the Government. However, some of the state funding for research and education in third-cycle education is channelled via research funding agencies, such as the Swedish Research Council. Research is also funded by research funding bodies other than the state.

Higher education is free of charge, except for students from countries outside the EU/EEC area or Switzerland. These students must pay both application fees and tuition fees for first and second cycle education.

3.1.2. Laws and regulations governing higher education

The Higher Education Act (1992:1434) contains provisions for HEIs that are accountable to the Government. The Act is enacted by the Swedish Parliament and contains basic regulations on education offered by HEIs. For instance, it sets out what should characterise courses and programmes at different levels and stipulates freedom of research. It provides a framework for the organisation and governance of the HEIs, and states that every HEI must have a board of governors and a vice-chancellor. It also contains regulations about the duties of teachers as well as provisions about student influence. In addition, HEIs must foster equality of opportunity, and promote and widen participation in higher education. However, the Education Act is not otherwise particularly detailed.

The Higher Education Act is supplemented by the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100); the Ordinance (1993:221) for the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; and the Ordinance (2007:1164) for the Swedish Defence University, which are decreed by the Government. The ordinances include, for example, rules for employing teachers and doctoral students; entry requirements for applicants to higher education; rules for syllabi and grades; and students' right to participate in the governance of HEIs. The annexes to the ordinances contain 'qualifications ordinances', which include descriptions of and qualitative targets for all degrees in all three cycles.

Figure 1 illustrates how the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance affect HEIs, together with UKÄ's legal supervisory and external quality assurance activities, in relation to the ESG.

**Higher education
institutions
(HEI)**

ESG
1.1–1.9

HL, HF,
ESG 1.10
ESG 2

**ESG
Higher
Education Act
(HL)
Higher
Education
Ordinance
(HF)**

UKÄ
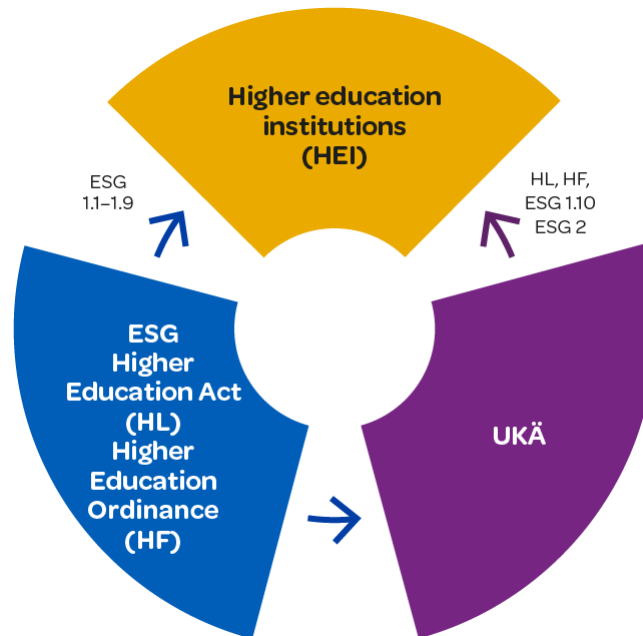
Public HEIs are also directed through the Government's annual public service agreement to each HEI. As government agencies, public HEIs are also regulated by the Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900).

The equivalent legislation, however considerably less detailed, for independent higher education providers is the Act (1993:792) Concerning Authority to Award Certain Qualifications. There are also often contracts with the Government laying out requirements for the independent education providers.

3.1.3. Programme and degree structure

Higher education in Sweden is organised according to the cycles of the Bologna process. Figure 2 shows the degree levels of Swedish higher education related to the first, second and third cycles.

Figure 2   The degree structure of higher education in Sweden.
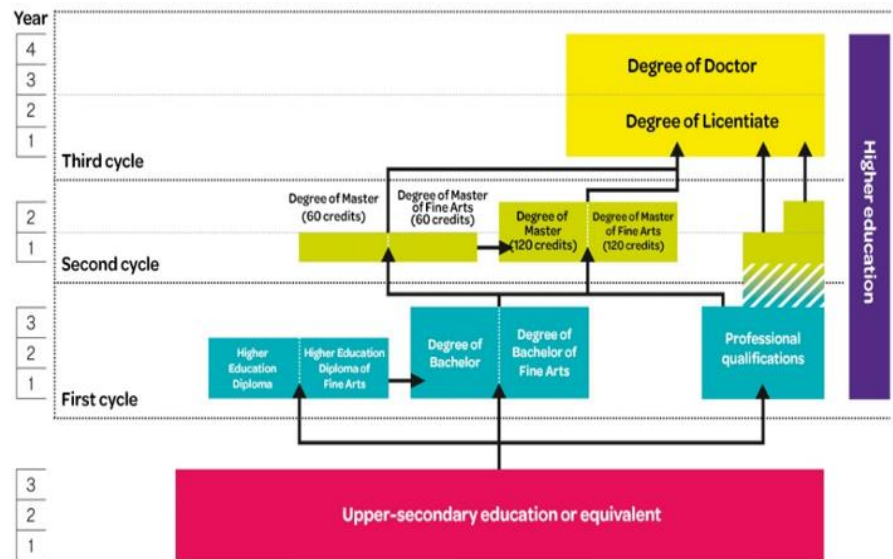
Students may either follow a programme or take freestanding courses. Courses at the first- and second-cycle levels can be assembled into a degree programme. One academic year corresponds to 60 higher education credits (equal to ECTS credits) for full-time studies. There are three types of qualifications in higher education: general qualifications; qualifications in the fine, applied and performing arts; and professional qualifications. The Qualifications Ordinance, Annex 2 of the Higher Education Ordinance, lays down the qualitative targets.

The total number of students (headcounts) in first- and second-cycle education in autumn 2018 is shown in table 1.

Table 1

Total number of students in first and second cycle education	349300
General qualifications - first cycle	
Higher education diploma programme	2400
Degree of Bachelor programme	65000
General qualifications - second cycle	
Degree of Master programme 60 credits	4500
Degree of Master programme 120 credits	28600
Fine, applied and performing arts - first and second cycle	3200
Professional qualifications - first and second cycle	144600
Students registered on first and second cycle courses	111200
Total number of students in third cycle education	16900

The total number and the number on each level presented in table 1 are net. A student can be enrolled at several levels and programmes or courses at the same time.

3.2. Evaluation of higher education

National evaluation of various aspects of Swedish higher education includes but is not restricted to external quality assurance. In addition to UKÄ's quality assurance activities described in this self-assessment report, higher education is also monitored and evaluated by, e.g., The Swedish National Audit Office[4], The Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy[5], and Statistics Sweden.[6]

3.2.1. Quality assurance of higher education

The Higher Education Act regulates, among other things, that the operations of higher education institutions shall be arranged to ensure that high standards are attained in courses and study programmes and in research. The resources available shall be used effectively to sustain a high standard of operation. Quality assurance procedures are the shared concern of staff and students at higher education institutions. In addition, the Higher Education Ordinance regulates certain aspects of HEIs and higher education, such as admissions, syllabi, grades, and student participation in governance. For each public HEI and for UKÄ, there are also government instructions and public service agreements defined by the Government, which direct the agencies' operations through funding and specific commissions. The government instruction for UKÄ[7] states that the agency is responsible for quality assurance of HEIs' operations through its external quality assurance activities. In addition, it states that these matters under UKÄ's responsibilities concern both public and independent higher education providers (independent HEIs).

For independent HEIs, the Award of Certain Degrees Licensing Act (1993:792) provides regulations that they are required to follow to be allowed to award specific degrees. This includes that the independent HEIs must follow the requirements of the Higher Education Act, and that they are required to participate in external follow-ups and evaluations of their programmes. Independent HEIs must therefore align with the same national regulations on quality assurance as public HEIs, and as such also fall under the remit of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities.

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[4] *Riksrevisionen,* https://www.riksrevisionen.se/en/about-the-swedish-nao.html.
[5] *Institutet för arbetsmarknads- och utbildningspolitisk utvärdering IFAU*, https://www.ifau.se/en/About-IFAU/.
[6] *Statistiska centralbyrån SCB*, https://www.scb.se/en/.
[7] *Förordning (2012:810) med instruktion för Universitetskanslersämbetet.* An English translation is available to ENQA's review panel on request.

4. History, profile and activities of UKÄ

The chapter describes the history, profile and activities of UKÄ as well as its position and status in the national context and its compliance with the national requirements.

4.1. The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ)

UKÄ is an independent government agency under the Ministry for Education and Research. UKÄ was established in January 2013 when three agencies (the National Agency for Higher Education Services; the National Agency for Higher Education and the International Programme Office) were merged into two new agencies: UKÄ and the Swedish Council for Higher Education.

As for all other government agencies, the Riksdag decides on the allocation of resources to UKÄ. The operations of UKÄ are laid down in the instructions issued by the Government. These instructions define its areas of responsibility and the tasks to be undertaken.

Each year the Government issues a public service agreement that specifies the targets and the funding for these operations. The Government can also assign additional tasks during the year, referred to as government assignments.

For a description of UKÄ's mission and vision, see 7.1.

4.2. Three main areas of operation

UKÄ's operations all support important quality aspects of higher education and research, although only the agency's external quality assurance activities are entirely within the scope of the ESG.

The agency's operations embrace three main areas:

- quality assurance of higher education and research[8], and appraisal of the degree-awarding powers of public-sector higher education institutions,

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[8] Reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes of research, not research as such. See 5.2.1.

- legal supervision of HEIs' compliance with laws and regulations

- statistics, analysis and follow-up of higher education, including the monitoring of HEIs efficiency.

UKÄ also receives government assignments within the agency's fields of competence in higher education and research.

4.2.1. Quality assurance and degree-awarding powers

Four separate but interlinked external quality assurance activities form the national system for quality assurance of higher education. The objectives of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities are to assess the quality of outcomes of study programmes and contribute to higher education institutions' work with quality enhancement in higher education.

In addition, reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes of research (not research as such) will be included in the institutional reviews of the higher education institutions' quality assurance processes as from 2021.

The current national system for quality assurance of higher education applies from 2017 through 2022.[9] The aims, objectives and processes of the external quality assurance activities are described in detail in chapter 5, and their compliance with the ESG is explained in chapter 10.

4.2.2. Student rights and legal supervision of higher education

To ensure that student rights are respected, UKÄ monitors and reviews the compliance of HEIs with applicable rules and regulations in Sweden. This applies, among other things, to the provisions of the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance and the Administrative Procedure Act[10]. UKÄ also reviews whether HEIs comply with their own rules.

UKÄ uses several working methods for legal supervision:

- processing complaints, primarily from students

- carrying out HEI supervision

- conducting targeted inspections when warranted

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[9] *National system for quality assurance of higher education – presentation of a government assignment* (UKÄ Report 2016:15).
[10] *Högskolelag* (1992:1434), *Högskoleförordning* (1993:100), *Förvaltningslag* (2017:900).

- managing projects on particular issues.

Supervision can be initiated on behalf of the Government, on UKÄ's own initiative, or following a complaint from an individual or an organisation.

The purpose of the HEI supervision is to determine that public HEIs comply with legal matters, which are also associated with certain quality assurance issues in the ESG. The standards and guidelines include a number of areas pertaining to issues that are regulated in the Swedish higher education statutes and the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act. These issues are typically monitored as part of the supervision. Compliance with the applicable rules is essential for HEIs to be judged to have a high-quality operation. However, the legal supervision of HEIs is not a separate external quality assurance activity nor part of such activities. The relationship between UKÄ's legal supervision of HEIs and the relevant ESG areas is shown in table 2.[11]

The HEI supervision is coordinated with the institutional reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes, in such a way that the supervision of an HEI is conducted a few months before the start of the institutional review. This allows for an overlap of the different activities, and both the HEIs and the assessment panel are able to take the results of HEI supervision into consideration for the institutional review.

Table 2   UKÄ's legal supervision of HEIs related to the ESG.

ESG standard	HEI supervision – review areas
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	- Student influence - Student representation in drafting and decision-making bodies - The HEI's measures to safeguard student influence when decisions are made or prepared by a single person - Course and programme syllabi - The HEI's compliance with the provisions for course and programme syllabi
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Appeals and complaints How the HEI handles appeals and complaints from students
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	- Credit transfer - How the HEI handles credit transfers according to regulations, and appeals regarding such cases

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[11] See also *Guidelines for supervision of higher education institutions' application of rules*, https://english.uka.se/about-us/publications/reports--guidelines/reports--guidelines/2018-05-09-guidelines-for-supervision-of-higher-education-institutions-application-of-rules.html.

1.5 Teaching staff	• Hiring of staff
	• How the HEI handles hiring processes in light of the rules in the Higher Education Ordinance and the Employment Ordinance
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	• Course evaluations
	• The HEI's compliance with regulations on course evaluations
	• Student influence
	• Student representation in drafting and decision-making bodies
	• The HEI's measures to safeguard student influence when decisions are made or prepared by a single person

Further, UKÄ carries out targeted inspections at HEIs when the agency receives indications that a HEI has shortcomings in a specific legal area. The purpose of these targeted initiatives is to review on site the HEIs' compliance with the regulations that apply to their operations.

UKÄ also provides administrative support for the Higher Education Expulsions Board and the Higher Education Appeals Board. The Higher Education Expulsions Board hears cases concerning the suspension of students from higher education. The Higher Education Appeals Board reviews appeals against some decisions made in the higher education sector and higher vocational education sector.

4.2.3. Statistics, follow-up and analysis

UKÄ is responsible for the official statistics on higher education. The sources for UKÄ's follow-up and monitoring of higher education are data from the Statistic Registry for Swedish Higher Education at Statistics Sweden (SCB), as well as financial data that UKÄ collects directly from the HEIs. Some data is also interconnected with data included in other national registers, such as the Register on Participation in Education (SCB). This information provides UKÄ with good opportunities to monitor the extent to which HEIs meet the requirements of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, e.g. regarding widened participation and internationalisation.

UKÄ statistics include data on the number of students in different study programmes, gender, age, whether they study on campus or as distance learning students, and students' social background.

Statistics may provide background information for UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, and serve as input to assessment panels' work, e.g. student completion rates used as indicators in programme evaluations. Thus, external quality assurance takes advantage of expertise and data from the agency's official statistics activities.

However, UKÄ statistics is not a separate external quality assurance activity.

Further, UKÄ follows up and analyses the operations of higher education institutions, primarily to provide the Riksdag and the Government with data on which to base decisions about higher education. This includes monitoring the efficiency of the operations of higher education institutions.

4.3. Organisation

The Director General is the Head of the agency and solely responsible for decision-making, but may delegate decision-making according to UKÄ's line of delegation. As a rule, decisions are prepared by UKÄ staff, and in the case of external quality assurance, based on assessments made by peer-review experts. Further, the agency has an Advisory Council, whose members are appointed by the Government. An important task for the Advisory Council is to provide democratic insight into the work of the agency.

The chart in figure 3 illustrates UKÄ's internal organisation:

Figure 3
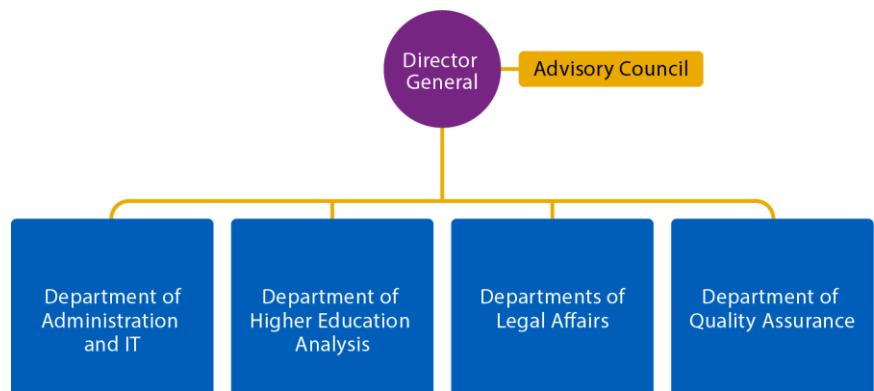
The various activities of the agency are conducted by the departments as follows:

- The Department of Quality Assurance is responsible for the external quality assurance activities within the national quality assurance system.

- The Department of Higher Education Analysis is responsible for the official statistics on higher education Statistics, follow-up and analysis, as well as for monitoring how efficiently HEIs make use of their resources.

- The Department of Legal Affairs is responsible for the legal supervision of HE and monitoring of students' rights, and

provide administrative support and legal expertise to the Higher Education Appeals Board and the Higher Education Expulsions Board

- The Department of Administration and IT is responsible for ensuring internal governance and control, coordinating budget, planning, follow-up and annual report, activities to develop HEI leadership [12], coordinating, monitoring and improving systems for records management, finance, procurement, facilities management, human resources and IT, and UKÄ's communication and information activities.

The human and financial resources of the agency are commented on in 9.5.

4.4. Historical overview of quality assurance activities

Consistent quality assurance of higher education in Sweden has a history of more than 20 years. Hence, UKÄ and its predecessors have gathered extensive experience in the field of external quality assurance. Different methods have been developed and used, and over time the national system has shifted focus between control and improvement, quality assessment and quality enhancement.

Starting out in the mid-nineties, there was a strong focus on internal quality assurance processes at HEIs. In 1995, Högskoleverket (HSV) inherited from the Office of the University Chancellor the implementation and further development of the two six-year cycles of institutional quality audits (institutional reviews), as well as appraisals of applications for entitlement to award degrees. A number of programme evaluations were also carried out, generally based on indications of problems or poor quality. This approach proved insufficient as the sole means of assessing the quality of study programmes.

From 2001 onwards, programme and subject evaluations became the predominant form of quality assurance carried out. At the same time, the quality audits were temporarily being phased out. A six-year plan was developed, covering all general and professional programmes. Simultaneously, a model of thematic evaluation was introduced, focusing on how well the higher education institutions dealt with specific aspects of quality, such as gender equality, internationalisation and student influence.

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[12] UKÄ has a government assignment to promote academic leadership targeted to all vice-chancellors.

As the 2001–2007 cycle drew to a close, plans were developed for a revised quality assurance system which included institutional reviews, evaluations of study programmes, appraisals of the entitlement to award degrees, and thematic evaluations and thematic studies. This system for external quality assurance was in operation until 2010. The model had met with some criticism, not least from the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF), who claimed that it lacked transparency, predictability and comparability, and that its focus on results was too weak.

