

Assessment of gender equality in third-cycle programmes

An analysis of methods and results in UKÄ's
evaluations



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Report 2020:04

Published by the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2020

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Assessment of gender equality in third-cycle programmes

Report on gender equality in evaluations of third-cycle programmes

Under the current quality assurance system, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) concluded in 2018 that it needs to clarify the implications of the assessment criteria, the character of the evaluation object and what examples UKÄ gives to show what is relevant information for the assessments. This led to revisions of guidelines in 2018 as part of the regular development work. The assessment criterion gender equality is now part of the assessment area Design, implementation and outcomes. Even though the change was already implemented, UKÄ saw a need for continued analysis of how the gender equality perspective is assessed and viewed.

This report looks at how UKÄ assessed and described gender equality in evaluations of third-cycle programmes during the period 2016–2018. The report is aimed at individuals interested in UKÄ's evaluations, such as at Swedish higher education institutions. UKÄ can conclude that improvements are needed in how gender equality is included in UKÄ's reviews. For example, we see that gender equality is interpreted differently by different assessment panels and higher education institutions (HEIs). We also need to review how guidelines and instructions are formulated around gender equality.

Of 95 evaluated programmes, six were judged not satisfactory within gender equality and an additional 24 programmes were judged to have weaknesses even if the area as a whole was judged satisfactory. There are significant variations between the different research subjects. Some subjects may have come farther in their work of integrating gender equality in their programmes. But as the report shows, the method may have also influenced the outcome to some degree.

UKÄ's mission

To make it easier for the reader to place this report in context, a description of UKÄ's mission and role in the higher education sector is provided below. This description also contains a presentation of the

development of a national quality system and how UKÄ, within the framework for the quality system, works with gender equality.¹

Through review and oversight, UKÄ's mission is to contribute to ensuring Swedish higher education maintains a high quality and is conducted in accordance to laws and regulations. Regulation (2012:810) with instructions for UKÄ defines the Authority's core mission and stakeholders: UKÄ is responsible for assignments related to quality assurance, review of effectiveness, follow-up, supervision and manager development. The tasks that the Authority is responsible for deal with higher education institutions, both public and private educational providers, who are covered by relevant laws and that receive government funding.

Based on its mission within quality assurance of higher education, UKÄ recruits assessment panels with external experts, known as assessors. The assessment panels evaluate the quality of programmes, the higher education institutions' quality assurance processes, and degree-awarding powers or conduct thematic evaluations.

Within the framework for its mission, UKÄ is to contribute to gender equality in the high education sector and thereby contribute to realising the gender equality policy goals, particularly the subgoal of gender equality in education.²

Development of a new system for quality evaluation

On 17 March 2016, the Government amended the public service agreement for that budget year for UKÄ (U2016/01132/UH, U2016/01349/UH). The amendment tasked UKÄ with developing and implementing a new quality assurance system for higher education by 1 October 2016. The Government specified that the new system for quality assurance was to be designed in accordance with the Government's judgement as described in government communication *Quality assurance of higher education*³, applicable legislation and regulations, and the principles for quality assurance developed within the framework of the Bologna Process. The principles are called *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).

In 2015, UKÄ was tasked in its public service agreement with presenting a plan for how the Authority would work with gender mainstreaming.

¹ <https://www.uka.se/download/18.44500bd3161940d35451cb7/1519222517296/2018-02-20-delredovisning-UKAs-arbete-jamstalldhetsintegrering.pdf>.

² "Women and men, girls and boys are to have the same opportunities and conditions for education, choice of education and personal development."

³ Government communication 2015/16:76.

Since the work to develop a new system for quality assurance corresponded with UKÄ's government assignment on gender mainstreaming, gender equality became one of the quality aspects included in the quality assurance system. There are six assessment areas in UKÄ's evaluations, including gender equality.⁴

Like other public authorities that have been tasked with working with gender mainstreaming, UKÄ developed a plan of action in 2015⁵. The action plan contains a list of unequal conditions in the higher education sector:

