

# Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

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# Introduction

Since 2017, the mission of the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has been expanded beyond quality assurance of higher education to include research. The review of quality assurance of research by higher education institutions (HEIs) has been included in the component *Institutional reviews of the higher education institutions' quality assurance processes*. This document provides guidelines for this expanded mission. These guidelines are based on the preparatory work presented in two UKÄ reports: *Granskning av lärosätenas kvalitetssäkring av forskning – rapportering av analys- och metodutvecklingsarbete* (Report 2019:6) (Reviewing HEI's quality assurance processes for research — review of analytical and methodological development work) and *Kvalitetssäkring av forskning – rapportering av ett regeringsuppdrag* (Report 2018:2) (Quality assurance of research — reporting a government assignment). A review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research, together with a review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes regarding education, is one of four components of Sweden's national system for quality assurance in higher education and research. For more information on Sweden's national system for quality assurance, see UKÄ's report *Nationellt system för kvalitetssäkring av högre utbildning – redovisning av ett regeringsuppdrag* (Report 2016:15) (National system for quality assurance in higher education — review of a government assignment).

# Reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

The reviews verify that the HEIs ensure that the research comply with the quality requirements of the Swedish Higher Education Act and the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance.

The reviews are based on the international research guidelines formulated in the *European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* and the national framework for quality assurance of research developed by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF).

The reviews focus on how well the HEIs' quality assurance processes – including follow-up, measures and feedback procedures – help ensure and enhance the quality of research.

The reviews also help improve HEIs' quality by highlighting good examples and strengths as well as areas in need of improvement.

## Purpose

UKÄ's reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research aim to confirm that these quality assurance processes ensure high quality research and help to enhance quality improvement by HEIs.

## Main principles for reviewing HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

The reviews by UKÄ incorporate the quality requirements formulated in the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and the Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100). The Higher Education Act states that the activities of the HEIs are to promote a close relationship between research and education and be adapted in a way that achieves high quality. The resources available are to be utilised effectively and the quality work undertaken is to be a mutual concern for staff and students. General principles of research that apply include the free selection of research questions, free development of research methods and free

publication of research results. The HEIs are to safeguard academic credibility and good research practices. The Higher Education Ordinance states that a higher education institution must ensure that employees can receive advice and support in matters of good research practice and deviations from such practice. A HEI shall examine other suspected deviations from good research practice than those that are to be examined in particular in accordance with the law (2019: 504) on responsibility for good research practice and examination of misconduct in research. Furthermore, a HEI shall establish guidelines for its examination of suspected deviations from good research practice and annually report these to the Board for examination of misconduct in research. Furthermore, The Higher Education Act stipulates that the mandate for HEIs include knowledge transfer, community service, community engagement and outreach (known as third stream activities) and ensuring that benefit is derived from their research results. Gender equality is always to be promoted and observed.

As a starting point for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research, both national and international agreed-upon frameworks and research guidelines play an important role beyond the Swedish Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. The international guidelines for reviewing quality assurance of research of particular relevance are the *European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* (Charter & Code). The European Commission supports the Charter and Code, which has a direct bearing on policy issues for research and research policy at the national level throughout Europe. In Sweden, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) has also formulated a national framework with overarching principles for quality assurance of research. This framework has been significant in formulating assessment criteria for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance efforts for research.

UKÄ's reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research are aimed at reviewing whether these processes systematically and effectively help to ensure and improve research quality. The focus of the review is on the HEI's handling of the information generated as a result of follow-ups, peer reviews and evaluation. UKÄ reviews how well the HEIs' quality assurance processes systematically identify strengths and ensures that these are preserved and enhanced and how well areas needing improvement are identified, followed up and addressed.

## Central concepts

Several concepts used in UKÄ's reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes in both education and research are defined below. The purpose is to clarify and highlight how UKÄ uses the concepts, not to be prescriptive in how they should be interpreted or used in general.

## **HEIs' quality assurance processes for research**

In the institutional reviews conducted by UKÄ, the object of review is the HEIs' quality assurance processes. An HEI's quality assurance processes include its quality system and quality work.