After a prolonged period of discussions and deliberations a new national system of programme evaluations was designed for the period 2011-2016[13]. Although focus was on achieved learning outcomes, some general effects at HEIs were identified, e.g. an increased focus on quality assurance procedures and increased awareness of the national qualification descriptors.[14]

In 2013, UKÄ began developing the current national system for external quality assurance. The concept of development in close dialogue with stakeholders ran through the whole development process. As part of this process, UKÄ conducted conferences, interviews, surveys, and seminars with representatives from HEIs, teachers, students, employers and the labour market aimed at collecting opinions and development ideas. A Government communication[15], together with experience from the 2011–2014 review cycle and the comments and suggestions that were collected during the work initiated in 2013, formed the basis for further developing the model for UKÄ's quality assurance activities.

The new quality assurance cycle started in January 2017 and will run through 2022. To meet the HEIs' demands on transparency and predictability, a timetable for all assessments planned during the six-year cycle was published and communicated to the HEIs.[16]

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[13] Evaluations were conducted 2011-2014.
[14] See the thematic analysis *The effects of programme evaluations – An analysis of the effects of the national evaluation system 2011–2014*, UKÄ report 2015:21, https://english.uka.se/about-us/publications/reports--guidelines/reports--guidelines/2016-05-17-the-effects-of-programme-evaluations.html.
[15] Government communication (*Kvalitetssäkring av högre utbildning* 2015/16:76), report from the Education Committee and the Riksdag communication (report 2015/16:UbU9, Riksdag communication 2015/16:155).
[16] Timetable for UKÄ assessments planned 2017-2022, https://www.uka.se/kvalitet--examenstillstand/tidsplan.html (in Swedish).

5. Higher education quality assurance activities of UKÄ

Four external quality assurance activities form a national system for quality assurance that supports HEIs' quality enhancement.

The chapter describes UKÄ's external quality assurance of higher education and the relevant activities.

The national system for quality assurance of higher education consists of four external quality assurance activities, outlined in this chapter. The objectives of the activities are partly to assess the performance of study programmes and partly to contribute to HEIs' quality enhancement work in education and research. The activities are based in the Higher Education Act, Higher Education Ordinance and the ESG.

The current national system applies from 2017 through 2022, and integrates all the types of assessment that UKÄ undertakes with an emphasis on providing support for the HEIs in their own internal procedures. This is an important aspect of the national system, as most quality assurance activities are to be conducted by the HEIs.

The ESG are explicitly included in the present model. Incorporating ESG's principles is important for both the HEIs and UKÄ as a quality assurance agency. The aim is to have a shared point of departure. It is also important for students as the new ESG has a clear focus on student-centred learning.

Both public HEIs and independent higher education providers are required to participate in UKÄ's external quality activities.

5.1. UKÄ's external quality assurance activities

The national system for external quality assurance comprises four separate but interlinked activities. The system is designed so that the separate quality assurance activities jointly address all standards in ESG Part 1 (see 10.1).

The external quality assurance activities and their respective assessment areas are listed in table 3.

Table 3   UKÄ's external QA activities and assessment areas.

Activity	Assessment areas
Institutional reviews	• Governance and organisation • Preconditions • Design, implementation and outcomes • Gender equality • Student and doctoral student perspective • Working life and collaboration
Programme evaluations	• Preconditions • Design, implementation and outcomes (including gender equality and follow-up, measures and feedback) • Student and doctoral student perspective • Working life and collaboration
Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers	• Preconditions • Design, implementation and outcomes (including gender equality) • Student and doctoral student perspective • Working life and collaboration
Thematic evaluations[17]	• The methodology applied to the thematic evaluations is developed and adapted to the relevant theme, but it should follow the methods used for the other activities whenever possible.

The interlinked design of the national quality assurance system is further illustrated in figure 4. The coloured bars represent the four external quality assurance activities, and shows which of the six assessment areas are covered by each activity.

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[17] UKÄ's thematic evaluations constitute a separate external quality assurance activity and should be distinguished from the agency's thematic analyses (9.4).

Figure 4   The interlinked national system for quality assurance.
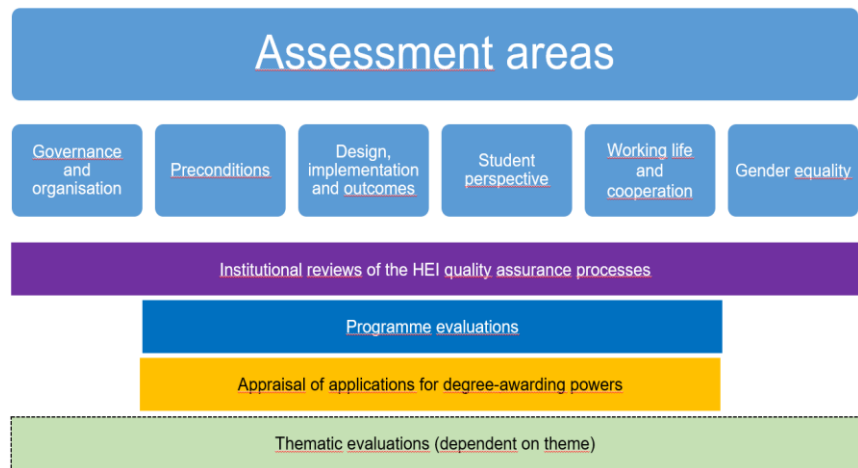
Table 4 shows the total number of completed and ongoing external quality assurance assessments during 2015-2020, including regular reviews, evaluations and appraisals, as well as follow-up assessments.

Table 4   UKÄ's external QA assessments 2015-2020.

Year[18]	Institutional reviews	Programme evaluations	Follow-up of progr. evaluations	Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers	Thematic evalua-tions	Total
2015			229	16		245
2016		13	104	28		145
2017	4[19]	20[20]	2	8	1	35
2018	4	83	0	16		103
2019	5	95	21	8		129
2020	11	103	36	12	1	163

5.2. Institutional reviews

The purpose of institutional reviews is to confirm that HEIs' quality assurance processes ensure high quality education and support their quality enhancement.

The reviews focus on how well HEIs' quality assurance processes, including follow-up, measures and feedback procedures, help to

[18] Year of decision.
[19] Pilot round of institutional reviews.
[20] Including 8 pilot evaluations.

systematically ensure and enhance the quality of the courses and programmes at all levels. They also contribute to improving HEIs' quality, since the assessors[21] in their reports identify both examples of good practice and areas in need of improvement.

The reviews aim to verify that HEIs ensure that courses and programmes at all levels comply with applicable laws, ordinances and the ESG.

A number of legal matters associated with certain quality assurance issues in the ESG are not considered in the institutional reviews as they are included in UKÄ's HEI supervision, conducted by the UKÄ's Department of Legal Affairs (described in 4.2.2). In this respect, HEI supervision may be said to function as a preparatory step for the institutional review process, although supervision is not as such within the scope of the ESG. The report resulting from HEI supervision is included as additional material in the subsequent institutional review.

5.2.1. Institutional reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

In July 2017, UKÄ was tasked by the Government to extend the current national quality assurance system to include the reviewing of HEIs quality assurance processes for research. A first pilot testing of the method developed in dialogue with the HEIs and the Swedish Research Council[22] is being conducted September 2019 – November 2020, and after proper adjustment, this new activity will be included in UKÄ's regular institutional reviews as from fall 2021. However, as it concerns research, it is not within the scope of the ESG.

5.3. Programme evaluations

The purpose of programme[23] evaluations is to monitor the outcomes of first-, second- and third cycle programmes, and to contribute to the HEIs' own quality improvements for the reviewed programmes.

The programme evaluations assess the actual conditions and results, e.g. that a programme meets the requirements in applicable laws and ordinances, ensure that students have opportunities to achieve the national qualitative targets and also achieve these targets.

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[21] External peer-review experts (described in detail in 10.4).
[22] *Vetenskapsrådet*, Sweden's largest governmental research funding body, https://www.vr.se/english.
[23] Programme = main field of study (Sw. *Huvudområde*).

In addition, programme evaluations assess how well the follow-up, measures and feedback processes systematically contribute to ensuring and enhancing quality in the evaluated programmes.

Failure to meet quality standards may result in the revoking of degree-awarding powers.

The evaluations contribute to enhancing HEIs' quality since UKÄ's assessors provide feedback in their reports on both identified examples of good practice and areas in need of improvement.

5.4. Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers

The purpose of appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers is to examine whether an HEI meets the necessary prerequisites for students to achieve the objectives defined in the Higher Education Act, and the Higher Education Ordinance. For third-cycle degrees, the assessment also includes the positions assumed in a government bill on doctoral programmes.[24]

UKÄ is charged by the Government to determine whether HEIs shall be given degree-awarding powers. The exemptions are independent HEIs, the Swedish Defence University, and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. For these HEIs, the decision of degree-awarding powers lies with the Government, although the applications are generally referred to UKÄ for assessment and appraisal, before the Government makes a decision.

Most public HEIs in Sweden have independent powers to determine which degrees they can issue. Although all HEIs must apply for degree-awarding powers for the professional degrees regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance, there are additional limitations as to what degrees each type of HEI may issue. This is shown in table 5.

Table 5   Degree-awarding powers according to type of HEI.

Type of HEI	Degree-awarding powers
Universities	Must apply to be able to issue professional degrees, and degrees in the fine arts. Generally have independent powers to issue: higher education diplomas, Bachelor's degrees, 1-year and 2-year Master's degrees, Licentiate degrees, and Doctoral degrees.
Public university colleges	Must apply to be able issue professional degrees, degrees in fine arts, and 2-year Master's degrees, as well as Licentiate and Doctoral degrees in specific subject areas. Generally have

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[24] *Forskarutbildning med profilering och kvalitet* 2008/09:134.

	independent powers to issue: higher education diplomas, Bachelor's degrees, and 1-year Master's degrees.
Public fine arts university colleges	Generally only have powers to issue higher education diplomas, and Bachelor's degrees. Must apply for degree-awarding powers to issue all other degrees.
Independent HEIs	Generally have no independent degree-awarding powers. Must apply for degree-awarding powers to issue all types of degrees.

5.5. Thematic evaluations

Thematic evaluations assess how HEIs fulfil tasks of importance for quality in higher education assigned to them by legislation. The primary purpose of the thematic evaluations is quality enhancement, and they do not imply any sanctions for the HEIs.

The first thematic evaluation was completed in 2017, and investigated HEIs work with promotion of sustainable development in higher education.[25] A second thematic evaluation on the subject of widening participation in higher education will be conducted 2020-2021.

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[25] Summary in English, https://english.uka.se/about-us/publications/reports--guidelines/reports--guidelines/2018-02-15-how-swedish-heis-work-in-promoting-sustainable-development.html.

6. Processes and their methodologies

The basic principles and procedures, including peer-review assessment, for UKÄ's external quality assurance activities are similar. However, there are variations between the different types of activities.

This chapter describes the processes and methodologies of each of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities. More detailed information on the processes of the various activities is provided in the guidelines for each activity, published on UKÄ's website.

6.1. Institutional reviews

All Swedish HEIs will be reviewed during the current cycle 2017-2022.

The overall process for institutional reviews is described in figure 5.

Figure 5

Process for institutional reviews of HEI´s quality assurance processes
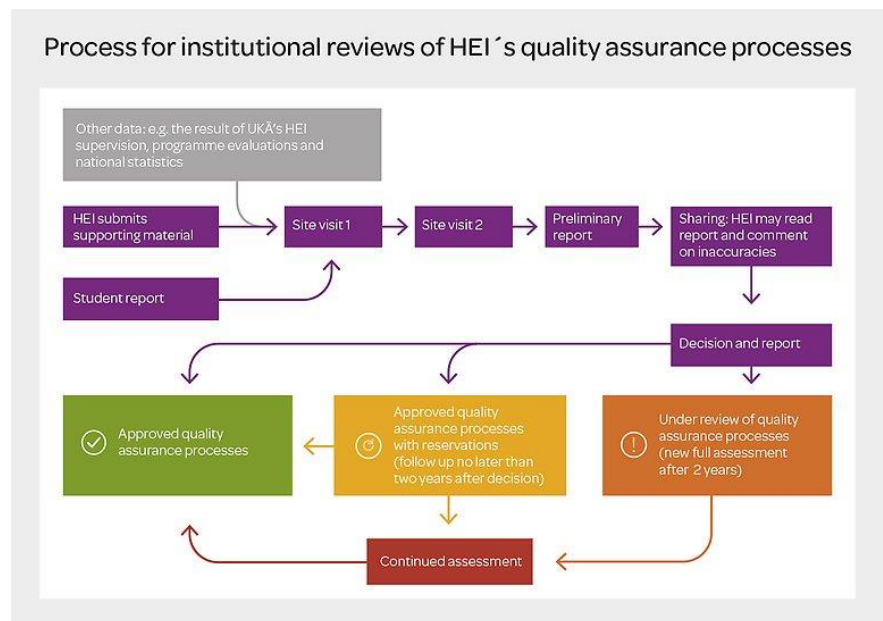
6.1.1. Assessment areas

The assessment areas for institutional reviews are listed in 5.2.

6.1.2. Assessment material

The basis for the reviews is a self-evaluation report written by the HEI, a student report, interviews, site visits, audit trails, and other information. All assessment material for the review is considered in the overall assessment.

The HEI's self-evaluation. The HEI is required to describe, analyse and evaluate how it systematically ensures and follows up that it fulfils the assessment criteria for the different assessment areas. Examples should be provided to support the HEI's evaluation.

Student report. The local student union(s) has the option of submitting a written statement, known as a student report, in which they give their opinion on the quality assurance work at the HEI.

Two site visits. During the site visits the assessment panel interviews personnel, students, and other relevant persons. The interviews complement the written assessment material.

Audit trails. To examine how quality assurance processes work in practice, the assessors examine one or more focus areas, called 'audit trails' for the second site visit. In this context, focus areas are quality assurance processes, related to the assessment criteria in selected environments.

Other assessment material. Prior to reviews, UKÄ produces data for the HEI relevant to the assessment criteria. Such data is e.g. HEI legal supervision reports, previous appraisals of degree-awarding power applications, programme evaluations, and national statistics showing student completion and establishment levels.

6.1.3. Assessments and reports

The assessment panel's judgment on whether the HEI fulfils the assessment criteria results in a report that serves as the basis for UKÄ's decision. For the reports also to help enhance quality at the HEIs, the assessors include their own reflections and highlight strengths and examples of good practice, as well as areas in need of improvement.

The assessment panel's draft report is sent to the HEI for comment before UKÄ makes its final decision. The purpose of this is to give HEIs the opportunity to comment on any factual mistakes in the report.

The overall assessment is made on a three-point scale. On the basis of the assessment panel's report, UKÄ decides whether the HEI receives: Approved quality assurance processes, Approved quality assurance processes with reservations, and Quality assurance processes under review.

6.1.4. Follow-up

Reviews are followed up in different ways according to the overall assessment:

Approved quality assurance processes. UKÄ follows up even HEIs that receive approval for their quality assurance processes. This includes dialogue meetings, surveys and conferences.

Approved quality assurance processes with reservations. There is ongoing development of follow-up procedures of this activity. UKÄ appoints an assessment panel that follows up the measures taken. Online interviews and site visits are included in the follow-up if needed.

Quality assurance processes under review. There is ongoing development of follow-up procedures of this activity. A new, complete review of the HEI's quality assurance processes is planned to be carried out two years after UKÄ's decision was made.

Supporting documents

- Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs´ quality assurance processes

- Some reflections and lessons following the first round of higher education institutional reviews

6.2. Programme evaluations

UKÄ may either evaluate all programmes at selected HEIs or programmes leading to a specific degree at all HEIs in order to provide a national overview of the quality of a particular programme. The programmes to be evaluated by UKÄ in the current six-year cycle were selected according to the following criteria:

- A selection of programmes that were not covered by the 2011– 2014 external quality assurance system, including third-cycle programmes.

- A national overview of the quality of some professional qualifications was identified as important to the sector, primarily concerning regulated professional qualifications.

- If an HEI's internal quality assurance processes do not meet the criteria in UKÄ's institutional reviews, a number of programmes may be selected for additional evaluation.

- UKÄ can initiate an evaluation if there are indications that individual programmes risk not fulfilling the national qualitative targets of the programme.

The overall process for programme evaluations is described in figure 6.

Figure 6

The programme evaluation process
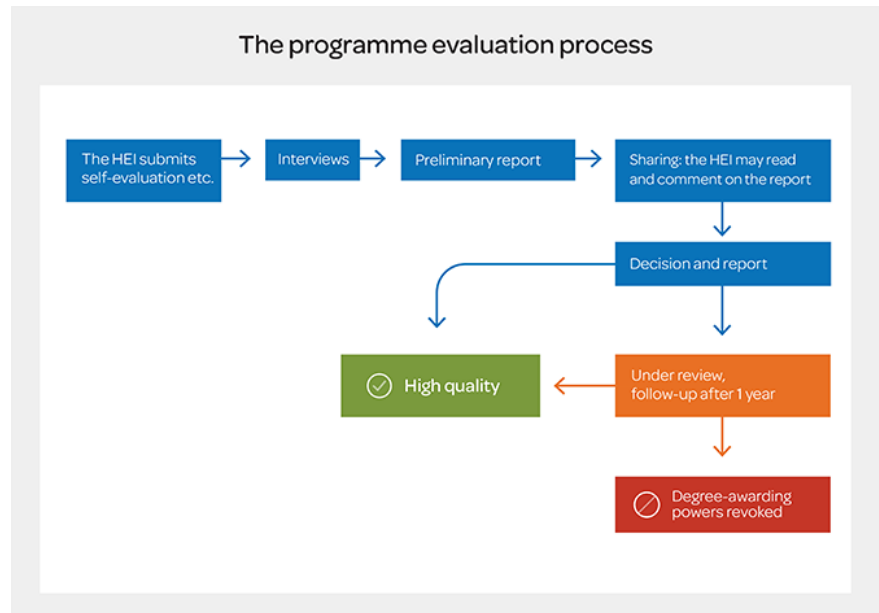
6.2.1. Assessment areas

The assessment areas for programme evaluations are listed in 5.2.