- Traditionally male sectors in society are often valued more highly and allocated more resources than traditionally female sectors, and academics is a traditionally male field. Academia also has subject areas that are traditionally more male dominated, such as engineering and natural sciences.
- Gender stereotypical assumptions influence assessments within academia.
- Knowledge about gender and gender equality is lacking in many programmes, which leads to many students graduating without being prepared to understand and deal with the consequences of unequal conditions or to work proactively.
- There are fewer men studying in higher education than women.
- Men are overrepresented among professors, even though women make up the majority of students in programmes at the first and second cycles and the distribution by gender is equal among researchers and teaching staff.
- The distribution by gender among applicants to many of the larger professional programmes is very uneven, which often leads to maintaining the stark gender segregation of the Swedish labour market.
- Women have a slower career development than men at higher education institutions. In particular, the difference is significant between women and men in terms of promotions to professor, which

⁴ **Governance and organisation**

How well is the higher education institution's quality system designed, with structures, procedures and processes for ensuring high quality education? How does the quality system relate to the higher education institution's overarching goals and strategies?

Preconditions

How well does the higher education institution (HEI) follow up, take measures and improve the conditions for the programmes' implementation and student learning?

Design, implementation and outcomes

How well does the HEI follow up, implement measures and improve its programmes, and thus ensure high quality in all of the HEI's courses and programmes offered?

Gender equality

How well does the HEI contribute to gender equality being considered in the content, design and implementation of the programmes?

Student and doctoral student perspective

How well does the HEI work to provide students with good opportunities and conditions for exercising influence over the programmes and their study situation?

Working life and collaboration

How well does the HEI ensure the programmes are useful and prepare students to face changes in their careers?

⁵ Swedish Higher Education Authority, *Action plan for gender mainstreaming at the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2016–2018* (2015).

indicates that the conditions for having an academic career differ between women and men.

- Men have a higher average salary than women in both administrative and academic employment categories within higher education institutions.

Assessment criteria in evaluations of third-cycle programmes

UKÄ has decided that the gender equality perspective is to be included in all UKÄ evaluations, as a result of the descriptions of problems with inequality in higher education and with the starting point in the Authority's core mission and gender mainstreaming assignment. From the gender equality perspective, UKÄ formulated assessment criteria on which the programmes would be evaluated. Two assessment criteria were applied to evaluate gender equality for third-cycle programmes 2016–2018:

A. A gender equality perspective is integrated in the programme's design and implementation.

B. Systematic follow-up is performed to ensure that the programme's design and implementation promote gender equality. The results of the follow-up are translated, when necessary, into actions for quality improvement, and feedback is given to relevant stakeholders.

Source material, delimitations and questions

The source material consists of reports from 95 evaluations of third-cycle programmes that were concluded in 2017 and 2018. To some degree, reference material has been included in the work with the reports, such as a guideline for evaluating third-cycle programmes.⁶

The report is delimited to the area of gender equality. This means that the basis for this report is the text from the reports under the assessment criteria dealing with gender equality. There may be relevant information in other parts of the reports that are not included in this report because of this delimitation. Searches of keywords were combined with text analyses in all reports.

We are looking for answers to the following questions in this report:

- Is it possible to see patterns in the outcomes of the evaluations in terms of gender equality?

⁶ Swedish Higher Education Authority, *Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes* (2016).

- What do the assessors choose to highlight as strengths and areas in need of improvement and what recommendations do the assessment panels make?
- What assessment materials do the assessors refer to?
- Are the assessment criteria assessed, that is to say, do the reports contain judgements on what is happening in the programmes?
- How is the concept of gender equality dealt with and understood?

Gender equality in the evaluation process

Patterns in the outcome

Of the 95 programmes evaluated, six programmes were assessed as *not satisfactory* for the entire area of gender equality. For assessment criterion A (*A gender equality perspective is integrated into the programme's design and implementation*), seven⁷ programmes were assessed as *not satisfactory*. Thirty programmes were assessed as *not satisfactory* for the assessment criterion B (*Systematic follow-up is performed to ensure that the programme's design and implementation promote gender equality. The results of the follow-up are translated, when necessary, into actions for quality improvement, and feedback is given to relevant stakeholders*). Twenty-four programmes were assessed as *not satisfactory* only for assessment criterion B.

All the programmes assessed as *not satisfactory* are within the research subject computer science. Within the subject, an additional six programmes were assessed *not satisfactory* in assessment criterion B but assessed *satisfactory* in the area as a whole. A programme within the research subject of economics was assessed as *partially satisfactory* on the first assessment criterion but *not satisfactory* on the second, while overall *satisfactory* in the area. The programme was given the assessment *under review*.

