



# Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers

General principles



Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers  
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# Introduction

This guide provides guidelines for the application for power to award a degree. These guidelines are based on the national system for quality assurance in higher education that the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has been assigned by the government to develop and implement. UKÄ has reported on this assignment in the report *National system for quality assurance in higher education – presentation of a Government assignment* (Report 2016:15). Assessment of the application to award degrees is one of the four review components within the national system of quality assurance in higher education.

The guidelines are structured as follows:

This document provides an overall summary of UKÄ's national quality assurance system and description of the process for assessing degree-awarding powers. There are four annexes to this main part:

- Annex 1 applies to applications for power to award first-cycle qualifications and Degree of Master/Master of Fine Arts (60 credits).
- Annex 2 applies to applications for power to award Degree of Master (120 credits) and Degree of Master of Fine Arts (120 credits).
- Annex 3 applies to applications for power to award third-cycle qualifications.
- Annex 4 applies to applications for power to award degree-equivalent professional qualifications.

The main thrust of all of the annexes is the same, but they have been each adapted to the salient points of the respective degrees and the degree level.

# National system for quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance in higher education presupposes that quality assurance is conducted by higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as by UKÄ (Swedish Higher Education Authority). This means that the HEIs and UKÄ have a shared responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. Valuing this shared responsibility has been a core principle of UKÄ in its work with the government assignment to develop a new system for quality assurance in higher education. It has been important to create a clear link between UKÄ's reviews and the quality assurance processes at the HEIs, while also considering how UKÄ's reviews can contribute to further improving this work. It is also in line with international principles for quality assurance in higher education, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*<sup>1</sup>, which deals with HEIs' internal quality work, the external quality assurance of HEIs' activities as well as the requirements that the quality assurance bodies must meet. To adhere to the requirements in ESG, both the HEIs and UKÄ must ensure that these standards are met.

## UKÄ's reviews

The national system for quality assurance in higher education consists of the following four components:

- appraisal of degree-awarding powers
- institutional reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes
- programme evaluations
- thematic evaluations.

UKÄ has strived to develop a model that is useful for all four components but that can also support the internal quality assurance processes of the HEIs. The model consists of assessment areas that together are based on both applicable Swedish law and ordinances and the ESG.

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<sup>1</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 2015. See also the Authority's Swedish translation, *Standarder och riktlinjer för kvalitetssäkring inom det europeiska området för högre utbildning (ESG)*, 2015.

The assessment areas are:

- governance and organisation
- preconditions
- design, implementation and outcomes
- student perspective
- working life and collaboration
- gender equality.

The assessment areas Governance and organisation; Preconditions; and Design, implementation and outcomes are based on both applicable Swedish law and ordinances as well as the ESG. Student influence and participation are regulated in the Higher Education Act, particularly in relation to the HEI's quality assurance processes (Chapter 1, section 4). The student perspective is more clearly described in the revised ESG (2015). Working life and collaboration are also regulated in the Higher Education Act. For example, first-cycle study courses and programmes develop students' preparedness to deal with changes in working life (Chapter 1, section 8). Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are key quality factors for consideration in the reviews. Like many other agencies and public HEIs, UKÄ is tasked with working with gender mainstreaming. Gender equality is also regulated in the Higher Education Act (Chapter 1, section 5).

UKÄ's reviews are based on the assessment criteria included in an assessment area. It has been important to keep the assessment criteria open-ended and to avoid micromanagement of how the HEIs choose to organise and conduct their educational activities.

All reviews will be carried out by independent assessment panels put together by UKÄ based on a nomination procedure in which HEIs, student unions and employee/employer organisations make suggestions for assessors. The assessment panels consist of student representatives, employer and labour market representatives, and experts from the higher education sector, who are all on an equal footing. UKÄ decision is based on the assessment panels' reviews.

For more information on the national system for quality assurance in higher education, see the report *National system for quality assurance in higher education - presentation of a Government assignment* (Report 2016:15).

# Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers

Degree-awarding power applications are appraised after being submitted and the appraisal is conducted according to the provisions of applicable laws and ordinances.