6.2.2. Assessment material

The assessment material consists of the HEI's self-evaluation report, degree projects (1st and 2nd cycles), general study plan, individual study plans and list of publications (3rd cycle), data on teaching staff, interviews with students or doctoral students and representatives of the reviewed programmes, and other material that UKÄ produces. All assessment material for the evaluation is considered in the overall assessment.

The HEI's self-evaluation. The HEI is required to describe, analyse and evaluate how it systematically ensures and follows up the evaluated programme's quality, and how it ensures that students fulfil the national qualitative targets upon receiving the degree.

Degree project or individual study plans. Randomly selected degree projects will serve as a basis for assessing the outcomes of programmes at first- and second-cycle levels. For third-cycle programmes, the assessment panel reviews the general study plan as well as a selection of the individual study plans, including lists of publications.

Interviews. Interviews with students and representatives of the reviewed programme is held to supplement the assessors' overview of the written documentation.

Other assessment material. Prior to the reviews, UKÄ will compile data on the HEI and the programme that is relevant to the assessment areas. This includes national statistics on student completion rate and establishment level, previous inspections, appraisals of degree-awarding powers, and previous programme evaluations.

6.2.3. Assessments and reports

The assessment panel's judgment and reasoning are to be clearly presented in a report. This report will serve as feedback to the HEI on examples of good practice and areas in need of improvement identified by the assessors. Furthermore, any assessment area judged to have insufficient quality in the case of a negative overall assessment should be clearly stated.

The assessment panel's draft report is sent to the HEI for comment before UKÄ makes its final decision. The purpose of this is to give HEIs the opportunity to comment on any factual mistakes in the report.

The overall assessment is made on a two-point scale. On the basis of the assessment panel's report, UKÄ decides whether the programme maintains high quality or if the programme will be under review. If a programme is under review, the HEI's degree-awarding powers are questioned for the qualification and subject field evaluated.

6.2.4. Follow-up

HEIs with programmes under review will have one year to address the deficiencies and submit an action report to UKÄ. To evaluate the HEI's report of measures taken, UKÄ will appoint a panel of assessors. Supported by the assessment panel's report, UKÄ will decide whether the programme maintains high quality, or if degree-awarding powers will be revoked.

Supporting documents

- Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

- Guidelines for evaluation of third-cycle programmes

6.3. Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers

Most public HEIs in Sweden have independent powers to determine which degrees they can issue, whereas independent higher education providers apply to the Government. The additional limitations as to what degrees each type of HEI may issue are described in 5.5.

The overall process for appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers is described in figure 7.

Figure 7

Process for appraising degree-awarding power applications

* For individual HEIs, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence University: The Government makes the decision based on UKÄ's recommendation.
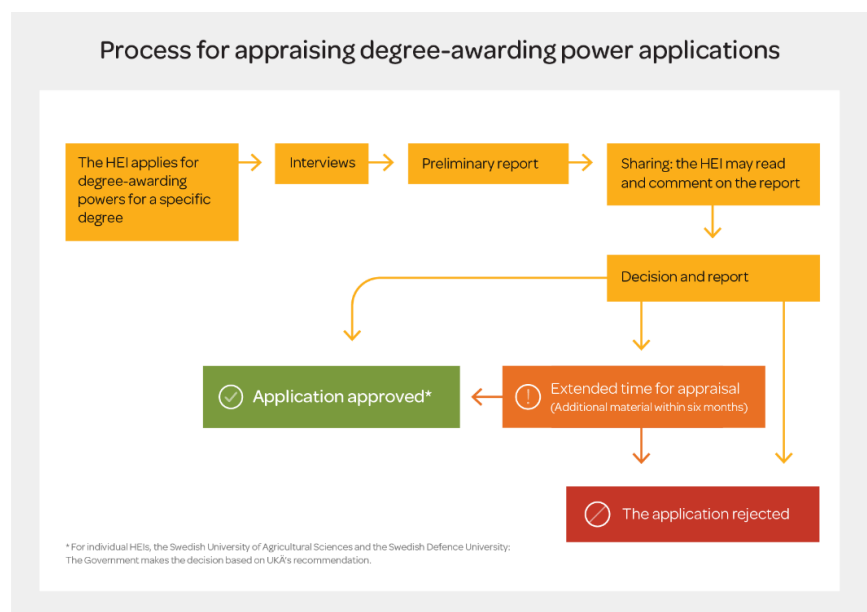
6.3.1. Assessment areas

The assessment areas for appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers are listed in 5.2.

6.3.2. Assessment material

Appraisals are based on the HEI's application and interviews with representatives from the HEI. All assessment material for the appraisal is considered in the overall assessment.

The HEI's application. HEIs submit their application for degree-awarding powers to UKÄ. Independent higher education providers, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence

University submit their applications to the Government, which then normally sends the application to UKÄ for assessment and report.

Interviews. The written application is supplemented with interviews with programme and HEI representatives.

6.3.3. Assessments and reports

The assessment panel's task is to report whether the HEI fulfils the assessment criteria and assessment areas. In the case of a negative report, the assessment panel's determinations and reasoning must clearly present what is judged to be inadequate. In its report, the panel recommends whether to grant or deny the application. Before UKÄ's final decision, the report will be sent to the HEI for comment on any factual errors.

All assessment areas must be satisfactory for the application to be granted. In cases of a smaller but well-defined issue, where measures to remedy the issue are deemed within reach, UKÄ can extend the review period six months.

6.3.4. Follow-up

UKÄ may grant extensions of the appraisal period. Extensions are only possible when identified inadequacies can reasonably be remedied within six months.

Supporting documents

- Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

6.4. Thematic evaluations

Thematic evaluations assess how HEIs fulfil tasks of importance for quality in higher education assigned to them by legislation and ordinances. The Government may task UKÄ with performing thematic evaluations on certain subjects, such as the ongoing follow-up of widening participation, initiated in January 2020. Information obtained through the UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, analyses and other tasks may also be used for thematic evaluations.

The methodology applied to thematic evaluations is developed and adapted to the relevant theme, but it should follow the methods used for the other external quality assurance activities whenever possible.

7. UKÄ's internal quality assurance

Developmental Monitoring – Assuring Sweden's Status as a Knowledge Society

UKÄ's vision

The chapter describes UKÄ's internal quality assurance procedures. This includes UKÄ's quality policy, the agency's management system, rules of procedures and managing directions, as well as the ethical foundations of the state that apply to government agencies and their staff. Special attention is given to the internal quality assurance at the Department of Quality Assurance.

7.1. UKÄ's quality policy

UKÄ's quality policy[26] (replaces a former strategy) states the overall direction for all activities of UKÄ. It clarifies UKÄ's vision and overall goals for the agency's activities. The quality policy is available on UKÄ's external website[27] as well as on the agency's intranet.

UKÄ's vision is *Developmental Monitoring – Assuring Sweden's Status as a Knowledge Society*.

In order to reach the vision, UKÄ has formulated four goals, as described in table 6.

Table 6   The four goals of UKÄ's quality policy.

Goal	How we achieve it
To be the acknowledged source of information about higher education and research	We produce reliable knowledge about higher education and research, such as statistics, analysis, quality assurance, legal supervision and support for committees.
Create results that are beneficial for the development of the higher education sector	We perform our tasks in dialogue with representatives of universities and university colleges, stakeholders, financiers of research, student unions, professional bodies, politicians and other decision makers. We are a user-friendly knowledge organisation and the results of our work are available through increasingly digitalised communication channels.
To be an attractive employer, where dedicated employees	We work to create an attractive workplace where employees enjoy working and experience well-being,

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[26] UKÄ's quality policy corresponds to a mission statement, see 9.1.
[27] https://english.uka.se/about-us/what-we-do/ukas-quality-policy.html.

have the opportunity to develop	enjoy good conditions to perform well, participate and perceive their work as part of UKÄ's mission. Systematic efforts for a good work environment contribute to a sustainable working life. Employees' competences are taken advantage of and there are career opportunities as well as opportunities for skills development.
To work in a coordinated and resource efficient manner	Knowledge exchange, cooperation and collaboration between departments are natural methods of working at UKÄ. We perform activities with efficiency and economy as guiding principles. We have established routines for gradual improvement and innovation.

7.2. UKÄ's management system

UKÄ has established processes for internal quality assurance for the whole organisation, and these are illustrated in UKÄ's management system. See figure 8.

The management system is a tool for the management at all levels to make activities carried out by UKÄ efficient and of high quality. In addition, it is within the frame of the management system that UKÄ's management provides professional and ethical foundations for the employees. The internal quality assurance procedures regarding UKÄ's external quality assurance activities are thus integrated in the overall management system, and are described more in detail in chapter 9.6.

An interactive figure of the management system is available on the internal website so that all employees easily can find information about UKÄ's mission, management and internal quality assurance procedures. It is published on the external website as well.[28]

The implementation of UKÄ's new management system interacts timely with the ENQA self-assessment process.

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[28] https://english.uka.se/about-us/what-we-do/our-management-system.html.

Figure 8   UKÄ's management system

UKÄ's mission

- Instruction from the government
- Laws and regulations
- Special assignments from the government

UKÄ's governance

- UKÄ's quality policy and operational plans
- Rules of procedures and managing directions

UKÄ's planning and accounting processes

- Planning and processes on operational and strategic levels
- Risk analysis
- Budgeting

- UKÄ's operations
- Projects
- Activites

Plan   **Do**

Act   **Check**

- Short term development and improvement on the operational level
- Longterm development and improvement activities on the strategic level
- Innovation

- Follow up processes
- Accounting
- Annual report to government
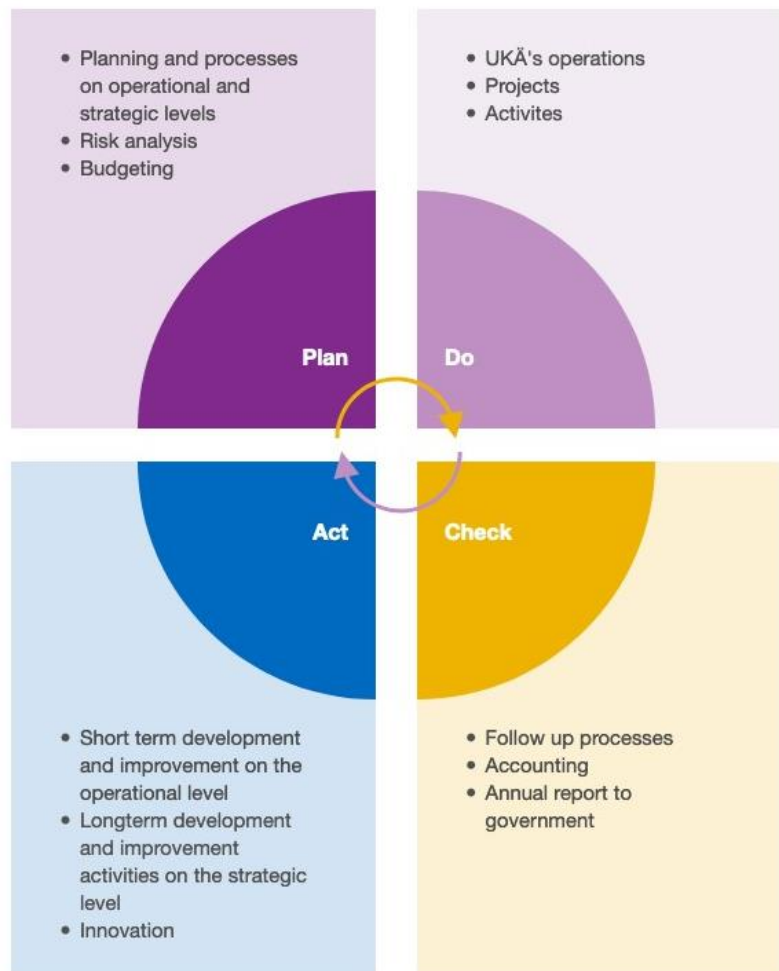
The Department of Administration and IT is responsible for coordinating the planning, budgeting and follow up procedures, as well as UKÄ's management of IT objects, but employees on all levels are involved in these processes to some extent.

The activities in UKÄ's planning and accounting processes are specified in an interactive circular annual operating plan available on the internal website. This is illustrated in figure 9 (see also Annex 2).

Figure 9   UKÄ's circular annual operating plan. Continuously updated throughout the planning process.
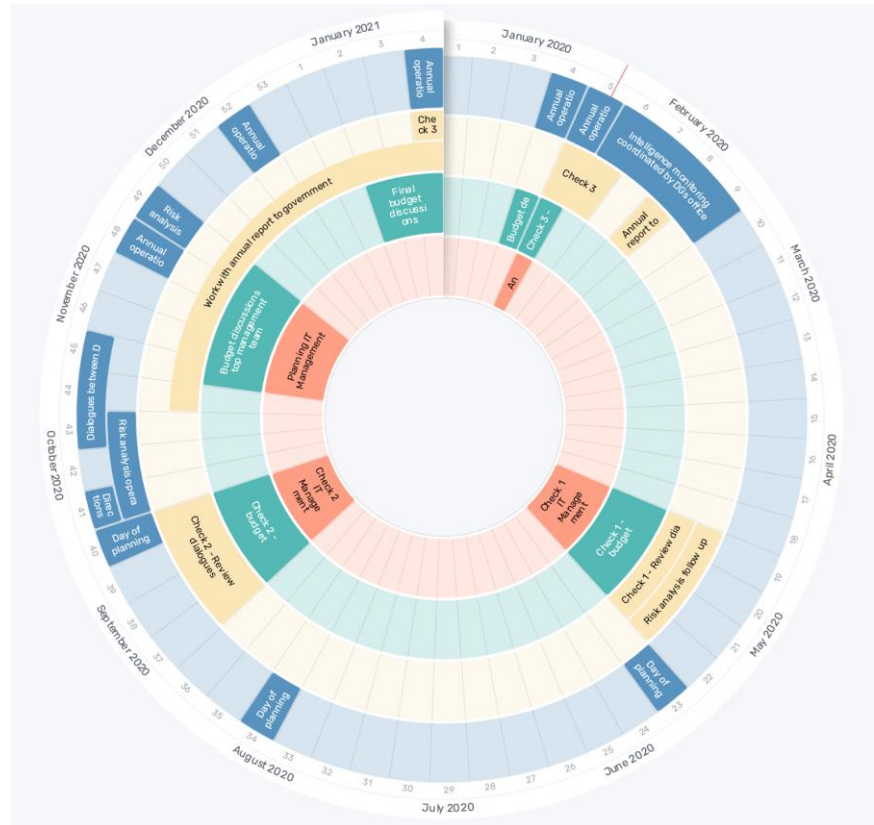
⬤ Planning

⬤ Check

⬤ Budget

⬤ IT Management

Every year, the management of UKÄ organises one day for planning (in the autumn) and one day for development (in the spring) respectively, on which all employees are expected to participate. In this way, the employees from all departments are involved in the planning and improvement of UKÄ's activities on a strategical level. The management regards the input as important ideas in the annual planning process. The financial controller participates on a regular basis in both planning and reviewing processes throughout the year, in order to secure a stable financial situation. Line managers are responsible for setting up planning processes on department level, and in doing so, involving the staff.

The starting points of all planning and development are the vision and goals of UKÄ as stated in the agency's quality policy. All employees are expected to be aware of UKÄ's 'business logic' that clarifies the connection between UKÄ's mission, vision and goals (governance), planning, activities, and results.

Operational plans for the agency and for each department, including agency activities as well as the financial situation, are followed up twice a year, and once in conjunction with the production of the annual report to the Government. For this purpose, dialogues are held between the Director General, controllers and line managers. In order to review and continuously improve the activities of the agency, UKÄ performs risk management on a strategical as well as operational level.

7.3. Rules of procedures and managing directions

In the Rules of procedure[29], it is stated that UKÄ is obliged to operate according to state regulation, the organisation of UKÄ is stipulated, as well as the line of delegation.

Beside the Rules of procedure, the management of UKÄ have decided upon a number of managing directions. These internal managing directions include different professional and ethical principles for all employees. There are three categories of managing directions: policies, guidelines and routines. The Director General decides upon the first two categories and the line managers on the latter.

A detailed description of UKÄ's handling of such documents are to be found in the agency's guidelines for handling managing direction documents[30], available on the internal website.

It is vital that all managing direction documents are up to date, well known and applied by the employees. They are followed up once a year within the frame of the follow-up processes illustrated in the management system. The management informs about new or updated directions during agency staff meetings that are held once a month, and on the internal website. Employees are expected to check the internal website about once a day. Staff meetings are held once a month in order to inform about new assignments from the Government, political and societal development, changes in the agency, new employees, etc. On these occasions, new reports and other results produced by the agency are presented as well as presentations about ongoing projects.

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[29] *Arbetsordning för* Universitetskanslersämbetet (in Swedish).
[30] *Intern riktlinje för dokumenthantering vid UKÄ* (in Swedish).

UKÄ is currently undertaking work to review and update managing directions and this work will continue at department level during 2020.

7.3.1. Internal quality assurance at the Department of Quality Assurance

Internal quality assurance procedures at department level are aligned with the overall management system. Line managers assure that procedures for daily work within their area of operation are fit for purpose. The processes for internal quality assurance of external quality assurance activities is further addressed in chapter 9.6. Most tasks relating to these activities are carried out at the Department of Quality Assurance.

The various guidelines for UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, and the *Project manager's manual* are important tools in the daily operations of the department and provide support for employees. There are bi-weekly meetings for the whole department which focus on planning, monitoring and issues relating to the working environment. There are also seminars where reports, drafts, and methods are discussed. Twice a year the whole department engage in full-day workshops. Examples of themes for such activities in recent years has been how to enhance our quality culture, project-based work. The whole staff is also involved in giving the Head of Department input to the operational plan.

The groups engaged in the different external quality assurance activities meet regularly to share more detailed progress-reports and reflections on feedback from assessors and HEIs.