All the programmes within the research subject ethics and history of religions were assessed not satisfactory for assessment criterion B, while all programmes in the architecture, veterinary medicine, and textile, rubber and polymeric materials research subjects were assessed satisfactory in both the assessment criteria for gender equality.

Looking at the number of programmes evaluated within the different research subjects, education is the largest subject with 20 programmes. All the programmes in education were assessed as satisfactory in the area as a whole and three programmes were assessed as not satisfactory in assessment criterion B. Within the subject computer science, 12 of 14 programmes were assessed not satisfactory in at least one assessment criterion. For an overview of all the research subjects, see Table 2.

There are examples of reports where the assessment panels have revised the two assessment criteria. Interpreting what assessment was made can

⁷ In one report, the assessment panel gave the judgement “A gender equality perspective is partially integrated in the programme's design and implementation.”. That has been interpreted as not being satisfactory.

therefore be difficult. In some cases individual words were changed while in others more significant changes to the assessment criteria were made.

A gender equality perspective is partially integrated into the programme's design and implementation (KTH, Royal Institute of Technology – economics, licentiate and doctoral degree)

A gender equality perspective is integrated into the programme's design and implementation. The assessment panel does, however, want to recommend that the higher education institution ensures that gender equality aspects are given greater focus, for example, in the third-cycle programmes' courses. (Linnaeus University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Table 2. Outcome in the assessment area gender equality divided by research subject.

Research subject	Number of programmes	Not	Not	Not
		satisfactory AC A	satisfactory AC B	satisfactory Gender Equality
Architecture	4			
Computer science	14	6	12	6
Energy systems	4		1	
Ethics and history of religions	4		4	
History	13		2	
Art history	5		1	
Textile, rubber and polymeric materials	2			
Economics	16	1*	3	
Pedagogy	20		3	
Psychology	12		4	
Veterinary medicine	1			
Total	95	7	30	6

* In the report, the assessment panel made the judgement "A gender equality perspective is integrated into the programme's design and implementation."

Conclusions of the outcome

There are significant variations between the different research subjects. Only one research subject has been assessed not satisfactory in gender equality. At the same time, there are subjects where almost all or all have been assessed satisfactory for both assessment criteria.

There can be many different reasons for this variation. Some subjects may have come farther in their work of integrating gender equality into their programmes, but this raises questions about whether the instructions that the assessment panels have received varied and if the assessment criteria have been interpreted differently. That the assessors in some cases have revised the text to the assessment criteria means that

some assessments are unclear. This can create less ideal conditions in interpreting the outcomes and understanding what needs to be improved, not just for the individual programmes but also for the exchange of knowledge between different programmes and higher education institutions.

Strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations about gender equality in third-cycle programmes

Strengths

Strengths refers to positive examples of gender equality or gender equality work that the assessment panels have chosen to highlight in the reports that are the basis for this report. Since the examples differ widely, it is difficult to place them in clusters and quantify them, and this makes it difficult to provide an overview at the overall level.⁸ Instead, here we present examples that recur in the reports and some that are unique for a specific programme.

Gender equality was judged quantitatively in 89 of 95 programmes. These often dealt with the gender balance in the doctoral student group or among supervisors. There are several cases where the assessments are both positive and negative, and some assessment panels compare the conditions at a specific programme with the national conditions within the subject. Within computer science, there are examples the focus is largely on recruiting more women since the subject is so male dominated. There are also cases where the assessment panel has highlighted special measures to address the imbalance. One such case is strategies for recruiting doctoral students from other countries. A less common strategy is to adapt the language in advertisements for positions to attract more underrepresented genders to apply to the programme.

In several cases, the assessment panels focused on doctoral students taking courses that include aspects of or perspectives on gender equality. Gender equality is included in the courses through the course literature, modules, choice of research question and seminars. It can also be in the form of doctoral students having the opportunity to take HEI-wide courses that deal with equal conditions and gender equality. Course literature is also re-evaluated at times.

Several reports mention another type of course: courses in training in higher education teaching and learning with gender equality aspects that doctoral students can attend. Supervisor training is also often noted as

⁸ For an overview of all the areas assessed by the assessment panels, see Table 3.

positive examples for how gender equality is incorporated into the programmes' design and implementation.