### **Quality system**

The quality system is the framework (or frameworks, in cases in which HEIs have separate quality systems for education and research) in which quality work is conducted. The quality system encompasses the documented background, in the form of organisation, allocation of responsibilities and internal policy documents, and the procedures and methods used to work with both quality assurance and quality enhancement. This also includes activities through which the organisation identifies the goals, processes and resources required to achieve the desired result.

### **Quality work**

Quality work is the work carried out within the framework of the quality system. This includes both quality assurance and quality enhancement, i.e., the work carried out to ensure that research operations are of high quality and the work carried out to improve research operations. The quality work is carried out at all levels in the HEI and involve the HEI's staff and doctoral students. The quality work includes both continual peer review and strategic work on research activities. Systematic quality work refers to continual work on improvements within predefined processes and procedures aimed at ensuring and improving quality throughout research activities.

### **Peer review**

The quality and relevance of research are reviewed regularly both nationally and internationally through integrated peer reviews. Peer reviews with appointed reviewers, structured discussions and written statements are essential for formulating, retaining and developing a good, smoothly operating quality culture, and peer reviews also form the basis of quality assurance processes for research. Other assessment processes are applicable to artistic research, but peer review also plays a critical role in these processes.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is a central concept. In addition to collaboration with industry and the private sector, there is also collaboration with county councils, municipalities and NGOs, for example. However, joint work methods and activities between HEIs are not covered by this concept.

# Assessment areas and assessment criteria

UKÄ's review of HEI quality assurance processes for research focuses on how well HEI quality assurance systems and procedures help to ensure and improve the quality of research. The review encompasses the following two assessment areas:

- Governance, organisation and implementation
- Preconditions

In the reviews, the assessment areas form the foundation for the overall judgement of HEI quality assurance processes. Each assessment area contains several assessment criteria. The assessment criteria are a minimum level for what the HEI must report in the self-evaluation. In addition to the assessment criteria, there may also be other components of the systematic quality assurance procedures, specific for each HEI that are relevant to describe within an assessment area.<sup>1</sup>

## Assessment area: Governance, organisation and implementation

The assessment area *governance, organisation, and implementation* concerns how the HEI has structured the systematic quality work. This assessment area concerns the division of responsibilities and employees involvement in the quality work. It also involves the way collaboration, dialogue, and exchanges of information and experience take place different levels in the organisation. In addition, the area includes the main processes/working models/channels the HEI has for detecting and correcting problems. It also includes the main processes/activities/channels the HEI has for identifying and taking action, on adequate knowledge, and how the HEI ensures that research and research environments undergo peer review and act on recommendations generated by these reviews. The three assessment criteria specify basic elements of a quality system and the characteristics that the organisation of quality work should have.

The self-evaluation is to contain descriptions and assessments related to each individual assessment criterion. A systematic quality work fit for purpose is a requested characteristic in the assessment criteria, so it is

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<sup>1</sup> The student perspective is reviewed and integrated into other assessment areas where it is considered relevant. Examples of relevant areas could include doctoral students' perspectives on matters pertaining to professional development and career support, as well as gender equality and collaboration. Furthermore, the student perspective on the link between research and education may deserve special attention.



important to demonstrate that there is an awareness and a plan behind the selection of different processes and the organisation of work. In describing how you work, you can also explain why you have chosen to work as you do so that the assessment panel can better understand the systematics, logic and capacity of the HEI's quality work. Give the assessors a context for the reasons behind your choice of quality assurance processes/body/review methods and so on. Describe and explain what considerations are important in the work. For example, you may reflect on the following questions: Have you changed the way you work? If yes, why? What challenges does the work present and what adjustments have you needed to make? Are there specific conditions and objectives affecting the HEI's considerations when ensuring and improving the quality of research? Nuanced and resonating assessments allow assessors to assess the HEI's ability to identify its own strengths and areas needing improvement, as well as how the quality culture of the HEI functions.