Appraisals of degree-awarding power applications examine whether the education provider meets the necessary prerequisites for the students/doctoral students to be able to achieve the qualitative targets for the degree the programme should result in.

## Purpose

The purpose of appraising degree-awarding power applications is to examine whether a programme provider (hereinafter referred as an higher education institution or HEI) meets the necessary prerequisites for students to achieve the objectives defined by the Riksdag and the government for the degree the programme should result in.

## Key principles for appraisal of an application for power to award a degree

Permission is required in order to award a higher education degree.<sup>2</sup>

Appraisal of a new<sup>3</sup> permission to award a degree is made after an application and is performed

- for degrees at first- and second-cycle levels, including professional qualifications, based on the provisions of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance.
- for degrees at third-cycle level, based on the provisions of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, as well as the positions assumed in the government bill Forskarutbildning med profilering och kvalitet [*Doctoral programmes with profiling and quality*] (2008/09:134).

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1, Section 12 of the Higher Education Act. (1992:1434) and the act relating to (1993:792) powers to award certain degrees.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of existing degree-awarding powers for various types of HEIs, please consult UKÄ's website, where there is also a database in which you can search for existing degree-awarding powers per HEI.

Appraisal of whether the conditions for the planned programme comply with the requirements is conducted by a group of assessors, in agreement with the principle of expert procedure used for all of UKÄ's reviews.

During appraisal, the core components of the governing provisions are summarised in a number of assessment criteria.

## Assessment areas and assessment criteria

Within the framework of UKÄ's model for quality assurance of higher education, there is a focus on the degree award appraisals in four assessment areas:

- proconditions
- design, implementation and outcomes (including gender equality)
- student perspective
- working life and collaboration.

Each assessment area is examined from associated assessment criteria. During appraisal, a total rating is given for each assessment area.

## Assessment material

During appraisal, reviews are based on the HEI's written application and interviews with programme representatives. If anything in the application is unclear, supplementary information may be requested in writing.

## The programme provider's application

UKÄ's website [www.uka.se](http://www.uka.se) contains the following templates that can be used for applications.

- Template 1 is used for applications for power to award First-cycle qualifications and Degree of Master/Master of Fine Arts (60 credits).
- Template 2 is used for applications for power to award Degree of Master (120 credits) and Degree of Master of Fine Arts (120 credits)
- Template 3 is used for applications for power to award Third-cycle qualifications
- Template 4 is used for applications for power to award degree-equivalent professional qualifications

The basic structure of all of the templates is the same but both templates and their documentation are tailored to the specific nature of the respective degree.

The guidelines, with their associated annexes, and the application templates indicate the documentation needed by the assessors in order to be able to make an adequate assessment during an award power appraisal.



To make the work of the assessor group easier, the application, including annexes, should be a coherent document with a table of contents and consistent pagination throughout the document.

### **How do you make an application?**

Public HEIs submit their applications on a form on the UKÄ website. When the application has been registered by UKÄ, the HEI can upload the documentation for the application at UKÄ Direkt, UKÄ's on-line case management system.

HEI's with individual providers, so-called independent higher education providers, as well as 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 review and report.

### **When can an application be made?**

UKÄ processes applications for degree-awarding powers on an ongoing basis. UKÄ's target for applications received by 15 March is to issue a decision no later than 15 December of the same year. UKÄ's target for applications submitted by 15 October is to issue a decision no later than 15 July of the following year.

### **Prior notification and nominations**

Those intending to apply in connection with these dates are asked to submit a pre-application to UKÄ approximately six weeks before submitting the application. The purpose of this is to ease planning and enable HEIs to nominate suitable assessors. It is important to emphasise that an application is neither definitive nor binding. UKÄ will send out a request for prior notification to existing institutions. The encouragement to notify in advance will also be found on UKÄ's website. This encouragement will also contain updated information about how to submit prior notification.

The prior notifications are then compiled and sent to all HEIs, who will be asked to nominate suitable assessors.

### **Interviews**

The written application is supplemented with interviews with programme representatives. Interviews with students are conducted if the programme is already being offered at a closely-related degree level or within a field or subject that can be considered closely related to the degree being applied for.