The internal quality assurance of operations at the Department of Quality Assurance and relevant management direction documents are described in an internal memo.[31]

7.4. Ethical foundations of the state

All state employees in Sweden have to be aware of the ethical foundations of the state. The Swedish Agency for Public Management is responsible for putting forward professional ethical foundations that are to govern the actions of all state employees.[32] The fundamental values of Swedish society, as expressed in constitution and laws, form the basis of the ethical foundations of national government. The ethical foundations consist of six principles (figure 10) that form the basis for a

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[31] *Intern kvalitetssäkring vid utvärderingsavdelningen* (in Swedish).
[32] *The Ethical Foundations of the state – professional values for good governance*. Swedish Agency for Public Management 2018.

professional platform for all state employees and make it clear what it means to work for state authorities:

Figure 10   Principles in the ethical foundations of national government in Sweden

These principles guide UKÄ staff, but they also guide UKÄ management in formulating specific professional and ethical principles for its employees, and to ensure that employees are competent and acting professionally and ethically in accordance with the ESG. This also accounts for external experts working for UKÄ as assessors in the agency's external quality assurance activities. For example, both UKÄ and assessors must abide by the rules on conflict of interest laid down in the Administrative Procedure Act, and in UKÄ's rules on conflicts of interest[33] (see 9.6, 10.4.3 and 10.4.7).

UKÄ's Guidelines for handling of discrimination and sexual harassment are in line with the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567), and stipulate that UKÄ does not accept discrimination or harassment of any kind. Management and employees are all responsible for keeping and developing a working environment free from discrimination or harassment.

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[33] Published on UKÄ's intranet and communicated to assessors.

8. UKÄ's international activities

The chapter describes UKÄ's international activities, and the Nordic, European and international quality assurance networks and associations in which the agency participates.

8.1. International activities within external quality assurance

A strategy for national and international horizon scanning at the Department of Quality Assurance was developed in 2018.[34] The strategy identifies the following areas for consolidation and further development: international exchange of experiences, participation in conferences, workshops and networks, and increased cooperation with European and international experts.

UKÄ's current focus in international engagements is on collaborations within the Nordic Network of Quality Assurance (NOQA), The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). Representatives of UKÄ regularly attend meetings organised within the ENQA cooperation, and a staff member of UKÄ is a board member of ECA. The main purpose is to develop the Swedish quality assurance system and to build and maintain significant international networks. In order to emphasise this further, UKÄ has established an international advisory committee with researchers and highly recognised quality assurance experts. UKÄ is also a member of The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and the Quality Audit Network (QAN).

Within NOQA[35], Nordic quality assurance agencies have worked together on several projects since the early 1990s. The projects have been significant in terms of learning from each other and enhancing co-operation between the organisations. UKÄ currently participates in a collaborative project focusing on impact studies of quality assurance systems. In 2019, the theme of the annual NOQA conference was Evidence in External Quality Assurance. The 2018 conference focused on the link between research and higher education, and saw the

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[34] *Strategi för utvärderingsavdelningens omvärldsbevakning - nationellt och internationellt*, 2018-06-15.
[35] https://www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/noqa/.

additional participation of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian quality assurance agencies.

On the European level, between 2016 and 2019, UKÄ coordinated an EU-funded project aimed at quality assuring European human rights education: Modernisation, Education and Human Rights (MEHR). The Swedish part of the project included Karolinska Institutet and the European Students' Union. In addition to Sweden, quality assurance agencies and HEIs in Croatia and Portugal participated. Surveys in the participating countries resulted in three reports in the selected areas of human rights. In addition, a final comparative report was produced that specifically emphasises quality assurance of learning objectives and the student perspective.

In 2018, UKÄ also participated in a project within the framework of a collaboration initiated by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The collaboration goes under the heading Bologna Peer Support Group, and the part that UKÄ participates in focuses on quality assuring higher education and research. During spring 2020, UKÄ will participate in staff exchange with other European quality assurance agencies.

Another example is the EUniQ project, where UKÄ is one of eight participating quality assurance agencies. The project builds on the experience and the support of many stakeholders and international organisations in the area of higher education, e.g. BFUG's Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance, and ENQA.

UKÄ regularly involves peer-review experts from the Nordic countries. The external quality assurance activities may also be conducted in English, e.g. when it is difficult to find peer-review experts in Sweden with no conflicts of interest. To date, two programme evaluations have been conducted in English.

8.2. International activities in higher education statistics

As responsible for official national statistics on higher education, UKÄ participates through its Department of Higher Education Analysis in a number of international organisations and networks:

- OECD: Indicators of Education Systems (INES) programme, including INES Working Party, Network on Data Collection and Development on Economic, Labour Market and Social Outcomes of Education (LSO), and Network for the Collection and Adjudication of System-Level Descriptive Information on Educational Structures, Policies and Practices (NESLI)

- Eurostat: Education and Training Statistics Working Group on Education and adult learning statistics

- Unesco/UIS, OECD, and Eurostat data collection (UOE joint data collection)

- The Advisory Board of the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER), under the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture.

9. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)

This chapter addresses each standard of ESG part 3 for UKÄ as an external quality assurance agency.

9.1. ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Standard
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

UKÄ's broad competence in external quality assurance and other areas benefits and supports the enhancement of quality in higher education and research, as well as the agency's vision and goals.

The variety of external quality assurance activities carried out by UKÄ are described in chapter 5 and in chapter 10 in relation to the standards in ESG part 2. Each activity within the national system is carried out regularly, according to its own timetable and processes as described for example in guidelines communicated to the HEI's and on the UKÄ website.

UKÄ's vision and overarching goals are stated in the quality policy. The vision and goals permeate operational plans at different levels and supported by rules of procedures and managing directions (chapter 7). The goals and different objectives of the external quality assurance activities are described in various document such as guidelines and manuals. The overall structure of the national system for external quality assurance – how the different parts interconnect – is explained in chapter 5.

As described in chapter 4, UKÄ also performs several tasks and activities that are not within the scope of this review. However, the results of such activities provide support both internally and externally. Internally, UKÄ's broad competence benefits and supports the fulfilment of the agency's goals and vision. Externally, UKÄ's tasks and activities support the enhancement of quality in higher education and

research, and in HEIs' quality assurance processes. Thus, through providing statistics, analysis, and information about the higher education sector, and through support and supervision in legal issues and students' rights, UKÄ's activities outside external quality assurance proper contribute to the enhancement of quality in higher education and research, and to HEIs' trust in UKÄ's operations.

As stated in the quality policy, UKÄ aims to create results that are beneficial for the development of the higher education sector. This is realised through cooperation and dialogue with various stakeholders. At agency level the Advisory Council provides important stakeholder perspectives and guarantees transparency towards the public. In external quality assurance activities, stakeholder involvement is crucial to the development of methods and procedures, through different reference groups and dialogue meetings (hearings). Assessment panels with students, labour market representatives and experts from HEIs are also an important platform for continuous stakeholder involvement and feedback.

The way in which UKÄ involve stakeholders in methodological design is further described in chapter 5 and 10.3, and stakeholder feedback in chapter 11.

Supporting documents

The Government Instruction for the Swedish Higher Education Authority (2012:810)

Public Service Agreement for 2020 for the Swedish Higher Education Authority

Annual Report for the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2019 (end of February 2020)

9.2. ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

Standard
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

UKÄ has an established legal basis for its operations, and decisions made by UKÄ as a result of external quality assurance activities are recognised by HEIs, the Government, and other stakeholders.

As shown in chapter 4, UKÄ has an established legal basis for its operations and is formally recognised as a quality assurance agency by the state. UKÄ operates independently under the Ministry of Education and Research and receives its funding through allocations from the state budget. UKÄ's activities in general are regulated by the government instruction and the yearly public service agreement. UKÄ's instruction

states that the agency is responsible for conducting quality assurance of HEIs' operations through the four defined external quality assurance activities.

Every year UKÄ is to present evidence to the Government that its quality assurance activities have contributed to quality enhancement and high quality in the operations of HEIs. This is described and exemplified in 9.4.

All Swedish HEIs are obliged to undergo the external quality assurance activities carried out by UKÄ. These activities serve both regulatory and quality enhancement purposes. Decisions made by UKÄ as a result of the external quality assurance activities are recognised by the HEIs, the Government, and other stakeholders.

Supporting documents

The Government Instruction for the Swedish Higher Education Authority (2012:810)

9.3. ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

Standard
Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

UKÄ operates autonomously and makes its decisions independently. The independence of all government agencies, including UKÄ, is safeguarded in Swedish legislation. The Government establishes the general principles for UKÄ in the instruction, allocates resources, and follows up the activities, among them quality assurance. However, neither the Riksdag nor the Government or other authorities have the right to interfere with UKÄ's decision-making.

UKÄ is led by the Director General. The Director General acts on behalf of UKÄ, is solely responsible for its activities, and responds directly to the Government. An advisory council is appointed by the Government, but has no decision-making powers (see chapter 4).

Although dialogue with relevant stakeholder groups such as students unions or working life organisations are important, UKÄ acts independently with regard to these groups. In addition, UKÄ's independence towards the HEIs is supported by the fact that there are no financial ties between UKÄ and the HEIs. Instead, UKÄ receives its full funding from the Government through allocations from the state budget

(see 9.5). The HEIs are obliged by law to hand in any information requested by UKÄ, thereby enabling the agency to work effectively and without third-party influence.

As described in detail in 10.4, all three categories of external experts – subject experts, student representatives and labour market representatives – are appointed to assessment panels by UKÄ after a nomination process during which HEIs, student unions and stakeholder organisations for working life are invited to nominate candidates. No external parties are involved in the decision. The selection and training of UKÄ's peer review experts, as well as procedures against conflicts of interest, is described in detail in 10.4.

Decisions on the outcome of the external quality assurance activities are made independently by UKÄ. The decisions are based on the assessment panels' reports produced by the recruited external experts.

Reflections

> The autonomy and independence of UKÄ remains an important area to safeguard.

Historically, the level of independence in the relationship between the Swedish national agency for higher education (UKÄ's predecessor) and the Government has been under debate. There is a general agreement that the Government was deeply involved in the process leading up to the launching of the earlier quality assurance system in 2011. During the cycle of programme evaluations carried out in the period of 2011-2014, the commission from the Government contained several details regarding the method for performing the evaluations including the use of specific assessment materials. This level of involvement turned out to be challenging, and as a result UKÄ lost its membership in ENQA. The loss of the ENQA membership has led to changes in the relationship between UKÄ and the Government. Furthermore, constructive discussions took place regarding the autonomy of UKÄ and how it should be safeguarded in the future.

As has been made clear, since then the relationship between UKÄ and the Government has undergone changes regarding the way in which UKÄ's quality assurance activities are set up. The current instruction from the Government is rather brief and held in general terms concerning UKÄ's quality assurance activities. However, the independence of UKÄ remains an important area to safeguard, and maintaining a strong autonomy and independence for UKÄ in general is a topic of continuous interest for the agency.

Supporting documents

The Instrument of Government (1974:152)

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

9.4. ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

Standard
Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

An important question concerning the development of the national quality assurance system is how the system supports high quality and development in higher education. This question may be divided in two: has the external quality assurance led to enhanced quality for the HEIs at a general level? Has the quality assurance activities helped develop higher education on a course and programme level?

In order to try to answer these questions, UKÄ regularly conducts meta-studies on completed external quality assurance activities, comparing results and highlighting common findings. In addition, UKÄ conducts in-depth analyses of the results of its quality assurance activities focusing on selected themes, with the aim to increase knowledge of factors that promote quality in higher education. The common goal of these analyses is to contribute to quality in both specific quality assurance processes and programmes, and in higher education in general. To analyse and reflect on completed quality assurance activities and the findings of the assessment panels is also important for the further development of the activities as such.

UKÄ's annual report[36] to the Government on UKÄ's quality assurance activities' contribution to HEIs operations, mentioned in 9.2, also comprises an important thematic analysis.

9.4.1. Thematic analysis of assessment results

UKÄ conducts external quality assurance activities in regular rounds of reviews and evaluations, and analyses of results are often made after completed rounds. The aim of these analyses is continuously to develop and improve the processes of upcoming quality assurance activities, and to spread insights and good practices in the sector.

Institutional reviews
To date, UKÄ has conducted a thematic analysis based on the results of the first round of institutional reviews. The analysis focused on highlighting experiences and reflections from the assessment panel

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[36] UKÄ's annual report to the Government for 2019 will be published in February 2020, and translated into English before the ENQA review panel's site visit to UKÄ.

reports for the four HEIs reviewed. This form of meta-study will be conducted after each completed review round.

Programme evaluations

Following the end of the final cycle of programme evaluations in the previous national quality assurance system (2011-2014), UKÄ analysed the results in the assessment reports to review the effects of the evaluations on the quality of the programmes. The analysis included a general comparison with the results of the preceding national system (2001-2006).[37]

Within the current national quality assurance system, UKÄ has carried out a thematic analysis of a round of third-cycle programmes evaluations. In the report, the size of third-cycle programme research environments was compared with the outcome of the evaluation. The results were analysed and the measures taken by the HEIs to overcome the challenges with small research departments were discussed. The first report was based on a limited number of programme evaluations; however, in a later publication, the data was updated with the outcome of newly completed third-cycle programmes evaluations.[38]

UKÄ is currently analysing how the assessors in the programme evaluation of teacher training programmes have addressed the question of student completion rates. The report will be published in February 2020. Furthermore, an analysis of how the assessment area gender equality has been addressed in programme evaluations will be published in spring 2020.

In larger evaluation rounds, the assessment panels summarise and evaluate in their published report the national situation for the programmes assessed. Although not thematic analyses in the strict sense, these reflections highlight important aspects of higher education brought out by the evaluation, and may provide valuable input to thematic analyses conducted by UKÄ.

The annual report to the Government how quality assurance has contributed to quality improvement and high quality in the HEIs' operations will be finalised in spring 2020.

The government assignment of a follow-up and assessment of the system for quality assurance, initiated autumn 2019 and to be reported in February 2021, will produce a thematic analysis with a particular focus on the student and labour market perspectives.

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[37] *Utbildningsutvärderingarnas effekter – En genomgång av effekterna av det nationella utvärderingssystemet 2011–2014.* UKÄ Report 2015:21 (available in English).
[38] *Små forskarutbildningsmiljöer. Utmaningar och framgångsfaktorer.* UKÄ Report 2019:17 (available in English).

9.4.2. Planning for analysis

Following up and analysing the external quality assurance activities is an integral part of UKÄ's quality assurance work. In part because of the requirement for yearly reporting to the Government, but also as a fundamental part of the national system. For the system to be quality enhancing, findings must continuously be analysed to create insight into which improvements can and should be made.

Planning for conducting thematic analyses is therefore an important step in the yearly planning of activities, resources, and budget of UKÄ's Department of Quality Assurance, as well as of UKÄ overall. The recurring analysis of completed review and evaluation rounds is part of the national quality assurance system, and it is generally the staff involved with the external quality assurance activities at the Department of Quality Assurance who will analyse the findings. The department memo Framework for self-initiated follow-ups and analyses[39] includes some general and specific guidelines for thematic analysis. In the yearly process of operational planning, the department identifies what specific thematic analyses are of particular interest and allocates appropriate resources. For the annual report to the Government, the department earmarks the specific staff resources that are required during the year.

Reflections

The analysis of external quality assurance activities is complex in various respects. While it is relatively easy to identify common traits and qualities for HEIs and programmes with positive or negative results, it is more challenging to show how the quality assurance activities as such enhance quality. To follow up of findings of the activities in the long term is therefore essential to be able to conclude whether the intended effect of enhanced quality in higher education was obtained. For many of the external quality assurance activities that UKÄ has completed, it is still too early to draw conclusions as to the effects. Regular analysis is therefore crucial in the continuous assessment and adjustment of the national quality assurance system.

UKÄ has also identified, partly in discussions with UKÄ's HEI stakeholder reference groups, a need for a developed dialogue with the HEIs as regards thematic analyses. Including the HEIs in the identification of possible themes for in-depth analysis will reinforce the quality enhancing aspects of the external quality assurance activities.

One measure of impact of the national quality assurance system is the follow-up of programmes that have received the assessment *Under review* in programme evaluations, which are the first follow-ups conducted in the current system. Instead of submitting a report on

> To allocate the necessary human resources for thematic follow-up analyses is a challenge to UKÄ, because of the workload generated by regular external quality assurance activities.

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[39] *Ramverk för egeninitierade uppföljningar och analyser* (in Swedish).

measures taken, some HEIs have voluntarily cancelled the evaluated programmes. However, in the follow-ups completed so far, the assessment panels have reassessed each programme as having high quality, on the evidence of improvements presented by the HEIs. Several follow-ups are planned for the coming years, both of specific programmes and of institutional reviews, and forthcoming analyses of those activities will provide further insights into how quality in higher education is enhanced. Allocating the necessary human resources for such follow-up analyses is, however, a challenge to UKÄ, because of the workload generated by the agency's regular external quality assurance activities.

Supporting documents

The Government Instruction for the Swedish Higher Education Authority (2012:810)

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

Framework for self-initiated follow-ups and analyses (internal memo, Department of Quality Assurance)

Thematic analyses – published and upcoming

Institutional reviews
2019
Några reflektioner och erfarenheter efter lärosätesgranskningarna i omgång ett, UKÄ 2019. In English: *Some reflections and lessons following the first round of higher education institutional reviews,* https://www.uka.se/kvalitet--examenstillstand/granskning-av-larosatenas-kvalitetssakringsarbete/erfarenheter-och-reflektioner-efter-larosatesgranskningar-i-omgang-1.html

Programme evaluations
2015
Utbildningsutvärderingarnas effekter – En genomgång av effekterna av det nationella utvärderingssystemet 2011–2014, UKÄ Report 2015:21. In English: *The effects of programme evaluations – An analysis of the effects of the national evaluation system 2011–2014*, https://english.uka.se/about-us/publications/reports--guidelines/reports--guidelines/2016-05-17-the-effects-of-programme-evaluations.html.

2019
Granskning för utveckling. 95 utvärderade utbildningar på forskarnivå 2017–2018, UKÄ Report 2019:1 (in Swedish), https://www.uka.se/publikationer--beslut/publikationer--

beslut/rapporter/rapporter/2019-01-31-uppfoljning-av-95-utvarderade-utbildningar-pa-forskarniva-2017-2018.html

Små forskarutbildningsmiljöer. Utmaningar och framgångsfaktorer.
UKÄ Report 2019:17. In English: *Small third-cycle programme environments*, https://english.uka.se/about-us/publications/reports--guidelines/reports--guidelines/2019-12-19-small-third-cycle-programme-environments.html

2020
UKÄ is currently analysing how assessors in the programme evaluation of teacher training programmes have addressed the question of student completion rates. The report will be published in February 2020.