### **Assessment criteria:**

1. The HEI's principles for quality work, division of responsibility and roles and concrete working models for ensuring and enhancing quality in research are established and widely available. They are designed in a way that supports strategic work at all levels and involves both management and employees.
2. The HEI ensures that they regularly follow up and continuously collect, analyse and use relevant information regarding the quality and relevance of research. This serves as a basis for quality enhancement, strategic decisions and setting priorities.
3. The HEI ensures that their research/research environments recurrently undergo reviews from a national and international perspective supported by peer review. The reviews are conducted in a manner that is appropriate for the HEI. The HEI systematically picks up and acts on the recommendations that these reviews produce.

### **Assessment area: Preconditions**

The assessment area *preconditions* concerns the capacity of the HEI to monitor, develop and maintain an appropriate environment for researchers. The area identifies some basic preconditions necessary for carrying out research of high quality. The assessment criteria specify the preconditions the HEI's systematic quality work should be able to handle.

The self-evaluation is to contain a description and assessments related to the description in each individual assessment criteria. Systematic is a

recurring word in the assessment criteria. Provide examples of activities, resources or working models and explain the ideas behind them and the reasons for your choices. Describe and evaluate the processes you employ to work on the various issues in a consistent and well-functioning manner. For example, you may discuss the following questions: Who is involved in the work? What information do you use to know that work is proceeding as it should? Are there examples of measures taken if the work has not gone well? What considerations and trade-offs are behind the work?

The assessments in this assessment area should also be nuanced and carefully considered to make it easier for the assessors to perceive strengths and areas needing improvement.

### **Assessment criteria:**

The HEI works systematically to:

- 1. promote good research practice and to prevent and deal with misconduct in research*
- 2. create good conditions for the development and renewal of research/research environments*
- 3. create good conditions for the freedom of research*
- 4. ensure that a close connection exists between research and education in its operations*
- 5. follow up its efforts to strengthen the quality and relevance of research through collaboration and mutual learning; the HEI works systematically to facilitate dissemination and utilisation of its research results*
- 6. ensure long-term competence provision for the development and renewal of research; the HEI works systematically to create good conditions for professional development and provides well-functioning career support for researchers at all stages of their careers, regardless of their form of employment.*
- 7. ensure appropriate support for the research; the HEI has appropriate processes for prioritisation and long-term renewal of research infrastructures*
- 8. promote gender equality with regard to research conditions and implementation.*

# The review process

## Assessment basis

Evaluation materials include the following:

- a self-evaluation from the HEI;
- a student and doctoral student report from the student and doctoral student unions that may be jointly produced with the corresponding report for the HEI review regarding education;
- two site visits with accompanying interviews;
- documentation about selected areas audit trails.

All assessment materials are considered for the assessment. The review process also factors in other data produced by UKÄ.

## The HEI's self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is an important document in the review of the HEI's quality assurance processes. To facilitate a fair evaluation of the HEI's quality assurance processes for research, it is important for the HEI's presentation in the self-evaluation to be complete and exhaustive. The self-evaluation is to be at most 50 pages using 12 point font. The HEI is to submit its self-evaluation to UKÄ within twelve weeks from the initial meeting.

The purpose of the self-evaluation is to:

1. Provide an overview of the HEI and its organisation.
2. Describe and analyse the HEI's quality assurance processes for research and its various aspects.
3. Describe and analyse how, through its quality work, the HEI systematically assures high quality in its research.

Provide evidence of how the HEI knows the selected procedures ensure the quality of research and identify the need for additional improvements.

The HEI is also to include a summary of the most central policy documents for its quality work. The assessment panel can then, when required, request supplementary documentation to verify or explore

specific parts of the self-evaluation. The following documents are to be included with the self-evaluation:

- Established procedure for quality assurance and improving the quality of research;
- The HEI's strategy(s) for research;
- The HEI's latest annual report or equivalent;
- Organisational chart;
- Work plan and delegation of authority for quality work on research;
- Compilation of the key steering documents for quality assurance work for research (such as action plans).