For example, course content and course literature are to reflect a gender equality relationship between men and women.

(Malmö University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

The assessments of gender equality in many of the reports deal with HEI-wide or department-level structures or functions. These can look at, such aspects, as whether an HEI has a plan for gender mainstreaming or that there is a gender equality officer at the department.

Assessments of employment conditions are common in the reports, particularly under assessment criterion B. Examples of such assessments are employee performance appraisals, employee surveys and other aspects of being employed. Some of the reports have also highlighted meetings between doctoral students and supervisors. In several cases it is unclear to what degree gender equality is a part of these types of follow-up.

In several cases, the assessments in the reports describe an *awareness* at a programme or at a department. In a few cases, this awareness is linked to a subject tradition, and sometimes the assessment panel concludes that the interviews revealed that the interviewee was aware of unequal conditions.

The higher education institutions note that an awareness of gender equality characterises both the seminars and the daily work at the environment.

(Stockholm University – child and youth studies, licentiate and doctoral degree)

There are examples of assessments found in one or a few reports. These include EU projects, a parental policy or a female doctoral student receiving a salary. In connection with recruitments, some programmes use affirmative action in cases of similar qualifications. Gender-balanced representation in examining committees are also noted in a few reports.

In job announcements, they indicate that preference will be given to the underrepresented gender when qualifications are equivalent.

(Karlstad University – environment and energy systems, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement refers to cases where the assessment panels have used the phrase areas for improvement in a report. There are descriptions in the report that could be interpreted as areas for improvement, but they

are not included in this analysis. Many reports lack examples of areas for improvement. We present here some examples of what assessment panels have considered an area for improvement.

As with strengths, the qualitative aspect of gender equality is a recurring theme in the reports even when discussing areas for improvement. In some cases, this refers to addressing an inequality in gender balance in the doctoral student group and in other cases it refers to ensuring that there are both men and women that can supervise doctoral students.

The assessment panel sees achieving better balance between male and female principal supervisors as an area for improvement within the programme.

(Uppsala University – history, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Follow-up and systematic work with gender equality constitute another area for improvement. This can involve department level systematic follow-up of how gender equality is integrated in a third-cycle programme, but also to what degree temporary positions are followed up systematically to see if gender patterns exist.

In some reports, entire assessment criteria are considered areas for improvement without the assessment panels having specified exactly what needs to be improved. There are some cases where the assessment panel feels that a complete assessment criterion should be seen as an area for improvement, while they have judged the entire area as satisfactory.

The assessment panel argues that the gender equality perspective's integration in the third-cycle programme should be considered as an area for improvement.

(Linnaeus University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

There are a few examples where the admission process for doctoral students is seen as an area for improvement. Some assessment panels also view timetabling, literature overviews and course content as potential areas for improvement.

There are also weaknesses in, for example, how the perspective is integrated into courses, into course literature and in the scholarly work. The assessment panel sees these as areas for improvement.

(Uppsala University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Recommendations from the assessment panels

The assessment panels can make recommendations in their reports. In the reports included in this review, the assessment panels rarely made recommendations about gender equality. In fact, only one of the assessment panels has expressly written recommendations about gender

equality in their reports. The most common recommendation is that the assessment panel feels that the programme could bring in an expert or an expert group to address problems or improve gender equality in different ways. Other recommendations in reports are that the HEI can develop networks for female researchers or ensure that doctoral students are educated in gender equality by participating in specific courses.

The department is recommended to obtain support from external experts to systematically examine the opportunities for integrating a gender equality perspective into the programme. One recommendation would be to develop networks of female researchers at other higher education institutions, nationally and internationally.