Gender Equality in third-cycle programme evaluations (spring 2020)

Hur har det gått? The 2020 annual report to the Government investigates how quality assurance has contributed to quality improvement and high quality in HEIs' operations (spring 2020).

9.5. ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

Standard
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

9.5.1. Financial resources

Like all government agencies in Sweden, UKÄ is financed through allocations from the state budget.

Budget and funding

Table 7   Budget summary (thousand SEK)

Department	Budget (thousand SEK)
Department of Higher Education Analysis	37,016
Department of Legal Affairs	16,777
Department of Quality Assurance	48,647
Department of Administration and IT (incl. Director General)	57,355
Total	159,795

Table 8   Funding (thousand SEK)

Source of funding	Amount (thousand SEK)

Administrative funding	156,376
Funding saved from 2019 (forecast)	4,621
Funding credit	4,691
Maximum loan for investment	13,500

The funding framework for UKÄ in 2020 is SEK 156,376,000, according to the agency's public service agreement for 2020. This is an increase of SEK 7,341,000 compared to 2019.

The funding saved from 2019 will be used for investments in operational development.

In 2020, UKÄ has a maximum available loan from the National Debt Office[40] of SEK 13,500,000 for investments in fixed assets for administrative purposes. For 2020, this limit is expected to need an increase of SEK 6,000,000 due to the agency's move to new premises in autumn 2020.

Table 9   External funding (thousand SEK)

Task	Budget (thousand SEK)
Cooperation on the provision of cutting-edge digital competence	1,719

In 2019, UKÄ was tasked by the Government to cooperate with the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth[41] on the provision of cutting-edge digital competence. To complete this task, in 2020 the agency may requisition SEK 2,000,000 from the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency[42].

When calculating the cost of completion, direct costs and indirect costs (overheads) are included.

9.5.2. Human resources

UKÄ has almost 100 employees (2019) in total. The distribution of staff over the agency's departments is shown in table 10.

Table 10   Distribution of staff by department 2014 – 2019 per 31st of December. Employees on parental leave or leave included.

Department	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Dpt of IT & Administration	23	26	23	23	18	21
Dpt of Quality Assurance	31	31	31	29	32	38

[40] *Riksgälden*, https://www.riksgalden.se/en/.
[41] *Tillväxtverket*, https://tillvaxtverket.se/english.html.
[42] *Kammarkollegiet*, https://www.kammarkollegiet.se/engelska/start.

Dpt of Analysis	19	20	23	23	21	26
Dpt of Legal Affairs	14	15	15	12	13	14
Total	**87**	**92**	**92**	**87**	**84**	**99**

The number of employees has been relatively stable until 2019, when the number of positions for project managers, analysts and legal advisors was increased. This investment was made due to an increasing number of assignments from the Government regarding the quality assurance of research, as well as the increased resources required to conduct the external quality assurance activities. The Department of Quality Assurance is UKÄ's largest department and has been so for a long time.

Recruiting and keeping qualified staff is a challenge, since the labour market is strong for well-educated people in Sweden and has been so for quite some time. On the other hand, many qualified applicants answer to UKÄ's advertisements. As stated in chapter 9.6, one of UKÄ's overall goals is to be an attractive working place, which includes offering skills development and career prospects. UKÄ has a *Plan for maintaining and developing qualifications and competence* of employees individually and as a collective.

The plan for maintaining and developing qualifications and competence is valid for 2017-2019 and being reviewed during 2020. Development includes updating recruitment procedures, as well as the renewal of the agency programme for internal training of all new employees. The Human Resources unit is responsible for this, in cooperation with the management including line managers. During 2020, all employees will be engaged in workshops on 'active employeeship' and will have the opportunity to contribute to the content in the new plan for qualifications and competence.

The Department of Quality Assurance has developed an extensive introduction for new employees, which includes mentorships and a series of seminars. These activities provide an historical overview of developments in external quality assurance activities in Sweden, as well as in-depth presentations of the different activities of the present national quality assurance system. A few staff members have participated in the ENQA Leadership Programme, as competence development. During 2020, the department will also participate in the BFUG staff exchange, both as sending and receiving partner.

Reflections

Staff turnover and workload are topical issues for UKÄ.

As shown in chapter 13 and 14, staff turnover and workload are topical issues. As an example, staff tasked with analysing the findings of the external quality assurance activities are in most cases also continuously involved in other activities. Using resources efficiently, without

removing necessary resources from other activities, is therefore something that UKÄ must take into account in its operational planning. This issue has been addressed through reallocation of resources and hiring of additional staff, but also by prioritising and postponing the start of certain external quality assurance projects and other activities. Although UKÄ normally manages to staff external quality assurance projects as planned and deliver expected results on time, this is not without putting a strain on already stretched human resources.

Further digitisation and technical platforms fit for purpose, e.g. case management systems, are other prioritised measures taken to streamline administration and promote efficiency. Steps to further develop UKÄ as an attractive workplace are addressed in the 2020 operational plan for UKÄ.

Supporting documents

Public Service Agreement for 2020 for the Swedish Higher Education Authority

Operational Plan for the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2020

Operational Plan for the Department of Quality Assurance 2020

9.6. ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Standard
Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

The agency's overall quality ambitions are defined in UKÄ's quality policy. The processes for internal quality assurance are illustrated in the management system as described in chapter 7.

Important tools to secure and enhance competence, professionalism and ethical awareness in the external quality assurance activities are the guidelines for the separate external quality assurance activities, and the *Project manager's manual*.

The guidelines of each external quality assurance activity, which describe the methodology, assessment criteria and process, are intended for HEIs, assessment panels and UKÄ staff. The *Project manager's manual* aim to support UKÄ staff and describes procedures, as well as the internal quality assurance processes to guarantee transparency,

accuracy, and consistency in all external quality assurance activities. For example, it includes information on the process to recruit assessors and set up assessment panels, how to organise site visits, guidelines regarding the production of the assessment panel's report and archiving of results.The manual is updated regularly by the Department of Quality Assurance and available on UKÄ's internal website.

In order to secure competence, professionalism and ethical awareness among assessors, UKÄ has well established procedures for nominating and hiring assessors, as well as setting up panels. All assessors must attend training (see 10.4.2.), and take part of the *Introduction for assessors in UKÄ's reviews*. UKÄ does not hire subcontractors to carry out external quality assurance activities.

Internal and external feedback is managed in various ways. The regular processes for planning and follow up through risk analysis, follow up activities and development procedures, as illustrated in the Plan – Do – Follow up – Act figure in the management system (chapter 7) ensures continuous improvement.

One of UKÄ's overall goals is to create results that are beneficial for the development of higher education and research. Consequently, UKÄ performs its tasks in continuous dialogue with stakeholders, in external quality assurance as well as statistics, analysis and legal supervision. UKÄ organises dialogue meetings with stakeholders and meets regularly with its sister organisations, such as the Swedish Research Council and the Swedish Council for Higher Education. The aim is to exchange ideas, experiences and feedback, and to discuss cooperation possibilities.

UKÄ has formed three stakeholder reference groups with the specific task to support dialogue on the external quality assurance activities. These groups engage representatives from the higher education sector, representatives from the labour market, and international experts on quality assurance of higher education and research. The reference groups have been actively involved in both the initial development of the national system for quality assurance, and the continuous improvement of the system. Meetings are held 2-4 times a year.

After most quality assurance activities, a questionnaire is sent to the HEI with questions on how the evaluation or review process was perceived and how the results have been used. HEIs are also invited to feedback conferences. These meetings are opportunities for HEIs to meet with each other, with UKÄ and with members of the assessment panel to engage in in-depth discussions on topics that have been identified as key issues in the review or evaluation. The conference is also an opportunity for the HEIs to give feedback to UKÄ on the assessment process.

UKÄ has a government assignment to monitor the assessments annually. Thus, UKÄ monitors the assessments and evaluations that are

completed from a number of different perspectives. Results are compiled and analysed in order to communicate it to stakeholders and continuously improve methods. For example, UKÄ will publish a report in spring 2020, accounting for, and analysing in what way assessments in the different external quality assurance activities have contributed to improvement and development in the internal quality assurance activities of HEIs.

The Government has tasked UKÄ with conducting an external evaluation of the national system for external quality assurance. The aim is to study the outcomes of the system and to give recommendations on how it can be improved further.

UKÄ's communication unit at the Department of Administration and IT is responsible for supporting and strategically developing UKÄ's communication with stakeholders, the public, media etc. UKÄ has a communications policy (currently under review), which is aligned with the overall goal that UKÄ strives to be the acknowledged source of information about higher education and research, and to create results that are beneficial for the development of the higher education and research sectors. The communications policy states how UKÄ staff and UKÄ as an organisation should communicate externally and internally. Employees are well informed about the role of the civil servant through the principles and ethical foundation of the state, which include codes of conduct such as objectivity and respect (see chapter 7).

As a government agency, the management of UKÄ meet with the Ministry of Education and Research on a regular basis.

Reflections

In the 2020 operational plan for the Department of Quality Assurance, there is a strong focus on continuous enhancement of internal quality assurance, and how to further develop the different external quality assurance activities in line with the goals in the quality policy and the special assignment from the Director General. Over the past few years, there has been a great deal of work on identifying innovative ideas from inside or outside the agency. Starting in 2019-2020, senior analysts and strategists from all departments form a group with a focus on intelligence monitoring in a structured way, coordinated by the Director General's office. The aim is better to keep track on developments that concern UKÄ's mission, and to feed this knowledge into the planning and improvement processes.

UKÄ strives further to enhance the professional and ethical approach of assessors and staff. As a part of this, staff have received training in how to plan and commence meetings that are well functioning and fit for purpose. This method to create discussions on equal terms is described

Guidelines for external quality assurance activities, a handbook for project managers, and training in inclusive meeting techniques all support the enhancement of competence, professionalism and ethical awareness.

in the memo *Inkluderande möten och intervjuer*[43]. It is the general impression that this has improved not only meetings and interviews in external activities, but also made internal meetings more efficient. For example, it has spurred initiatives such as weekly stand-up meetings and mini-seminars, where staff share best practice with colleagues at pivotal milestones in the review and evaluation processes.

Supporting documents

Guidelines regarding handling of conflicts of interest (see 7.4, 10.4.3 and 10.7)

Guidelines regarding expenses and gifts

Guidelines for recruitment

Plan for maintaining and developing qualifications and competence of employees individually and as a collective

Guidelines for handling of discrimination and sexual harassment

Communications policy (in Swedish)

Inclusive meetings and interviews (memo in Swedish).

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[43] 'Inclusive meetings and interviews.' (in Swedish).

9.7. ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

Standard
Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

UKÄ is undergoing its first external review for ENQA membership.

10. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)

This chapter addresses each standard of ESG part 2 for UKÄ's external quality assurance activities.

10.1. Consideration of internal quality assurance

Standard
External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

The respect for HEIs' autonomy and responsibility for their internal quality assurance is at the core of the national system for quality assurance.

The legal framework within which internal and external quality assurance of higher education operates is described in 3.2.1. The operations of a public HEIs are to be conducted so that high quality is achieved in education and research, and the respect for HEIs' autonomy and responsibility for their internal quality assurance is at the core of the national system for quality assurance.

The national system for quality assurance of higher education is designed so that the separate external quality assurance activities jointly address all standards in ESG Part 1 (see chapter 5). The unified approach of UKÄ's four interlinked quality assurance activities aligns with both national legislation and the ESG, in order to support and enhance the internal quality assurance processes of the HEIs. Because of the differences in the objective and approach of the different external quality assurance activities, as well as their historical evolution, not every standard is addressed in each activity. For example, appraisals of degree-awarding powers focus on the preconditions and the HEI's capacity to offer a certain study programme, while programme evaluations focus on the outcomes and quality of a specific programme. On the other hand, the purpose of the institutional reviews is to make a broader assessment of the overall internal quality assurance process of the HEI. The external quality assurance activities should therefore be viewed as complementing each other.

A mapping table on how the standards and guidelines of ESG Part 1 are addressed in detail in UKÄ's external quality assurance activities is presented in Annex 3.

10.1.1. The relationship between UKÄ's external quality assurance and HEIs' quality assurance processes

The government instruction for UKÄ establishes that UKÄ shall conduct institutional reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes, evaluations of first-, second-, and third-cycle programmes, thematic evaluations, and appraisals of applications for degree-awarding powers. The way in which UKÄ has chosen to design and implement these different activities is further described in chapters 5 and 6, and the rationale of the national system for external quality assurance is explained in 10.2.

Institutional reviews

The institutional reviews cover the internal quality assurance processes of the HEI, including central policies and guidelines as well as quality assurance work conducted at different levels of the institution. Because of the scope of institutional reviews, some of the ESG standards are more in focus than others. A clear example of this is standard 1.1, which is only addressed in institutional reviews.

Programme evaluations

Programme evaluations are designed to align with the appraisals of applications for degree-awarding powers. They include many of the same assessment areas and criteria, and address many of the same standards of the ESG Part 1, using assessment material such as degree projects to verify whether the programme ensures that the students meet the national qualitative targets.

Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers

In appraising applications for degree-awarding powers, the main focus lies on the resources and preconditions of the HEI. To be granted a certain degree-awarding power, the HEI must show that it has the capacity to provide students with a high quality education that enables them to meet all the requirements of the degree in question.

Thematic evaluations

The thematic evaluations are initiated by UKÄ, or upon specific commission from the Government. As such, the process of conducting these evaluations is modified depending on the theme and the scope of the evaluation. However, the thematic evaluations are to follow the

process and methodology of the other external quality assurance activities as much as feasible.

Reflections

Swedish public HEIs are required by the Higher Education Act to achieve high quality in their operations. UKÄ as the national agency is tasked with addressing the quality assurance of the HEIs' operations. An issue that UKÄ has to contend with is the challenges of being both a partner in quality assurance as well as a controlling and regulating body. However, the dialogue with the HEIs about the external quality assurance activities conducted so far during the current cycle, especially regarding the institutional reviews and programme evaluations, indicates that UKÄ has made progress in its relationship with the HEIs (see chapter 11). Feedback from HEIs regarding the outcome of the reviews and evaluations indicates that they consider them to enhance quality and support them in the further development of their internal quality assurance procedures.[44]

> It is a challenge for UKÄ to be both a partner to HEIs in quality assurance and a controlling and regulating body, but feedback from the HEIs indicates that UKÄ has made progress in managing this double role.

Supporting documents

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes

The Government Instruction for the Swedish Higher Education Authority (2012:810)

The Swedish Higher Education Act (1992:1434)

The Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

The Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900)

The Instrument of Government (1974:152)

Award of Certain Degrees Licensing Act (1993:792)

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[44] Information on the opinions of UKÄ's stakeholders is presented in chapter 11.

10.2. ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Standard

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

10.2.1. Design and fitness for purpose of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities

A core principle for UKÄ has been to create a clear link between UKÄ's external quality assurance activities and the internal quality assurance undertaken by HEIs. This includes considering how UKÄ's quality assurance can contribute to further developing quality assurance processes within HEIs, as well as to the further enhancement of higher education at large (see 10.1 and Annex 3 on UKÄ's external quality assurance activities take into account ESG Part 1).

The alignment of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities with key principles in ESG 2.3-2.7 is presented in a table in Annex 4.

Stakeholders are involved in the design and continuous improvement of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, e.g. through the continuous dialogue between UKÄ and the HEIs, and through feedback at initial meetings and follow-up conferences. HEIs, students' unions, and labour market organisations are closely involved in the evaluation processes in UKÄ's assessment panels, where they contribute actively to self-reflection and improvement of the quality assurance methods and processes.

In order to secure efficient administration and documentation, UKÄ has developed a case management system for external quality assurance, with working spaces for UKÄ's project managers, assessment panels and HEIs' administrators. This tool thus supports a collaborative environment for each external quality assurance project.

10.2.2. Method development

As described in 4.4, UKÄ's efforts to develop and implement the current system for quality assurance in higher education was conducted in close dialogue with the HEIs and other stakeholders The process also included regular discussions with advisory groups and reference groups, including interviews with all vice-chancellors. Below, different fora for consultation are described, some of which were established on a continuous basis.

Stakeholders are involved in the design and continuous improvement of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities. This allows UKÄ to take into consideration HEIs' workload and possible evaluation fatigue due to overlaps between the agency's external assessment activities.

Advisory groups

UKÄ recruited a number of people from HEIs and other areas of the sector to different advisory groups to provide support and feedback on various questions. The advisory groups thus secured experience in internal and external quality assurance of higher education and from various HEIs and disciplines.

Reference groups

Reference groups were set up to discuss and comment on the overarching principles for the quality assurance system and its external activities. These groups included representatives from various organisations representing HEIs, students, teachers, employers and the labour market. The reference groups still meet on a regular basis.

An international advisory committee of experts with proven experience in quality assurance processes in higher education in Europe was also appointed to provide additional international perspectives.

UKÄ's Advisory Council

Advice and feedback on the quality assurance system was also received from UKÄ's Advisory Council, appointed by the Swedish Government to advice the Director-General of UKÄ in different matters.

Dialogue meetings

A number of dialogue meetings were held in 2016 to discuss and receive comments on UKÄ's proposal for a new quality assurance system. The meetings targeted vice-chancellors, quality officers and teacher representatives, students, and employer and labour market organisations. In addition to the dialogue meetings, comments could also be submitted online. A summary of the comments was published online.[45]

UKÄ also participated in dialogue meetings organised by stakeholders such as the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF), The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), and HEIs quality officers.

Experience from previous systems

Conferences, interviews, surveys and seminars were conducted with representatives from HEIs, teachers, students, employers and the labour market to collect opinions and development ideas as a way of leveraging experience from the 2011–2014 evaluation system. UKÄ has also

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[45] Summary in Swedish, https://www.uka.se/om-oss/konferenser--seminarier/konferenser--seminarier/2016-06-03-det-nya-kvalitets-sakrings-systemet-dialogmoten.html.

conducted a number of analyses of the effects of the previous evaluation system. Such analyses are described in 9.4.