No other documents should be required to read and understand the HEI's self-evaluation.

**Writing a self-evaluation – guidance to the HEI** The self-evaluation template consists of two parts. The first provides an introduction to the HEI's quality system for research. The purpose of this introduction is to allow the HEI to describe and explain its quality system at an overall level. It may be the same as the corresponding section of the self-evaluation of the HEI review regarding education. The HEI determines this. The second part consists of the two assessment areas: i) governance, organisation and implementation and ii) preconditions, on which the review is based. The HEI can also refer here to the first part as needed.

#### **Part 1 of the self-evaluation: the HEI's quality system**

The HEI is to provide an overarching presentation of its quality system under the first heading of the self-evaluation "The HEI's quality system". The self-evaluation is to be 3–5 pages, 12-point font. Include the following:

- an overarching presentation of how the quality system for research is designed, including an illustrative process overview of all levels of the quality system;
- how long the existing system for quality assurance and quality enhancement of research has been in use and the principles upon which it is based;
- a presentation of the overarching plan for quality assurance of research and what methods are used, such as peer review.

The purpose of this initial part of the self-evaluation is to allow the HEI to provide an overarching description of how the quality system is designed and expected to work. If parts of the quality system for research are the same as the quality system for education, this should be clearly stated and those sections may be identical in the two self-evaluations.

### **Part 2 of the self-evaluation: The assessment areas**

The second part of the self-evaluation is to focus on describing and analysing the HEI's quality assurance processes based on the two assessment areas.

The HEI is to describe its quality system and systematic quality work in relation to the assessment criteria. It should be clear how, through its quality assurance processes, the HEI identifies strengths and preserves and enhances them. Also make clear how areas in need of improvement are identified, followed up and addressed. Show how the information and experience generated is used to develop the quality system. Explain how the current quality system has emerged over time, the lessons learned and how the HEI has used these to enhance and develop its quality work.

It should be apparent whether the HEI has a centralised or decentralised organisation for quality work. Describe how the chosen method works to improve research quality and why it has been chosen. Feel free to provide examples of an issue the HEI has been working on that illustrates how quality assurance processes work in their entirety.

Provide evidence that quality assurance processes work well and are effective. Explain how the results of previous follow-ups and peer reviews are addressed and lead to high quality research.

## **Student report**

In the reviews of the HEI's quality assurance procedures, student unions are invited to collaborate with the doctoral student sections or other doctoral student organisations at the HEI in submitting a written document to UKÄ, known as a student report. The purpose of the report is to give the unions, or equivalent bodies, an opportunity to present their views on, and experience with, the quality assurance work of the HEI.

Student reports are written using a special template and should not exceed eight pages. The report is voluntary and may be jointly written with the corresponding report for the HEI audit for education, though this is not required. If an HEI has multiple student unions, UKÄ would like the unions to collaborate and submit a joint student report. However, this is something the unions may determine themselves. A joint report should be no more than ten pages.

In the report, the student unions can both relate to the assessment areas and highlight other issues, which they consider important for the HEI's quality enhancement. UKÄ has produced a guide to help student unions write the report (see Annex 1).

It is important to point out that the student reports do not negate the fact that the HEI's quality work is a shared concern for the HEI's staff, students and doctoral students, and that a student report should not negatively impact student opportunities to participate in the self-evaluation process.

## **Audit trails**

In addition to the descriptions and supporting information provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, audit trails are also part of the basis for assessment. The purpose of the audit trails is to review how well the HEI's quality assurance process works in practice through random sampling of the process.

### **Choice of audit trails**

Audit trails are selected and explained by the assessment panel after the first site visit and then the HEI is notified. The number of audit trails varies depending on the size of the HEI. At larger HEIs, the assessment panel usually chooses three to six audit trails; at medium-sized HEIs, two to four audit trails; and at smaller HEIs, one or two audit trails.