(Umeå University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Conclusions of strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations

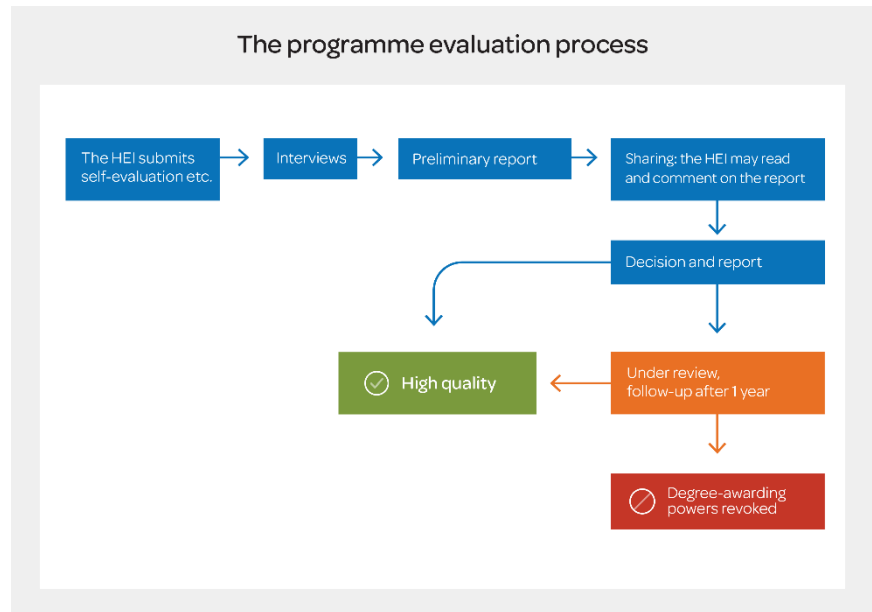
The assessments are based on a large range of examples, from programme-based examples, such as reviews of course literature lists, to HEI-wide policy documents. This wide range of examples is a sign that what is to be evaluated is not well defined.

It is clear that the assessment panels have had both similar and significantly differing approaches in their work. The clearest example of similarities is that 89 of 95 reports contain some form of judgement of quantitative gender equality. An example of a difference is that only one assessment panel has made recommendations. Another difference in the assessment panels' work is that some have assessed *awareness about gender equality* among interviewees while others have not.

What assessment materials do the assessors use?

The third-cycle programme evaluations use multiple assessment materials. Assessment materials consist of the HEI's self-evaluation, including annexes, general and individual study plans, interviews with doctoral students and representatives of the reviewed programme, and other material that UKÄ produces. An important principal in the evaluation is that all assessment materials are to be weighed together. The self-evaluation is the material that the vast majority of assessments are based on, but it is relatively common that interviews are used as the basis for assessments. In 28 of 95 reports, the assessment panels write that it made assessments for the gender equality area based on the interviews.

Figure 1. Process for programme evaluations.



It is, however, unusual for the assessment panels to refer to assessments based on the general study plans or the individual study plans. Only in two cases did assessment panels base assessments on information found in the general study plan, and the individual study plans have only been included on four occasions.

Gender equality is not written into the general study plan and is not included in the in the qualitative targets for third-cycle programmes.

(Stockholm University – art history, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Conclusions about what assessment materials are used

The assessments are a reflection of the assessment materials. The primary source of information that the assessments are based on are the self-evaluations, while the interviews are used in almost a third of all reports. On the other hand, there is a lack of assessments based on the general study plan or the individual study plans.

Are the assessment criteria assessed?

The assessment criteria in third-cycle programme evaluations focus on the degree to which gender equality is integrated into the programme's design and implementation, if there are systematic follow-ups that promote gender equality and how these are used internally and

communicated to relevant stakeholders. The assessment criteria focus on programme-based activities and the quality of the programme.

In the reports, certain concepts recur in the descriptions and assessments of the programmes. These different concepts can be related to four categories: programme based, department/faculty level, HEI level and other. Since they are sometimes described in different ways, they can be included in more than one category. For example, courses can be both at the relevant third-cycle programme and at the HEI level.

At the higher education institution, all employees working with recruitment participate in a course involving gender equality and culture.

(KTH Royal Institute of Technology – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

There are also weaknesses in, for example, how the perspective is integrated into courses, into course literature and in the scholarly work.

(Uppsala University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Table 3. Categorising assessments.