Pilot studies

In December 2014, a pilot study began for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes. The pilot study included both small and large programmes in natural sciences, engineering and technology, medicine, social sciences, the humanities and artistic research. It also included two interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary programmes. The pilot study was completed in May 2016, and experience from the assessors, the HEIs and UKÄ was subsequently used in the process of developing UKÄ's quality assurance activities. Above all, these experiences were used to design the method for programme evaluations.

In the autumn 2016, additional pilot studies were launched to test the methods for the institutional reviews and the revised method for programme evaluations. The pilot study for programme evaluations included pre-school teacher and primary teacher training programmes. After the pilot studies were completed, the methods were adjusted as necessary.

In March 2016, through a revision to the public service agreement for the current budget year, the Government instructed UKÄ to evaluate the work of the HEIs in promoting sustainable development. This assignment gave UKÄ an opportunity to also test methods for thematic evaluations.

10.2.3. Revision of methodology

Focus on quality of education

Following the pilot evaluations and feedback from HEIs that the scope and focus of the reviews were too wide, UKÄ clarified the educational focus in both institutional reviews and programme evaluations. These and similar adjustments took into consideration HEIs' workload, on which UKÄ is in constant dialogue with HEIs through its reference groups and in other fora.

Diversifying quality assurance activities

In order to avoid repetition and overlap between the external quality assurance activities, and thus diminishing the workload of HEIs, the number of assessment criteria was significantly reduced for programme evaluations. The experience from the pilot round showed that certain questions within these evaluations tended to provide answers at institutional level. As a consequence, the guidelines for UKÄ's quality assurance activities are now more diversified.

Systematic approach

The systematic approach of HEIs' internal quality work should be reflected in UKÄ's assessments. To strengthen this aspect, the logic of the national system for quality assurance has been refined. e.g. by grouping certain assessment areas differently.

Clarification of communication and terminology

Explanatory texts in the guidelines were revised for greater transparency. Terminology was changed, purpose clarified, as regards assessment areas and conditions.

Reflections

UKÄ strives to ensure that set goals and aims are met, e.g. through producing analyses of assessment panel reports. An example of this is an internal report (not published) analysing how HEIs handled the gender quality perspective in all pilot evaluations made during 2017.

There is a continuous comparison and vetting of assessments and assessment panels' reports within and between evaluation projects, in order to achieve highest possible consistency and equity in assessment.

During a so-called Department Day in autumn 2019, staff from the Department of Quality Assurance analysed assessments from the HEIs' perspective, e.g. the number of evaluations and reviews that HEIs had participated in during 2019, including UKÄ's legal supervision activities. This has led to further discussions on how UKÄ can make processes more efficient and decrease workload for HEIs as well as UKÄ.

The quality assurance system as a whole can become a heavy burden for HEIs, and it is crucial for both UKÄ and HEIs to make sure that evaluations and reviews are managed at a reasonable cost as regards time and other resources. As mentioned above, UKÄ has taken into careful consideration feedback from HEIs, e.g. by reducing the number of assessment criteria in order to ensure that HEIs' workload is kept at a reasonable level. In order to further strengthen this effort, the 2020 operational plan for the Department of Quality Assurance focuses on how UKÄ's external quality assurance activities best create results that are beneficial for the development of the higher education and research sectors, and how the agency's quality assurance processes can be made more efficient and sustainable, for UKÄ as well as for HEIs.

An identified challenge concerns what stakeholders should be involved and when in the assessment process, since there are several stakeholder groups within an HEI.

As from 2020, quality assurance of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research will be included in UKÄ's institutional reviews (see 5.2.1.), and the methodology will then be adjusted to fit the extended scope. The implementation of this new activity may create new challenges for UKÄ and HEIs as to resource allocation and workload, and will be closely monitored, including the Swedish Research Council in the dialogue.

Supporting documents

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes

Operational Plan for the Department of Quality Assurance 2020

10.3. ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

Standard
External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include
-- a self-assessment or equivalent;
-- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
-- a report resulting from the external assessment;
-- a consistent follow-up.

As described in detail in chapter 6, the basic principles and procedures for all UKÄ's external quality assurance activities are similar, reflecting the interlinked design of the national quality assurance system. However, there are necessarily variations in how the features of the present standard apply to the four quality assurance activities, which are explained in this section.

As explained in 10.2.3., conclusions drawn from pilot assessments led UKÄ to revise the procedures to better fit each activity, and as a consequence, the published guidelines are now more diversified, while still ensuring the cohesiveness of the quality assurance system as a whole.

The processes are piloted, implemented, evaluated and revised in close dialogue with stakeholders and assessors, as well as between UKÄ's project managers in the course of coordinated evaluation projects.

10.3.1. Self-assessment

The variations between UKÄ's external quality assurance activities in purpose, scope and expected content of self-evaluation reports is explained in detail for each of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities in relevant sections of chapter 6.

Due to the character of appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers, the self-assessment in this quality assurance activity is expressed in the HEI's written application, rather than in a self-evaluation report.

10.3.2. External assessment and site visit

Interviews are an integral part of each external quality assurance activity. They may be conducted through regular site visits, as in the case of UKÄ's institutional reviews, or online. In programme evaluations, UKÄ has developed the concept of site visit introducing online interviews.

Interviews are also integral parts of appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers, while methods for thematic evaluations vary.

10.3.3. Report

The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (see 10.6) written by a group of external experts (see 10.4), which forms the basis for UKÄ's decision. The assessors' report provides clear guidance for institutional action and quality enhancement, stating how assessment areas and assessment criteria have been evaluated, and highlighting strengths and examples of good practice, as well as challenges and areas of development. The decision and the report are published together on UKÄ's public website.

In the case of appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers, the assessment panel's report makes a recommendation to UKÄ as to whether the application should be granted or refused. As for thematic evaluations, the report is in itself the main output. However, only one thematic evaluation has been carried out so far, and the precise forms for reporting results may differ.

10.3.4. Follow-up

For all external quality assurance activities, UKÄ has consistent and quality-enhancing follow-up processes for assessing the action taken by

an institution or programme under review. Clear feedback from the initial assessors' report and UKÄ's feedback conferences provide support for HEIs in their efforts to enhance the quality of their programmes or quality assurance procedures.

Reflections

Within UKÄ and in dialogue with different stakeholders, there is continuous work to make all procedures as efficient as possible. It is the general impression from surveys as well as feedback conferences and dialogue meetings that the different external quality assurance activities are considered useful and contribute to quality enhancement at HEIs. Many HEIs state in the surveys that the preparation of the self-evaluation report is the most important part of the assessment process. This is in line with findings from the preceding national system for quality assurance.[46]

The Department of Quality Assurance have identified some areas of improvement and ongoing efforts. For example, feedback from HEIs and assessors is regularly shared within the different teams. An issue constantly in focus is how reports can be further improved, and how UKÄ staff best coach assessors into writing clear reports that give useful input to the HEIs. Efforts have been made to renew the feedback-conferences with more focus on follow-up and how HEIs can share how the assessment process has been received and what actions and improvements it has led to.

Another topical issue is how to instruct HEIs to provide evidence of their procedures without submitting too much documentation, which is a burden to the HEIs as well as the assessment panels.

Results (reports and decisions) are made available in different databases that can be reached through the UKÄ external website. However, there is an ongoing discussion on how UKÄ can make these tools better known. There is also potential to improve how UKÄ uses the website to provide information on the different external quality assurance activities, and on the results, adjusted to the needs of different stakeholder groups. An area of development is how to make better use of the UKÄ website and the agency's newsletter. Therefore, UKÄ's has decided to develop a new layout for the external website during 2020.

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[46] As evidenced by the two thematic analyses (cf. 9.4) *Utbildningsutvärderingarnas effekter. En genomgång av effekterna av det nationella utvärderingssystemet 2011–2014*, and *Granskning för utveckling. 95 utvärderade utbildningar på forskarnivå 2017–2018*.

Supporting documents

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes

10.4. ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

Standard
External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

January-October 2019, 363 external experts were engaged in 56 assessment panels in one or several of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities.

The external quality assurance activities are conducted by assessment panels with peer-review experts, including students, recruited by UKÄ. Collectively, each panel is to have sufficiently broad and extensive expertise to assess all assessment areas and criteria of the quality assurance activity in question. Each panel normally includes a number of experts from Swedish or foreign HEIs, a student representative, and a representative of the labour market. Because of the difference in focus and scope of the activities, the number of assessors in each panel and the skills and experience required of the assessors varies.

The panels are recruited through a nomination process where all Swedish HEIs, student unions, and a number of labour market organisations are invited to nominate assessors based on a specified profile (see 10.4.1.). For instances where nominations are not enough in terms of numbers or sufficiently qualified nominees, UKÄ uses its internal experience and national and international networks to gather additional nominations. As a quality assurance measure before the panels are officially appointed by UKÄ, HEIs have the opportunity to comment on the composition of the panels, e.g. point out potential conflicts of interest.

10.4.1. Selection of assessors

UKÄ has internal guidelines to support the selection of assessors.[47] The guidelines draw on experience from previous national quality assurance systems, and experiences gathered in the development of the current system. They aim to support UKÄ in recruiting as efficient and experienced assessment panels as possible, fit for the purpose of the quality assurance activity in question. UKÄ project managers are responsible for recruiting assessors. The panels are reviewed and confirmed by the deputy head of department in charge of the external quality assurance activity, before UKÄ sends the list of panel members to the HEI for comment.

The assessor profiles developed in the internal guidelines provide a framework for both the general and specific experiences and expertise required. In addition, they include experiences that UKÄ considers favourable or meritorious in the carrying out of the assessor's assignment, such as international quality assurance experience. Previous experience of quality assurance, and especially of UKÄ's quality assurance activities, is particularly important for the selection of assessment panel chairs.

In addition to the specific expertise of each potential assessor, UKÄ also considers the gender balance and geographic distribution of the assessment panel. The aim is for at least one of the experts in each panel to have international experience.

10.4.2. Training of external assessors

Training of assessors is integrated in the rounds of institutional reviews and programme evaluations as a continuous activity. UKÄ staff responsible for managing a review or an evaluation are responsible for providing the necessary support to the assessors during the entire process. Initial training is ensured through introductory meetings, and UKÄ provides assessors with the *Introduction for assessors in UKÄ's reviews[48]*, the published guidelines for the external quality assurance activity in question, and background information on the HEI or the main areas of study to be evaluated.

10.4.3. Objectivity of assessors

In order to prevent conflicts of interest, UKÄ takes a number of actions during the recruitment process. Before the recruitment is finalised, each

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[47] Internal guidelines for the recruitment of assessors, adapted to each external quality assurance activity (in Swedish). The guidelines include assessor competence profiles, some of which are available in English.
[48] *Information till bedömare i UKÄ:s granskningar,* https://www.uka.se/kvalitet-- examenstillstand/verktyg-for-larosaten-och-bedomare/introduktion-for-bedomare.html (in Swedish and English).

assessor must submit a form, where they state that they have read UKÄ's guidelines and assert that they do not have any conflicts of interest. UKÄ's procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest are based on the rules of disqualification for government agencies in the Administrative Procedure Act, and on UKÄ's rules on conflicts of interest[49] (see 7.4, 9.6 and 10.7).

In addition, assessors contracted by UKÄ must abide by the ethical foundations of the state (see 7.4).

Reflections

UKÄ has extensive experience of recruiting assessors. Regardless of national quality assurance system and activities, the recruitment of competent assessors has always been at the core of the quality assurance work of the agency. UKÄ therefore has well-established processes for recruiting and training assessors. However, Sweden is a relatively small country in terms of the number of potential assessors available, a fact that has to be taken into continuous consideration. This circumstance creates challenges identifying a sufficient number of assessors with a broad expertise for institutional reviews, and with subject-specific expertise for programme evaluations and appraisals of degree-awarding powers. In instances of reviewing field-specific HEIs, and evaluating programmes with small education and research environments, there may be difficulties finding assessors without potential conflicts of interest. In an effort to deal with conflicts of interests in programme evaluations, the students' degree projects are anonymised (student and HEI names removed), and are only reviewed by assessors with no conflict of interest. This also strengthens objectivity of assessment, regardless of conflict of interest.

UKÄ has employed several ways of dealing with these challenges, for example by recruiting additional international experts. With international experts, the language used can be a concern, so UKÄ has primarily recruited experts from the Nordic countries or with a working knowledge of Swedish. However, programme evaluations have also been conducted in English, and at the time of writing, one institutional review is being conducted in English at the request of the HEI. Since the need for conducting external quality assurance activities in English will most likely increase, UKÄ must be ready to adapt its processes, while taking into account the responsibilities of public bodies laid down in the Swedish Language Act[50].

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[49] Published on UKÄ's intranet, these rules on conflicts of interest apply to both UKÄ staff and assessors.
[50] *Språklag* (2009:600), https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2009/05/spraklag-pa-engelska/ (in English).

UKÄ has received some criticism for not being sufficiently transparent towards HEIs as to conflicts of interest reported by assessors, and has made certain changes accordingly.

Within UKÄ, there are continuous efforts to improve the training of assessors. Following the example of some other quality assurance agencies, there is now more focus on small-group discussions during the introductory seminar, and former panel members are invited to share their experience.

Supporting documents

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes

Introduction for assessors in UKÄ's reviews

Conflict of interest form

Assessors' profiles

The Swedish Higher Education Authority's guidelines for managing conflicts of interest, reg.nr 222-506-13

The Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900)

10.5. ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

Standard
Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

10.5.1. Determining outcomes

All guidelines for external quality assurance include explanations of each assessment criteria, and detail what is expected of the HEI to provide evidence on how they fulfil them. As such, the guidelines provide support for the HEI in how they are to show the fulfilment of the criteria in their self-evaluation, as well as support for the assessment

panels in their analysis. The criteria are formulated for the purpose of qualitative analysis. This enables the HEIs to explain their own processes and programmes, in a manner that allows the panels to assess the HEI or programme in context.

For a HEIs internal quality assurance processes to be approved, and for a programme to be evaluated as having high quality, each assessment area must be deemed satisfactory. The same applies for an application for degree-awarding powers to be approved. However, not all assessment criteria included in an assessment area must be fulfilled for the whole area to be able to be deemed satisfactory. Both the number of unfulfilled assessment criteria, and the scope and severity of the deficiencies, are considered by the assessment panel when determining whether an assessment area is satisfactory or not. For the final overall assessment, the panel must make the same considerations regarding the assessment areas. In institutional reviews, for example, in the case of one or more assessment areas deemed not satisfactory, the panel must make the assessment whether an HEI is *approved with reservations*, or *under review*. The assessment in this case cannot be based solely on the number of unsatisfactory assessment areas, but rather on an overall assessment of the HEI's quality assurance processes as a whole, and on the severity of the shortcomings related to the assessment criteria and areas.

Regardless of the criteria or whether the panel has reached a positive or negative assessment, the panels must be able to justify their findings based on the assessment material. In the reports, they must clearly explain the assessment of each criteria and how they have reached their final overall assessment.

10.5.2. Publishing criteria

The explanation of the assessment criteria, assessment areas, and possible overall assessments in each external quality assurance activity is described in the guidelines for each activity, published on UKÄ's website and communicated to HEIs and assessors.

10.5.3. Support to assessment panels

At the start of an assessment process, the assessment panel is introduced to the process and methodology of the quality assurance activity. This includes information about the assessment areas and criteria to be assessed. Throughout the process, UKÄ project managers support the assessment panels in different stages of the process. The primary objectives of the support are to make sure that all assessment areas and criteria are assessed, and that the assessors follow the guidelines.

10.5.4. Preparing and reviewing reports for decision

The panel reports go through a vetting process starting with the preliminary reports that the panels write early in the process. The preliminary reports are initially reviewed by the panel members themselves and the UKÄ project manager, e.g. in order to find discrepancies in the panel's assessments and any potential departures from the guidelines. Issues with the assessments or the report are continuously discussed at assessment panel meetings throughout the whole process, in order to obtain maximum consistency and equity of assessment. After the meetings, the panel finalises the report, which is then reviewed by UKÄ again to ensure that the assessments are clear, consistent and well-argued. A panel chair meeting may also contribute to UKÄ's continuous monitoring of the panels' assessments and analysis, to make sure that criteria are applied consistently.

UKÄ is responsible for assuring the quality in the report by reviewing the language and structure, checking that the panel has made reflections and included strengths and examples of good practice, and areas in need of improvement, as well as ensuring that the assessments are justified and well-founded.

Reflections

The consistent application and transparency of the criteria in UKÄ's external quality assurance activities is an ongoing discussion with HEIs and within the agency. The national quality assurance system must be transparent and consistent for it to be able to provide long-term constructive benefits for the HEIs, but there must also be room for the system to take the differences of the HEIs and programmes into account.

In order to maintain comparability of outcomes, UKÄ has avoided making extensive changes to the assessment criteria within the ongoing cycle. However, to clarify the overall process for both HEIs and assessment panels without reducing the consistency or transparency of the possible outcomes, smaller changes have been made in dialogue with the HEIs. For example, criteria have been moved from one assessment area to another, and criteria have been combined.

Another method that UKÄ applies to contribute to consistency and transparency is the support provided to the panels in their assessments. A challenge for UKÄ is to provide this support without influencing the assessments.

By applying a thorough process of assuring the quality of the panels' reports, where it can be reviewed by several parties, as well as awareness among staff and assessors, this issue can be avoided. It is however a challenge that possibly requires continued monitoring.

> The consistent application and transparency of criteria in UKÄ's external quality assurance activities is an ongoing discussion between UKÄ and HEIs and within the agency.

Supporting documents

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes

10.6. ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

Standard
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

UKÄ has identified a need to improve the dissemination and use of assessment reports and to enhance the functionality and user-friendliness of the agency's web-based services.

As shown in chapter 5 and further described in 10.5, each external quality assurance activity results in an assessment panel's report and a formal decision or recommendation made by UKÄ.

Assessment panels' reports are published in an open database accessible from UKÄ's website, together with the decision or recommendation by UKÄ, and the HEI's self-evaluation or application, usually the day after the decision is made by UKÄ. To find out what degree-awarding powers an HEI has, it is possible to use a special search tool to filter the results by HEI or degree. The database also allows searchable comparison between assessment areas for different reviews and evaluations. However, the functionality of this database and its links to other services on UKÄ's public website is an identified area of further development in order to enhance dissemination of the results from the agency's external quality assurance activities.