### **Documentation connected to audit trails**

Within 15 business days from the HEI being informed of the assessment panel's selection of audit trails, the HEI is to submit the documentation which the assessment panel and HEI have agreed upon together. The documentation is to be uploaded to UKÄ Direkt, and it is to consist of documents that already exist at the HEI.

Examples of documentation which can be requested include records from research board meetings, the HEI's own research evaluations, or follow-up and improvement plans for a certain area within the quality work. To help the assessment panel work with the material, the HEI is to also attach a cover sheet that briefly describes information contained in the documents.

## **Background information**

Before the reviews, UKÄ produce background information about the HEI. The background information is intended to give the assessment panel an understanding of the HEI and its profile. The information consists of the results of UKÄ's quality reviews and the legal supervision preceding the

HEI review. In addition, UKÄ produce quantitative background information on the HEI before each review. The information is grouped within the areas of finance, personnel and research/artistic production. Presented in the form of time series, they aim to help the assessment panel understand the profile of the HEI and how the HEI's activities have evolved over time. The material will be available in UKÄ Direkt in conjunction with the initial meeting.

## **Upload documentation to UKÄ Direkt**

All written documents are uploaded and registered by the HEI on UKÄ Direkt, which is the HEIs' portal for UKÄ's online case management system. UKÄ will also upload information to UKÄ Direkt that the HEIs need prior to and during a review, for example, guidelines and self-evaluation templates, as well as the user manual for UKÄ Direkt. Each HEI has an administrator for UKÄ Direkt who distributes login information to the HEI's other users and can answer questions about UKÄ Direkt.

## **Important steps in the review process**

### **Initial meeting**

As a first step in the evaluation process, UKÄ arranges an introductory initial meeting for those HEIs to be reviewed. Participants to attend are:

- representatives from each HEI;
- representatives from each student union at the HEI;
- representatives of the assessment panels, including the chairpersons;
- and staff from UKÄ.

The overall objective of the initial meeting is to provide the HEI with insight and understanding of the review and its content and focus. Another important purpose is to provide the HEI with the opportunity to present its preconditions, organisation and strategic objectives so that UKÄ and the assessment panel have better insight and understanding of the HEI. During the meeting, the HEI and the student unions have an opportunity to ask UKÄ and the assessment panel questions about the review process.

UKÄ will also present what other documentation is included in the review and a schedule for the review round.

## **Two site visits to the HEI**

During the site visits, the assessment panel interviews representatives from different levels and functions within the HEI, such as leadership, researchers, doctoral and other students, and other staff categories. Representatives from the HEI's collaborative partners may also participate in the interviews.

Students participating in the interviews should be appointed, if possible, by a student organisation that either belongs to a student union or has union status at the HEI. The HEI and student unions are asked to make sure the individuals who have been appointed to participate in the interviews receive all the necessary information. No more than one week before the interview date, the HEI and student unions inform the responsible project manager at UKÄ which individuals have been nominated to participate in the interview. If the student unions find they are unable to recruit students, UKÄ, in consultation with the HEI's quality officer or other designated person, will ensure that students are recruited for the interviews.

### **The first site visit**

The purpose of the first site visit is to give the assessors a chance to ask remaining questions based on the HEI's self-evaluation and to identify the audit trails to be reviewed during its second site visit. The first site visit usually takes one business day. The HEI's self-evaluation, together with the other documentation collected by UKÄ, is the basis for the assessment panel's questions. Near the time of the first site visit, the assessment panel is to determine, in dialogue with UKÄ's officers and the HEI's representatives, which type of documentation the HEI is to report on for each audit trail.

### **The second site visit**

The purpose of the second site visit is to, using the selected audit trails, review whether the HEI's quality assurance processes function systematically in practice to ensure high-quality research. This visit is more comprehensive and requires one to three business days, depending on the size of the HEI. It takes place about eight weeks after the first site visit.

### **Feedback conference and lessons**

Since the HEI review focuses on lessons and improvement, the feedback conference is an important part of the review. The HEIs will be invited to share their experiences. There will be an opportunity to take note of the good examples and obstacles that have been identified.