Programme-based	Department/faculty level	HEI wide	Other
Examination format	Admission	Admission	Work environment
Supervision	General study plan	Surveys	Dissertation
Courses	Examining committee	Parental policy	Gender balance (doctoral students)
Course literature list	Discussion climate	JiHU/JIM ⁹	Gender balance (supervisors)
Course syllabuses	Surveys	Gender equality group/committee	Gender balance (teachers)
Seminars	Faculty	Gender equality plan	Doctoral student ladder
Teaching	Supervision	Equal terms/Equal treatment	Surveys
	Department	Plan	Unions
	Individual study plans	Policy	Responsibility for coffee and snacks
	Gender equality group/committee	Rules	Parental policy
	Professional development	Study	Gender
	Course syllabuses		Gender Academy
	Equal terms/Equal treatment		Stakeholders
	Plan		Salary
	Policy		Awareness

⁹ Gender mainstreaming in higher education / Gender mainstreaming in government agencies

	Rules		Norm criticism
	Recruitment of doctoral students		Plan
	Recruitment of supervisors		Policy
	Recruitment of teachers		Rules
	Recruitment of experts		Recruitment of doctoral students
	Timetabling		Recruitment of supervisors
	Study		Recruitment of teachers
	Measures		Recruitment of experts
			Study
			Follow-up

In many cases, the assessments in the reports have a clear connection to the assessment criteria. An example is when the assessors highlight content in courses or choice of course literature that can concretely be related to the programmes' design and implementation.

Course literature is chosen to represent different genders. During seminars and courses, discussions on gender equality are held based on content and language use.

(Lund University – music education, licentiate and doctoral degree)

It is also common that the assessment panels assess aspects that have an unclear or tenuous connection to the programme being evaluated. For example, the government assignment on gender mainstreaming that HEIs have and how they work with questions at the HEI-wide level. Or that there is a function at the HEI that works with gender equality or diversity issues. These lack descriptions for exactly how this impacts the programme, making them vague.

The higher education institution has a gender equality developer responsible for its strategic gender equality work.

(Örebro University – computer science, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Some assessments are based on ongoing work during the evaluation but where there are no results or evidence that the work is having the desired effect. Even so, the assessment panel has in some cases assessed it as satisfactory.

A gender equality perspective is to be integrated into the programme and the work is to be fully implemented in 2019.

(Chalmers University of Technology – materials sciences, licentiate and doctoral degree)

In several cases, the assessment panels expressly write that there are no systematic processes to follow up gender equality, but there is an awareness of gender equality, for example, at the department. That has

been sufficient for the assessment panel to consider the gender equality perspective to be satisfactory.

The department's way of presenting its work for ensuring a workplace with mutual courteousness and professionalism is very appealing.

(Stockholm University – history, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Conclusions about the assessment criteria

There are many examples of reports with assessments that can be difficult to relate to the programmes, such as when they are about the HEI-wide work or specific policy documents. In some cases, there is reason for the assessment panels to note functions or documents that apply HEI wide, but in many cases it is unclear what the connection is to the programme under assessment. This is likely the result of the reports largely reflecting the content of the self-evaluations. But it can also be that the assessment criteria were not well formulated to be applicable to the assessment object, i.e. the third-cycle programmes. Making gender equality its own area is seen as being closer to HEI-wide questions.

That said, in 2018 UKÄ revised its guidelines for evaluations of third-cycle programmes. The assessment criteria for gender equality previously constituted a perspective (now called assessment area). They have now been integrated in the assessment area Design implementation and outcomes, in part to emphasise the connection to the programmes.

The concept of gender equality

The concept of gender equality is defined as equality between women and men. This means that women and men have the same rights, obligations and opportunities within all areas of life. UKÄ's evaluations focus on gender equality. In the reports, several different concepts are used that in one way or another related to gender equality. These include diversity, gender and equality. It is not always clear what the assessment panels mean when they use such concepts as *gender balance* or *gender perspective*. Sometimes, even concepts that are defined as including something else, such as intersectionality, are used without explanation of how a programme connects it with gender equality.

Gender balance in the supervisor group, which has not yet been achieved, is a central starting point.

(Lund University – history, doctoral degree)

The university college integrates a gender perspective in courses when it is relevant, and there is a significant awareness of gender issues.

(University West – education with specialisation on work integrated and workplace learning, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Course literature is included that examines gender, power structures and intersectionality in the elective course Scientific Theory in and for Music Education Research.

(University of Gothenburg – music education, licentiate and doctoral degree)

Conclusions about the concept of gender equality

Gender equality involves not just even gender distribution but also highlighting attitudes, norms, values and ideals that impact the conditions facing women and men within society's various areas. There are many examples in the reports where concepts are confused. This is caused by different factors, including confusion in the assessment materials, such as the self-evaluation and general study plans.