UKÄ makes information on completed external quality assurance activities available to HEIs as well as to other stakeholders, mainly through an open database accessible via the agency's website.

An assessment panel's report includes assessments of the HEI's fulfilment of each assessment criteria and area, and an overall assessment. The overall assessment also constitutes a summary of the assessment areas, and for institutional reviews and programme evaluations it is included as an annex to UKÄ's formal decision. In

addition to the assessments, the reports contain certain annexes depending on the external quality assurance activity.

The panels' conclusions must be justified based on the evidence provided, and with a clear connection to the assessment criteria. For the reports to be useful to the HEIs, regardless of a positive or negative outcome of the assessments, the panels are also expected to include their own reflections and to highlight the HEIs' strengths and areas in need of improvement, as well as examples of good practice (see chapter 6).

The assessment panel's report draft is sent to the HEI for comment before UKÄ makes its final decision. The purpose of this is to give HEIs the opportunity to check the contents and comment on any factual errors in the report. As mentioned above, the HEI's written response is included with the panel's report when published.

Reflections

Since the external quality assurance activities are peer-review processes, the responsibility for making assessments and writing the reports lies with the assessment panels. This may cause a challenge for UKÄ in ensuring the quality of the reports. UKÄ must make sure that each report includes assessments of all assessment areas and criteria, and that it is written in a clear and concise manner. Therefore, the efforts to ensure the quality of the report starts early in the process with the training of assessors, and continues with the review of the preliminary and final reports. This process takes considerable time and effort for UKÄ staff, as well as for the assessors. Issues such as consistency and equity of assessment, and language and structure in reports are discussed continuously within UKÄ with the aim to share good practice and promote high quality. An area of development identified for 2020 will be to investigate how the reports may best contribute to development and enhanced quality in higher education. On the other hand, the work put into preparing high quality reports must be balanced against their perceived benefits. Hence, in the future, the extent of the written assessment reports might be reduced in favour of other methods of communicating results and providing feedback to HEIs, such as thematic analyses, conferences and workshops.

In the international perspective of higher education and quality assurance, UKÄ has recognised an increasing need to make decisions and reports from the agency's external quality assurance activities available in English. At present, only reports from a few programme evaluations conducted in English have been published. In addition, the open database used for publishing results is currently only available in Swedish. An area of development for UKÄ to consider is therefore what information can be provided more easily in English, e.g. as summaries. At the same time, a public body, UKÄ must abide by the Swedish Language Act (see 10.4).

UKÄ has identified a need to improve the dissemination and use of assessment reports and to enhance the functionality and user-friendliness of the agency's web-based services. To this end, UKÄ's has decided to develop a new layout for the external website during 2020.

Supporting documents

National system for quality assurance of higher education. Presentation of a government assignment, UKÄ Report 2016:15

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

Guidelines for the evaluation of first- and second-cycle programmes

Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes

Introduction for assessors in UKÄ's reviews

Guidelines for the assessment panel's report (institutional reviews and programme evaluations)

10.7. ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

Standard
Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

10.7.1. Appeals

The Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900) states that when a decision made by a government authority as the first instance is manifestly wrong in some essential respect due to new circumstances or for some other reason, it should be altered, provided that this can be done rapidly, easily and without detriment to any private party.

As from 2017, UKÄ has introduced separate guidelines with routines for the reassessment of decisions relating to external quality assurance activities. Institutions are able to request that a decision is reviewed. A special expert group with three external experts and three substitutes has been appointed for a period of two years. The guidelines for this procedure are published on the UKÄ website. UKÄ aims to address such requests within three months from receiving the request.

UKÄ's preparation process in the event of a request for reassessment is more limited compared with the comprehensive assessment process preceding UKÄ's original decision. Thus, a completely new process will not be carried out.

At the time of writing, one HEI has made a formal request for a decision to be altered. In their review report, the special expert group stated that there had been some deficiencies in the assessment process. Following their recommendation, the Director General has given the head of the former assessment panel and a newly appointed assessor the task to reassess parts of the original case. A decision is expected in February 2020.

10.7.2. Complaints

In line with in the ethical foundations of the state, legality, transparency and good service are important principles guiding all UKÄ operations (chapter 7 and 9.6). For all external quality assurance activities, there is a strong focus on preventing complaints, and procedures are in place for quality-assured processes during the course of all activities. Feedback from institutions as well as assessment panel members is gathered throughout the assessment process and can contribute to improvement and clarifications in guidelines and manuals. Feedback may be collected in a structured way through, for example, questionnaires or more informally. In programme evaluations and institutional reviews, UKÄ has a long-standing tradition of arranging feedback seminars, where HEIs, assessment panel experts, and UKÄ project managers discuss content as well as procedures. Such seminars take place a few months after UKÄ's decision.

Prior to UKÄ's final decision, the assessment panel's preliminary report is referred to the HEI for review (see 6.1.3, 6.2.3, 6.3.3). This applies to all activities within the Swedish system for external quality assurance of higher education. HEIs are thus provided with the opportunity to correct factual errors. The statement from the HEI is always published as an annex to the panel's report, as an appendix to the decision.

Reflections

For all external quality assurance activities, there is a strong focus on continuous improvement of processes, and an open dialogue is encouraged. The different ways for HEIs to give feedback during and after the process, and the opportunity for pre-review of the report, may contribute to potential appeals and complaints being avoided.

Within the Department of Quality Assurance there is ongoing work to include information about reassessment in the guidelines for each activity when they are revised.

> Several ways for HEIs to give feedback during and after the assessment process, and the opportunity for pre-review of the report, may contribute to avoiding potential appeals and complaints.

As the Administrative Procedure Act was renewed in 2017, UKÄ's guidelines for reassessment will be revised accordingly. In addition, during the first review for a reassessment, the special expert group made some recommendations for areas of improvement of the guidelines.

Supporting documents

Guidelines for the reassessment of decisions within external quality assurance of higher education (in Swedish)

11. Information and opinions of stakeholders

UKÄ's main stakeholders are HEIs, students, the labour market, the Government and other decision-makers on national, regional or local level. HEIs, students' unions, and labour market organisations are all closely involved in UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, e.g. as experts in assessment panels, and throughout the assessment process through HEIs' self-evaluation reports and interviews (including student and labour market representatives).

In addition, stakeholders contribute in various ways to improving the design of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities, and they are active also after the assessment process, e.g. by providing feedback in surveys and follow-up conferences organised by UKÄ. The agency works continuously to develop the forms for active stakeholder involvement before, during and after reviews and evaluations. This ensures that UKÄ's assessment processes are timely and fit for purpose.

Feedback and opinions from stakeholders reach UKÄ directly through the above mentioned communication channels, through UKÄ's reference groups, and from continuous dialogue between UKÄ and stakeholders; more indirect feedback is provided by public debate over various quality aspects of higher education in Sweden.

Stakeholder survey 2018

In an attempt to gather substantial evidence of stakeholder views on UKÄ and the quality and consistency of the agency's services, an external stakeholder survey directed to HEIs was carried out in 2018. The findings are summarised below.[51]

'Good dialogue, easy to get in touch with, responsive.'

'The responsiveness, that they listen to our knowledge and skills.'

The picture of UKÄ is generally very positive. A clear majority of the respondents (around 75 %) have a positive or very positive opinion of the agency, are to a large or very large extent familiar with UKÄ's mission and role, and find that contacts with the agency function well or very well. UKÄ is considered relevant, credible, objective, transparent, available, and cooperative. The agency is perceived as confident in its role as a government authority, and is seen as a reliable source of knowledge in the higher education sector.

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[51] A full presentation of the survey results is available in PDF format (in Swedish).

'UKÄ has gone from a control function to a development function. A positive development.'

'Know who to turn to, get a lot of information through reports, panel calls.'

'UKÄ has a difficult assignment. It is a fast, moving environment and a lot is happening in both education and research.'

'UKÄ has good ideas, but not enough resources.'

At present, the focus is largely on education and an increased focus on research and research competence is called for. Several interviewees also wished that UKÄ should strengthen its horizon scanning and business intelligence activities.

Many of the respondents believe that UKÄ could be more active and visible in the public debate on higher education. However, others are uncertain whether this actually fits into UKÄ's mission and believes that a neutral and impartial attitude in debates is preferable.

Contacts with UKÄ were described as positive, and UKÄ is perceived as responsive, open, committed, practising a positive dialogue-based approach. What could be improved according to some is the communication of UKÄ's distinguished roles – agency of external quality assurance, legal supervision, and statistics, monitoring and analysis - and a perceived lack of resources for the agency.

According to the survey, the future presents challenges for UKÄ in the form of clarifying the agency's mission, balancing data collection with a stronger communicative role and increased research focus. Digitisation, and internationalisation are mentioned as additional challenges and areas of enhancement. Another challenge mentioned by the respondents is for UKÄ to recruit and keep experienced staff with a thorough understanding of education and research, and to secure continuous competence development for the employees. Also, synergies could be further developed between different activities such as quality assurance and legal supervision.

Reference groups and dialogue

The picture of UKÄ reflected in the stakeholder survey mentioned above is consistent with the feedback the agency receives continuously through various reference groups, and through the Director General's contacts with vice-chancellors and the Government. Above all, the dialogue-based and transparent approach applied in the development and implementation of the current national system for quality assurance, as well as in the agency's operations as a whole, is highly appreciated by stakeholders and is considered an important enhancement of the relationship between UKÄ and the rest of the higher education sector. See also chapter 13 SWOT analysis.

12. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's resulting follow-up (for second and subsequent reviews only)

UKÄ undergoes an ENQA agency review for the first time.

13. SWOT analysis

A number of SWOT analysis exercises were held with internal and external groups as part of the SAR process. This includes two sessions with staff from the Department of Quality Assurance, sessions with representatives of the higher education sector, students and the labour market in UKÄ's reference groups, and with UKÄ's top management team. Similar discussions took place in UKÄ's international advisory committee. Although focus was on activities in the scope of the ENQA review, discussions partly included UKÄ's other areas of operation. Table 11 summarises the most significant results thematically.

Table 11   UKÄ's SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• UKÄ is well recognised by the higher education sector, with a clear mandate and financially stable. • UKÄ has gained legitimacy and credibility through competence and experience, and a dialogue-based approach to stakeholders. • The national system for quality assurance has been developed and implemented in a close dialogue with the agency's stakeholders. • UKÄ is an acknowledged body of knowledge and expertise in higher education and research. • UKÄ is independent vis-à-vis the HEIs. • UKÄ's legal authority is well anchored in the HEI sector. • Thematic analyses of the findings of UKÄ's external quality assurance activities contribute to identifying success factors of quality enhancement in higher education. • Published guidelines and manuals ensure transparency and equity in external quality assurance criteria, processes and assessments, as well as equal treatment of HEIs.	• The national system for quality assurance is sometimes perceived by stakeholders as too complex and rigid. • The level of staff turnover is relatively high, particularly in the Department of Quality Assurance. • HEIs convey a certain evaluation fatigue, due to overlap between UKÄ's external quality assurance activities and the agency's legal supervision or monitoring activities. • A certain organisational tunnel vision impedes cooperation between departments.

Opportunities	Threats
• A stronger focus on thematic analyses and enhanced outreach with the agency's results from external quality assurance and other activities. • Increased international cooperation and exchange with other quality assurance agencies is an opportunity to strengthen UKÄ's international networks and enhance the agency's competence and relevance. • UKÄ might take on new assignments drawing on the agency's acknowledged expertise. • HEIs encourage UKÄ to participate more actively in the public debate on higher education, based on the agency's legitimacy and credibility. • A stronger cooperative culture would mitigate organisational tunnel vision. • A continued digitisation of UKÄ's processes and administration creates opportunities for enhanced case management, digital meetings, and internal and external communication. • Increased international cooperation and networking will reinforce UKÄ's legitimacy as an external quality assurance agency in an increasingly international higher education landscape. • Future national or international competition would provide opportunities for UKÄ to conduct external quality assurance on a European or international level.	• Political volatility and policy changes might become a threat to the agency's independence. • Extensive workload may jeopardise staff health and endanger the quality of UKÄ's outputs. • A high level of staff turnover may result in a loss of competence and continuity, and entails extensive recruitment processes. • Overloading HEIs might endanger their trust in UKÄ and call the agency's legitimacy and credibility into question. • The strong dependency of UKÄ's complex processes on advanced case management systems and other technical platforms may constitute a threat, if the digital systems are not stable and user-friendly. • Although not a current issue due to UKÄ's national quality assurance monopoly, competition from other quality assurance agencies, or increased autonomy for HEIs to assess their own processes, could constitute potential future threats.

14. Current challenges and areas for future development

This chapter highlights the most important challenges and areas for development that UKÄ needs to address over the next few years in relation to the agency's external quality assurance activities.

Continuous improvement of the national system for quality assurance

Two core goals for UKÄ are to

- be the acknowledged source of information about higher education and research

- create results that are beneficial for the development of the higher education and research sectors.

To achieve this, the Director General has given each head of department an assignment targeting areas for development and improvement. For the Department of Quality Assurance, focus is on how to increase knowledge on quality issues within the higher education sector, and how to strengthen UKÄ's capacity to create long term benefits for the quality of higher education and research, while maintaining a strong integrity as an assessment agency.

This will require updated working procedures within the various external quality assurance activities, in order to further emphasise a trust-based relationship with HEIs and to facilitate the use of knowledge gained through the quality assurance activities. Furthermore, new approaches may be required to create more benefits, e.g. new sets of meta-analyses, new cooperative efforts or new forms for dialogue and international cooperation.

The implementation of quality assurance activities must also be sustainable and of highest quality. Project management capacity must include the responsibility for each project's quality in terms of results, reports and knowledge created, and cooperation with external reviewers, as well as quality in relation to past and parallel projects with a similar focus. A continuous work to ensure project quality is thus of utmost importance.

These areas for improvement and change requires strong communication skills, knowledge about communication channels, as well as digital systems to support the activities performed. To move

forward in these areas is a joint responsibility across the agency's departments, and thus a cooperative culture across departments is a necessity.

In the following, three more identified areas for development are discussed that build on the general goals and improvement agenda mentioned above.

Including research in the institutional reviews

In 2017, the Government decided that the national quality assurance system should include the reviewing of HEIs quality assurance processes for research. UKÄ was assigned the task to further develop the national system for quality assurance to accommodate this new activity. UKÄ concluded that further development of the institutional reviews was required to meet the new demand. A method was developed in dialogue with the HEIs and the Swedish Research Council, and a pilot round is being conducted during 2019-2020. Building on the experiences from the pilot review, necessary changes to the method will be decided, and HEIs quality assurance processes for research will be part of the regular quality assurance system as from 2021.

There are no agreed international standards against which a quality assurance system for research could be measured, such as the ESG for higher education. The Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) thus decided to develop a Joint framework for HEIs' research quality assurance and enhancement systems[52], which then was used by UKÄ to define assessment criteria within the assessment areas.

Introducing the new extended institutional reviews in 2021 will be both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a new topic for institutional reviews, covering an area where, traditionally, there has not been a major requirement for systematic approaches in terms of quality assurance. On the other hand, the system will be consistent, covering both education and research, emphasising the mutual dependency of education and research and the HEIs' responsibility to work with both areas in a conscious way. In addition, the extended system will facilitate cooperation and synergies between institutional reviews and third-cycle programme evaluations.

Preparing the next quality assurance cycle

The current six-year cycle of external quality assurance will be concluded in 2022. Smaller adjustments of the various activities have been made within the current cycle, but as the cycle draws to an end,

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[52] https://suhf.se/app/uploads/2019/09/SUHF-Ramverk-forskning-Framework-Research-2019-REV.pdf

there will be an opportunity to gather experiences over a longer period and to make comprehensive evaluations of the system. ENQA's agency review of UKÄ, as well as an external, independent assessment of the quality assurance system carried out 2020-2021[53], will be important sources of knowledge when identifying areas for improvement.

One major issue to address is if there is a need to refocus the assessment areas based on the experiences from the first cycle of external quality assurance activities. HEI's have developed their quality assurance systems during the first cycle and there might be a need either to emphasise or reduce the importance of various assessment areas for the system to be beneficial to the enhancement of quality during a second cycle of assessments.

Programme evaluations have been carried out for a selection of programmes on all three levels. Some major educational areas have been covered, e.g. teacher training programmes and a selection of PhD programmes from various scientific areas. It needs to be decided if this principle will be used also in the second cycle of evaluations, or if, for example, a risk-based approach could be implemented for the selection of programmes to evaluate. In addition, the volume of the programme evaluation activity must be discussed, e.g. in terms of workload imposed on HEIs and UKÄ in relation to attested enhancement effects of the evaluations.

The long term adjustments needed when research is introduced in the institutional reviews need to be assessed as the second cycle is planned.

Furthermore, one of the strengths of the current national quality assurance system is its legitimacy, which is partly a benefit from the dialogue-based approach applied during development and implementation, and a willingness to discuss and adjust the system based on stakeholder dialogue. It is thus essential that there be enough time to discuss the second cycle with HEIs and other stakeholders. A dialogue-based approach requires hearings, workshops and seminars at different stages of the development process. Consequently, preparatory activities for the second cycle of external quality assurance will be initiated soon, and no later than at the beginning of 2021.

Internationalisation

Swedish HEI's are profoundly internationalised in terms of student and staff mobility, exchange programmes, academic career opportunities, research, etc. Quality assurance processes are however organised within a national framework and national legislation. A university cannot choose to replace institutional reviews done by UKÄ with that of

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[53] Follow-up and assessment of the system for quality assurance (decision in public service agreement for 2017). To be reported to the Government by 1 February 2021.

another quality assurance agency from another country, and UKÄ cannot take assignments outside of Sweden. As universities deepen their cooperation across national borders this might be an issue where some institutional changes may be necessary within the next decade.

If the European university initiative develops as intended, HEIs must also build their quality assurance systems to reflect student mobility within a programme but across international and institutional borders. Like quality assurance agencies in other countries, UKÄ needs to adapt to a new international scene for quality assurance, and this will have an impact on all external quality assurance activities of the Swedish quality assurance system and on the agency itself. Therefore, it is an important step for UKÄ to be part of developments in Europe and the project on external quality assurance methodologies for the institutional alliances within the European university initiative.