## Assessment panels

The assessors are recruited according to the usual nomination procedure in collaboration with the HEIs, student unions through the Swedish National Union of Students and labour market organisations. UKÄ determines the members of the assessment panels. The HEI review of education and research uses a joint and expanded assessment panel. The panel is to consist of at least eight assessors (one of which is appointed as chair of the panel):

- five expert assessors;
- an expert in collaboration and a labour market representative (may be the same);
- a doctoral student representative and an undergraduate or master's student representative.

Collectively, the panel is to have sufficiently broad and extensive expertise to assess all assessment areas included in the review. At least one of the assessors should be from outside Sweden or have experience from abroad. Collectively, the assessment panel is to be very familiar with the Swedish higher education system and international higher education systems and have extensive knowledge of and experience with quality work for research at different levels. The assessment panel is to include someone with experience of working with management within an HEI and, if possible, within some other form of organisation outside of academia. The assessment panel is also to include someone with in-depth or broad knowledge of collaboration issues in research between academia and the surrounding community (private enterprise, municipality, county council, non-profit organisations, etc.).

As a quality assurance measure, the HEI can comment on the assessment panel's composition, for example, to point out conflicts of interest, before the panel is officially appointed by UKÄ.

The assessors' assignment begins with an introduction to UKÄ's assessment and work methods. The introduction aims to clarify the assignment and expectations.

The assignment of assessor includes:

- discussing assessments of assessment areas and assessment criteria;
- participating in meetings during the review process;

- through a chairperson, being represented at the initial meeting with the HEIs to be included in the review;
- reviewing the various assessment material, explaining the judgments in writing and specifying what supporting material the reviews are based on;
- jointly preparing questions for interviews with representatives from the HEI, students, and any representatives of collaborative partners the HEI works with;
- summarising the assessments in a joint statement, including the assessment panel's overall judgement and proposed decision;
- participating in the final preparation of the report before UKÄ makes a decision.

The document “Information for assessors”, together with the guidelines for each component, provides support for the assessors' assignment.

## Report and decision

### Assessment panel's report

The assessment panel's report specifies whether the HEI meets the assessment criteria for the reviewed assessment areas. The assessment panel's judgements and reasoning are to clearly present what is not judged satisfactory should there be a negative judgement. For the reports to also help improve quality at the HEIs, the assessors are to include their own reflections and highlight strengths and good examples.

The assessment panel's draft report will be 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. Four weeks are given to submit comments. The assessors read the HEI's responses and make changes to the report where relevant. The final report from the assessment panel forms the basis for UKÄ's decision. The HEI's written response will be attached to the report.

### Decision

The overall judgement of the HEI's quality assurance processes for research is given on a three-point scale. UKÄ decides whether to approve the quality assurance processes, to approve the quality assurance processes with reservations or to decide that the quality assurance processes at the HEI are under review. UKÄ's decision is based on the assessment panel's report and the considerations of UKÄ.

### **Approved quality assurance processes**

An overall judgement of “approved quality assurance processes for research” means the HEI’s quality assurance processes are well described, well supported and well functioning in practice. They are systematic and effective at all levels of the HEI, from leadership level to departmental level. All assessment areas are judged as satisfactory.

### **Approved quality assurance processes with reservations**

With the overall judgement of “approved quality assurance processes for research with reservations”, the HEI’s quality assurance processes are generally well described, well supported and well functioning in practice. The decision clarifies which assessment areas are not satisfactory, which the HEI is to follow up and take action to remedy within a certain time.

### **Quality assurance processes under review**

An overall judgement “quality assurance processes are under review” means there are several significant deficiencies in the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research in terms of how they are described and reasoned and how they function. The deficiencies are substantial, and the assessment panel believes the quality assurance processes at the HEI need to be reviewed again in their entirety.

## **Follow-up**

### **When quality assurance processes are approved**

HEIs that have had their quality assurance processes for research approved are followed up through dialogue meetings, surveys, conferences and in other ways. UKÄ believes follow-ups for HEIs that receive approval for their quality assurance processes are an important part of the external quality assurance process.