Concluding discussion

The variations among examples serving as the basis for the assessments raise questions, such as about UKÄ's instructions to the higher education institutions and assessors and the assessment criteria's functionality and the distinctive nature of third-cycle programmes. The variations also show that changes need to be made to the method used. As noted above, UKÄ implemented changes to the method and guidelines in 2018. This was done to meet the development need for ensuring that the programme evaluations conducted by UKÄ contribute to improving quality in the higher education sector. In 2019 and 2020, a number of programme evaluations were conducted using the revised guidelines, both at the first-cycle and second-cycle levels and at the third-cycle level. This makes it of interest to conduct a new analysis of evaluations that used the revised guidelines to see how gender equality issues have been considered and assessed.

As noted in the below discussion, the method may have influenced the outcome.

The outcome shows that only within computer science have six programmes been assessed as “under review” based only on the area gender equality being judged as not satisfactory. In other research areas, programmes assessed as not having satisfactory gender equality have also been judged not satisfactory in other assessment areas. It cannot be excluded that the assessment panels have given positive assessments of the area gender equality to avoid that the entire programme being assessed as under review. Another explanation can be that the assessment panels have felt they lacked sufficient expertise to judge the area gender equality.

The report shows that there are similarities and differences in the reports. The differences consist of both the form of the actual report and how the assessments were made. An example of this is that a clear majority of reports assessed quantitative gender equality, but only one assessment panel made recommendations.

An important question is to what degree the assessment panels are to describe areas for improvement and recommendations. Since the evaluations are to contribute to the internal quality improvement of HEIs, the assessment panel is to explain its assessments and provide feedback to the HEIs.¹⁰ It is reasonable that the HEIs can benefit from the assessment panels' experiences and good examples for improving

¹⁰ <https://www.uka.se/download/18.67f90ad11593fd0dd2d902ad/1487841858629/rapport-2016-09-30-nationellt-system-kvalitetssakring-hogre-utbildning.pdf>.

their programmes beyond criticisms. This can also lead to an exchange of experience between the programmes and contribute to the HEIs learning from each other.

There is also the need to discuss the degree to which it is legitimate to assess awareness of gender equality or inequality. Awareness does not need to mean that the programmes' content and design include aspects of gender equality. This also applies to assessments of future efforts that are only in the planning stage.

The effect of subject traditions on the assessment area gender equality is also a variable that may have influenced the assessments. Some subjects seem to have greater knowledge of issues related to gender equality than others. Structured and documented gender equality work may generally also be relatively undeveloped in third-cycle programmes.

Certain assessment materials, such as general study plans and the individual study plans, are hardly used in the assessment of gender equality. This is why UKÄ should consider if there are other assessment materials that may be relevant. It would be interesting to see the degree to which the assessment materials are referred to in other assessment areas to see if the pattern is more widespread.

The distinct nature of third-cycle programmes can be a contributing cause to the uncertainty about what the HEIs are to focus on in the self-evaluations. Even though the assessment criterion deals with the actual programmes, the focus is sometimes on work environment, for example. This can result in the statements in the reports, i.e. the assessments, not always being relevant for the assessment criteria.

References

Swedish Higher Education Authority, *Action plan for gender mainstreaming at the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2016–2018* (2015).

Swedish Higher Education Authority, *National system for quality assurance in higher education, report of a government assignment* (2016).

Swedish Higher Education Authority, *Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes* (2016).

Swedish Higher Education Authority, *Guidelines for the evaluation of third-cycle programmes* (2016, revised 2018).

The third-cycle subjects for which evaluation reports have been included as material for this report:

Architecture	Reg. No. 411-00465-16
Computer Science	Reg. No. 411-00357-16
Ethics and History of Religions	Reg. No. 411-00450-16
Energy Systems	Reg. No. 411-00432-16
History	Reg. No. 411-00394-16
Art History.	Reg. No. 411-00423-16
Economics	Reg. No. 411-00391-16
Education	Reg. No. 411-00367-16
Psychology and Applied Psychology,	Reg. No. 411-00401-16
Textile, Rubber and Polymeric Materials	Reg. No. 411-00431-16
Veterinary Medicine	Reg. No. 411-00382-16

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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