Annex 1 UKÄ's assessment processes

The charts in Annex 1 describe the steps included in UKÄ's external quality assurance activities

- institutional reviews

- programme evaluations (1st and 2nd cycle; 3rd cycle)

- appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers

As explained in 6.4, the methodology of UKÄ's thematic evaluations is developed and adapted to the relevant theme.

Assessment process overview for review of HEIs' quality assurance processes

Phase 1: Start-up process

Possible Chair Meeting 1	Initial meeting with the HEIs	HEIs submit material to UKÄ
	Material is made available by UKÄ	

Phase 2: Review process

UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 1 Assessment material is made available in UKÄ Bedömarvy	Study of guidelines and assessment material by assessors	Assessment Panel Meeting 1
Assessors conduct individual assessment work	Assessors submit individual assessments in UKÄ Bedömarvy	UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 2
Possible Chair Meeting 2 and Assessment Panel Meeting 2	Joint assessment work – preparations for Site Visit 1	Site Visit 1
		Assessment Panel Meeting 3 Selection of audit trails
UKÄ informs HEIs of audit trails	Joint assessment work – writing report draft	The HEIs submit the requested documentation to UKÄ
Requested documentation is made available	Site visit 2 about audit trails	Chair Meeting (online). Calibration of assessments
Study of documentation on audit trails	Assessment Panel Meeting 4	
Joint assessment work – work on report draft	Possible Chair Meeting and Assessment Panel Meeting 5	Assessment panel finalises preliminary report

Phase 3: Decision-making process

UKÄ assures the quality of preliminary reports and submits the preliminary reports to the HEIs for comment	The HEIs submit potential comments	Assessment panel goes through the HEIs' comments and makes adjustments when relevant	UKÄ´s formal decision

Legend: ■ Assessors ■ HEIs ■ UKÄ ■ All

Assessment process overview for first- and second-cycle level programme evaluations

Phase 1: Start-up process

Possible Chair Meeting 1	Initial meeting with the HEIs Material is made available by UKÄ	HEIs submit material to UKÄ

Phase 2: Review process

UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 1 Assessment material is made available in UKÄ Bedömarvy	Study of guidelines and assessment material by assessors	Assessment Panel Meeting 1
Assessors conduct individual assessment work	Assessors submit individual assessments in UKÄ Bedömarvy	UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 2
Possible Chair Meeting 2 and Assessment Panel Meeting 2	Joint assessment work – writing report draft	UKÄ sends out meeting material and report draft before Assessment Panel Meeting 3
Possible Chair Meeting 3 and Assessment Panel Meeting 3 – report meeting and preparation of interviews	Assessment panel conducts web interviews with the HEI	Assessment panel finalises preliminary report
Assessment Panel Meeting 4 online – go through all preliminary reports		

Phase 3: Decision-making process

UKÄ assures the quality of preliminary reports and submits the preliminary reports to the HEIs for comment	The HEIs submit potential comments	Assessment panel goes through the HEIs' comments and makes adjustments when relevant	UKÄ´s formal decision

■ Assessors   ■ HEIs   ■ UKÄ   ■ All

Assessment process overview for third-cycle level programme evaluations

Phase 1: Start-up process

Possible Chair Meeting 1	Initial meeting with the HEIs	HEIs submit material to UKÄ
	Material is made available by UKÄ	

Phase 2: Review process

UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 1 Assessment material is made available in UKÄ Bedömarvy	Study of guidelines and assessment material by assessors	Assessment Panel Meeting 1
Assessors conduct individual assessment work	Assessors submit individual assessments in UKÄ Bedömarvy	UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 2
Assessment Panel Meeting 2	Joint assessment work – writing report draft	Possible Chair Meeting 2
UKÄ sends out meeting material and report draft before Assessment Panel Meeting 3	Assessment Panel Meeting 3 – report meeting and preparation of interviews	Assessment panel conducts web interviews with the HEI
Assessment panel finalises preliminary report	Assessment Panel Meeting 4 online – go through all preliminary reports	

Phase 3: Decision-making process

UKÄ assures the quality of preliminary reports and submits the preliminary reports to the HEIs for comment	The HEIs submit potential comments	Assessment panel goes through the HEIs' comments and makes adjustments when relevant	UKÄ´s formal decision

■ Assessors ■ HEIs ■ UKÄ ■ All

Assessment process overview for appraisals of degree-awarding powers

Phase 1: Review process

The HEI applies for degree-awarding powers for a specific degree → UKÄ sends out meeting material before Assessment Panel Meeting 1. Assessment material is made available in UKÄ Bedömarvy. → Study of guidelines and assessment material by assessors

Assessors conduct individual assessment work → Assessment panel meeting 1 – review of the application and preliminary assessment → UKÄ requests additional material if needed
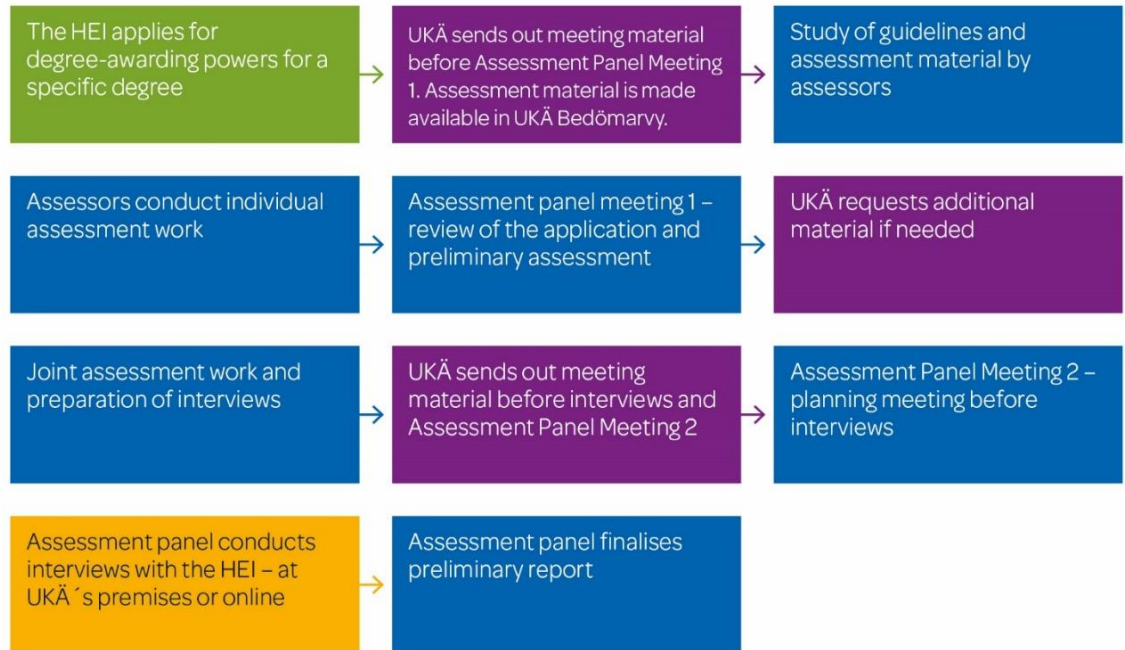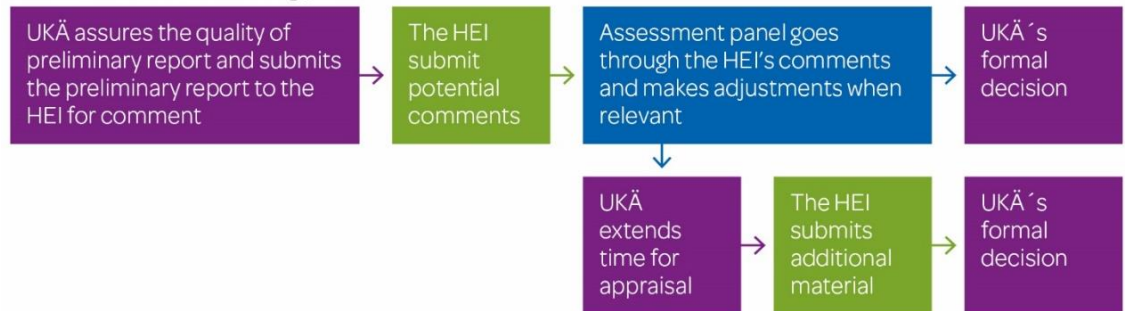
Joint assessment work and preparation of interviews → UKÄ sends out meeting material before interviews and Assessment Panel Meeting 2 → Assessment Panel Meeting 2 – planning meeting before interviews

Assessment panel conducts interviews with the HEI – at UKÄ´s premises or online → Assessment panel finalises preliminary report

Phase 2: Decision-making process

UKÄ assures the quality of preliminary report and submits the preliminary report to the HEI for comment → The HEI submit potential comments → Assessment panel goes through the HEI's comments and makes adjustments when relevant → UKÄ´s formal decision

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UKÄ extends time for appraisal → The HEI submits additional material → UKÄ´s formal decision

■ Assessors ■ HEI ■ UKÄ ■ All

Annex 2 UKÄ's circular annual operating plan

UKÄ's annual operating plan is updated continuously throughout the planning process. The circular plan published on UKÄ's intranet is interactive, i.e. all text is hyperlinked and gives access to various steering documents.

- ⬤ Planning
- ⬤ Check
- ⬤ Budget
- ⬤ IT Management

Annex 3 UKÄ's external QA and ESG Part 1

Mapping of UKÄ's external QA activities and the ESG Part 1, i.e. how each standard is addressed in each activity.

	Institutional reviews – assessment criteria	Appraisals of degree-awarding powers – assessment criteria	Programme evaluations – assessment criteria	Thematic evaluations – assessment criteria[54]	Swedish laws and regulations
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	*Governance and organisation* 1.2. The HEI's quality assurance policy				
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	*Preconditions* 2.4. Students' ability to complete their studies in time. *Design, implementation and outcomes*	*Preconditions* Subject area/main field of study/professional qualification The degree within the scope of the degree ordinance/System of qualifications.	*Preconditions* **Education environment** The scientific/artistic, and professional, environment for the programme. Including the connection between research and education. *Design, implementation and outcomes*	*Design, implementation and outcomes* The integration of sustainable development into programmes, can mean both content and working methods. Systematic work with following up, and developing, the	HL55: 1 ch. 4-4a §§, 2 ch. 7 §. HF56: 6 ch. 13-17 §§

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54 How the standards are addressed in thematic evaluations depends on the theme and scope the evaluations conducted. The information in the table reflects the assessment criteria used in the thematic evaluation of sustainable development conducted in 2017 (cf. 5.5 and note).
55 HL: *Högskolelag* (Higher Education Act).
56 HF: *Högskoleförordning* (Higher Education Ordinance).

	3.1. Design, development, establishment, and closure of programmes. 3.2. Students active role in learning processes. 3.4. Connection between national and local goals, teaching activities and examinations. Student and doctoral student perspective 5.1. Student influence.	The scope and definition of the subject area/main field of study. The public interest of the qualification from a national perspective. *Preconditions/Design, implementation and outcomes* **Goal attainment** Students' achievement of degree targets.	**Goal attainment** Students' achievement of degree targets.	integration of sustainable development in the education. There are programmes where research/artistic research for sustainable development is used in education.	
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	*Governance and organisation* 1.4 Participation, engagement and responsibility. *Design, implementation and outcomes* 3.2. Students active role in learning processes. 3.5. Improvement and development of courses and programmes.	*Preconditions/Design, implementation and outcomes* **Goal attainment** Students' achievement of degree targets. *Student perspective* Student influence.	*Design, implementation and outcomes* **Goal attainment** Students' achievement of degree targets.		HL: 5 ch. 1 §. HF: 6 ch. 24 §, 12 ch. 2 §, 5 §. FL : 33 §, 38 §, 41-44 §§

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Design, implementation and outcomes 3.7. Admissions, credit transfers and awarding degrees. Student appeals.57		Follow-up, measures and feedback Students are able to complete their studies in time.		HF: 6 ch. 6-7 §§, 12 ch. 2 §
1.5 Teaching staff	*Preconditions* 2.1. Staff skills and the needs of the educational operations. 2.2. Supportive environment for the development of skills and conditions for efficiency. *Design, implementation and outcomes* 3.3. Close connection between research and education	*Preconditions* **Staff** Teachers' numbers and expertise	*Preconditions* **Staff** Teachers' numbers and expertise	*Environment, resources and areas* Ensuring staff competence regarding sustainable development in education.	RF58 (1974:152), The Public Employment Act (1994:260), The Employment Ordinance (1994:373). HF: 2 ch. 2 § and 4 ch.
1.6 Learning, resources and student support	*Preconditions* 2.3. Infrastructure, student support and teaching resources.	*Preconditions* **Resources** There is stable and appropriate infrastructure.	*Preconditions* **Staff** Teachers' numbers and expertise		

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[57] The assessment criteria 3.7 is only applied to independent education providers. The reason for this is that they are not reviewed in UKÄ's HEI supervision, which would otherwise have addressed these issues (cf. 4.2.2.).

[58] RF: *Regeringsformen* (The Instrument of Government).

		Resources are used effectively.	**Education environment** The scientific/artistic, and professional, environment for the programme. Including the connection between research and education.
1.7 Information management	*Governance and organisation* 1.5. The implementation of measures in strategic governance, quality work, and development of the quality system. *Design, implementation and outcomes* 3.5. Improvement and development of courses and programmes.	*Student perspective* Student influence. *Working life and collaboration* Students' preparedness to face changes in working life. Collaboration with surrounding society.	*Follow-up, measures and feedback* Feedback to relevant stakeholders. *Student perspective* Student influence. *Working life and collaboration* Students' preparedness to face changes in working life. Collaboration with surrounding society.
1.8 Public information	*Governance and organisation* 1.6. Communicating results generated by the quality system. *Design, implementation and outcomes* 3.6. Communicating planned and implemented measures.		

1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	*Governance and organisation* 1.5. The implementation of measures in strategic governance, quality work, and development of the quality system.	*Student perspective* Student influence.	*Follow-up, measures and feedback* Systematic follow-up of programme content, design, implementation and examinations.	*Governance and organisation* Systematic follow-up and development of work with sustainable development in education.	HL: 1 ch. 4-4a §§ HF: 1 ch. 14 §
	1.6. Communicating results generated by the quality system.		Translation of follow-ups into measures for quality improvement. Feedback to relevant stakeholders.	*Design, implementation and outcomes* Systematic work with following up, and developing, the integration of sustainable development in the education.	
	Preconditions 2.3. Infrastructure, student support and teaching resources.				
	2.4. Students' ability to complete their studies in time.				
	Design, implementation and outcomes 3.3. Close connection between research and education				
	3.5. Improvement and development of courses and programmes.				

3.6. Communicating planned and implemented measures.

Working life and collaboration
6.1. Students' preparedness to face changes in working life.

1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	*Governance and organisation* 1.1. The HEI's quality system ensures the quality of the programmes and is connected to the overarching goals and strategies which the HEI has established for its educational offerings.	ET[59]: 6 §

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[59] ET: *Lag om tillstånd att utfärda vissa examina* (Award of Certain Degrees Licensing Act).

Annex 4 ESG Part 2 alignment

Alignment of ESG Part 2 with key principles of UKÄ's external quality assurance processes

External QA activity	Key principles of UKÄ QA processes							
	Self-assessment (ESG 2.3)	Site visit (ESG 2.3)	Consistent follow-up (ESG 2.3)	Peer-review experts (ESG 2.4)	Student assessors (ESG 2.4)	Published criteria (ESG 2.5)	Published reports and decisions (ESG 2.6)	Complaints and appeals (ESG 2.7)
Institutional reviews	Yes *Self-assessment report (and student report)*	Yes	Yes[60]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Programme evaluations	Yes *Self-assessment report*	Yes *Interviews*	Yes[61]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers	Yes *Application for degree-awarding powers*	Yes *Interviews*	Yes[62]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Thematic evaluations	Yes *Self-assessment report*[64]	Yes/No[65]	Yes[66]	Yes	Yes	Yes[63]	Yes	Yes

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[60] The type of follow-up depends on the outcome of the review. But all HEIs are followed-up, including those with a positive outcome.

[61] The type of follow-up depends on the outcome of the evaluation. But all HEIs are followed-up, including those with a positive outcome.

[62] An HEI that has been granted a degree-awarding power may be followed-up through the institutional review or programme evaluation. However, no specific follow-up is made of a granted degree-awarding power.

[63] The criteria applied are adapted to the relevant theme. The chosen criteria are published in the guidelines for the evaluation.

[64] The methodology applied is developed and adapted to the relevant theme.

[65] The methodology applied is developed and adapted to the relevant theme. The thematic evaluation conducted so far did not include site visits or interviews, partially due to time constraints.

[66] The follow-up procedure for a specific thematic evaluation is defined when the evaluation is planned. It may include a national conference.

Glossary

Audit trails	Quality assurance processes and the environment in which they are studied during a site visit for an institutional review.
Assessment area	Contains one or more assessment criteria. The six assessment areas in the national system for quality assurance are: governance and organisation; preconditions; design, implementation and outcomes; gender equality; student and doctoral student perspective; working life and collaboration.
Assessment criteria	Requirements to be met by HEIs in a specific review, evaluation or appraisal. Known in advance and common to all HEIs or programmes concerned. Grouped into assessment areas.
Assessment panel	Group of external experts that normally includes peer-review experts, students, and labour market representatives.
Degree-awarding powers	Authorisation for an HEI to issue a certain degree.
Degree project	The Higher Education Ordinance specifies the requirement for a student to conduct a degree project to obtain a degree at the first-cycle and second-cycle levels. Also sometimes called an independent project or thesis.
Perspective	The student and doctoral student perspective, the working life perspective, are to permeate all activities of the HEI.
Qualitative targets	Qualitative targets for different degrees listed in the System of Qualifications in the Higher Education Ordinance and the Ordinance for the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence University.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbetet – UKÄ) is to contribute to strengthening Swedish higher education and Sweden as a knowledge society. We review the quality of higher education programmes, we analyse and follow-up trends within higher education, and we monitor the rights of students.

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