### **When quality assurance processes are approved with reservations**

HEIs with the assessment “approved quality assurance processes with reservations” are followed up in the assessment areas deemed unsatisfactory, but only in those areas. The HEI is to present the measures it has taken no later than two years after the decision. UKÄ appoints an assessment panel that follows up the measures. Additional materials and online interviews are included in the follow-up if needed.

If the follow-up review results in a positive assessment from the assessment panel, the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research will be approved in their entirety by UKÄ. If the HEI’s quality assurance

processes still do not receive approval after the follow-up review, the overall assessment “approved quality assurance processes with reservations” remains in effect. No additional follow-up of the HEI’s quality assurance processes is carried out.

**When quality assurance processes are judged under review**

All assessment areas deemed unsatisfactory will be followed up at HEIs with quality assurance processes that are under review. UKÄ and the HEI will decide together on the time for the follow-up review. An assessment panel will be appointed to review the self-evaluation and other documentation. Additional materials and online interviews are included in the follow-up review if needed.

If the follow-up review results in a positive assessment from the assessment panel, the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research will be approved in their entirety by UKÄ. If the measures taken are not deemed sufficient, the overall assessment of the HEI’s quality assurance as “under review” remains in effect. No additional follow-up of the HEI’s quality assurance processes is carried out.

# Annex 1. Guide for student and doctoral student unions when writing student and doctoral student report

This guide was developed for the student unions and doctoral student sections with union status at HEIs included in the Swedish Higher Education Authority's (UKÄ) reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes. The guide describes the review process in general and the function of a student and doctoral student report as one of several supporting documents in the review. It is designed for use as a complement to the document *Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes*

## Starting points

UKÄ's reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes are intended to make sure that the HEIs' systematic quality work ensures high quality research and to contribute to improving the quality of research at the HEIs.

The purpose of the student and doctoral student report is to give the unions an opportunity to provide opinions on the HEIs' work to ensure and enhance the quality of research.

The student and doctoral student report is an important document in the review of the HEI's quality assurance processes. This helps the assessment panel in understanding how students and doctoral students view the HEI's work to ensure and enhance the quality of research.

UKÄ wants to emphasise that a student and doctoral student report does *not* replace the participation of students and doctoral students that is assumed to take place during the HEI's work on self-evaluation.

## Review process in brief

UKÄ recruits a joint assessment panel for the HEI review of education and research. The assessment panel consists of experts in quality assurance of research and education, a doctoral student representative, a student representative, a representative for employers and the labour market and an expert in collaboration. The assessment panel's starting

points are the assessment areas and assessment criteria developed by UKÄ in dialogue with representatives from the higher education sector and other relevant parties which originate in Swedish legislation and in both national and international frameworks.

- The assessment panel analyses the assessment criteria included in the review. The assessment material for the review consists of a self-evaluation from the HEI, one or several student reports, two site visits, and documentation on the chosen audit trails. All assessment materials are considered for the assessment.
- When relevant, the other supporting material is considered by both the HEI and the assessment panel. The supporting material includes the results of UKÄ's HEI supervision and evaluations. The material serves as the basis for questions during the site visits and can also serve as the basis for the selection of audit trails.
- The assessment panel conducts an initial site visit with representatives from the HEI, students, and any collaborative partners with which the HEI works. The purpose of the first site visit is partly to give the assessors a chance to ask questions based on the HEI's self-evaluation and partly to identify the audit trails, which the assessment panel will follow during its second site visit to the HEI.
- The assessment panel carries out a second site visit at the HEI to talk again with management, staff and students. The purpose of the second site visit is to, via the selected audit trails, review whether the HEI's quality assurance processes function systematically in practice to ensure high-quality research.
- The assessment panel formulates preliminary assessments in a report and shares these with the HEI so that it has the opportunity to comment on any factual errors. The HEI is responsible for ensuring relevant parties, such as the student unions, can comment.
- The assessment panel reviews the comments received and then submits its final judgement in a report to UKÄ, which determines whether to approve, to approve with reservations or to declare the HEI's quality assurance processes as under review.