## Assessment panels

The assessors are recruited according to the usual nomination procedure in collaboration with the HEIs, student unions (via the Swedish National Union of Students, SFS) and labour market organisations. UKÄ appoints the assessment panels.

Collectively, the panel is to have sufficiently broad and extensive expertise to assess all assessment areas included in the review. The assessment panels usually consist of

- expert assessors
- student/doctoral student representatives
- labour market representatives.

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

The assessors will undergo a training programme in UKÄ's evaluation and working methods.

## Assessment and report

The assessment panel's task is to state whether the programme fulfils the assessment criteria for the reviewed assessment areas. It will do this based on the application, interviews and any supplemental information.

In a written report, the assessment panel makes a recommendation to UKÄ as to whether the application should be granted or refused.

In its written report, the assessment panel explains its assessment and reasoning in a clear and concise manner. In the event of a negative report, the report must indicate what it considers does not maintain sufficient quality. The assessors can point out areas for improvement, even in cases where they suggest that the application is granted.

## Sharing of the assessment panel's report

The assessment panel's draft report will be sent to the HEI for so-called consultation before UKÄ makes its final decision. This will give the HEIs the opportunity to correct any factual errors. The review period will last three weeks. The final report will then be the basis for UKÄ's decision or recommendation to the government.

## Decision

UKÄ's position is based on the assessment panel's report and recommendation for a decision and on UKÄ's deliberations. All of the

assessment areas must be approved if an HEI is to be granted the power to award a degree.

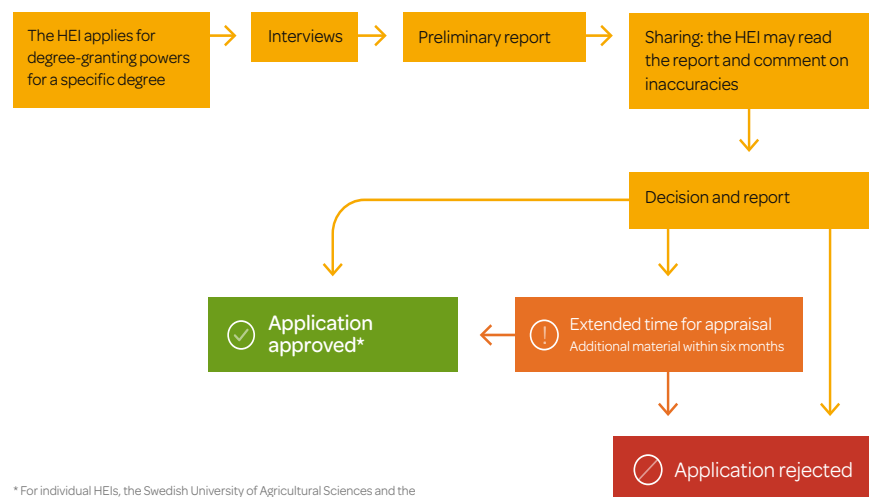
UKÄ makes decisions on degree-awarding authorisation for state HEIs, except for the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence University. For independent higher education providers, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence University, the assessment panel and UKÄ's determination and recommendation to approve or not approve the application will be submitted to the government.

The decision is published at [www.uka.se](http://www.uka.se).

## Extended time for appraisal

UKÄ can grant extensions of the appraisal period. Extensions are only possible when inadequacies are found in the fulfilment of the assessment area that can reasonably be remedied within six months. The assessment panel can recommend that UKÄ permits an extension. The inadequacies must be clearly defined.

In the event of a decision to extend time for appraisal, the applicants are given the opportunity to submit specific supplementary information, based on the inadequacies that the assessment panel have indicated. The time to submit supplementary information is six months from the date of the extension decision. When the supplementary information has been received, the assessment panel can make a decision as to whether these will make it likely that the inadequacies have been remedied.



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

# List of Annexes

**Annex 1** for applications for degree-awarding powers to award first-cycle qualifications and Degree of Master/Master of Fine Arts (60 credits).

**Annex 2** applies to applications for power to award Degree of Master (120 credits) and Degree of Master of Fine Arts (120 credits).

**Annex 3** applies to applications for power to award third-cycle qualifications.

**Annex 4** applies to applications for power to award degree-equivalent professional qualifications.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbete – 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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