## Content of the student and doctoral student report

The student and doctoral student report is to include the views of students and doctoral students on the HEI's quality assurance procedures based on the two assessment areas and the associated assessment criteria. UKÄ refrains from stating in detail what the student report should contain to avoid directing or limiting its content, but some assessment criteria have been cited in the text below that may be particularly relevant to note from a student and doctoral student perspective.

The assessment areas included in the review are:

- governance, organisation and implementation;
- preconditions.

The assessment area *governance, organisation and implementation* concerns how the HEI's has structured the systematic quality work. The area looks at the division of responsibility and how employees are involved in the quality work. It involves the way collaboration and dialogue and exchanges of information and experience take place among different levels. It also includes and how the HEI ensures that research and research environments undergo peer review and act on recommendations generated by these reviews.

The assessment area *preconditions* concerns the capacity of the HEI to monitor, develop and maintain an appropriate environment for all researchers, including doctoral students. The area identifies some basic preconditions necessary for carrying out research of high quality.

Each assessment area contains several assessment criteria. Some of these are particularly important to discuss from a student and doctoral student perspective, namely how the HEI systematically works to:

- *create good conditions for the development and renewal of research/research environments*
- *ensure that a close connection exists between research and education in its operations*
- *follow up its efforts to strengthen the quality and relevance of research through collaboration and mutual learning; the HEI works systematically to facilitate dissemination and utilisation of its research results*
- *ensure long-term skills supply for the development and renewal of research; the HEI works systematically to create good conditions for professional development and provides well-*

*functioning support for researchers at all stages of their careers, regardless of their form of employment.*

- *promote gender equality with regard to research conditions and implementation.*

A more developed description of what is included in both the assessment areas is found in the chapter *Assessment areas and assessment criteria* in this guideline. It also lists all the assessment criteria. Note that other assessment criteria than those provided in the paragraph above can also be relevant to discuss from a student and doctoral student perspective. The student and doctoral student report, however, does not need to include opinions on all assessment criteria. Instead, the report can focus on some specifically chosen areas that are considered particularly important for students and doctoral students. In addition to issues related to the assessment criteria, the students and doctoral students may also highlight other issues considered important for quality enhancement.

### **Scope of the student and doctoral student report**

The student and doctoral student report should not exceed eight pages or ten pages if multiple student unions submit a joint report. It should be in 12-point font.

### **Reference materials for the student and doctoral student report**

Please make clear whether the student and doctoral student report has been approved by an organisation connected to the student and doctoral student unions or the equivalent. The student and doctoral student report can, but does not have to, refer to different studies or official documents. This can involve the student unions' previous surveys among students and doctoral students or meeting notes from student and doctoral student union or HEI meetings.

### **Some practical advice and suggestions**

It is good if the content in the student and doctoral student report is discussed and anchored in different groupings before it is approved by the student unions. An important group to involve in producing the report is doctoral students, since questions related to how the HEI works with creating good research environments and good career paths is particularly relevant for this groups. An example of how the unions can work to produce the report is to send drafts for comment to the various student and doctoral student groups. In this way, opinion on the content can be obtained before the report is approved and submitted to UKÄ.

If there are several student unions and doctoral sections or the equivalent at the HEI, UKÄ recommends that they collaborate on a joint student and doctoral student report. If this is not possible, the unions may submit separate reports or write certain parts jointly and others separately. The



student union is welcome to contact UKÄ with questions about the report's content, scope or process of producing it. Contact the project manager responsible for the review at your HEI.

### **Keep in mind**

The student and doctoral student report becomes an official document in the review of the HEI's quality assurance processes. It is also a public document that can be accessed by anyone once it has been submitted to UKÄ. The HEI and students will have the opportunity to comment on the student and doctoral student report during the interviews conducted with management and staff.

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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