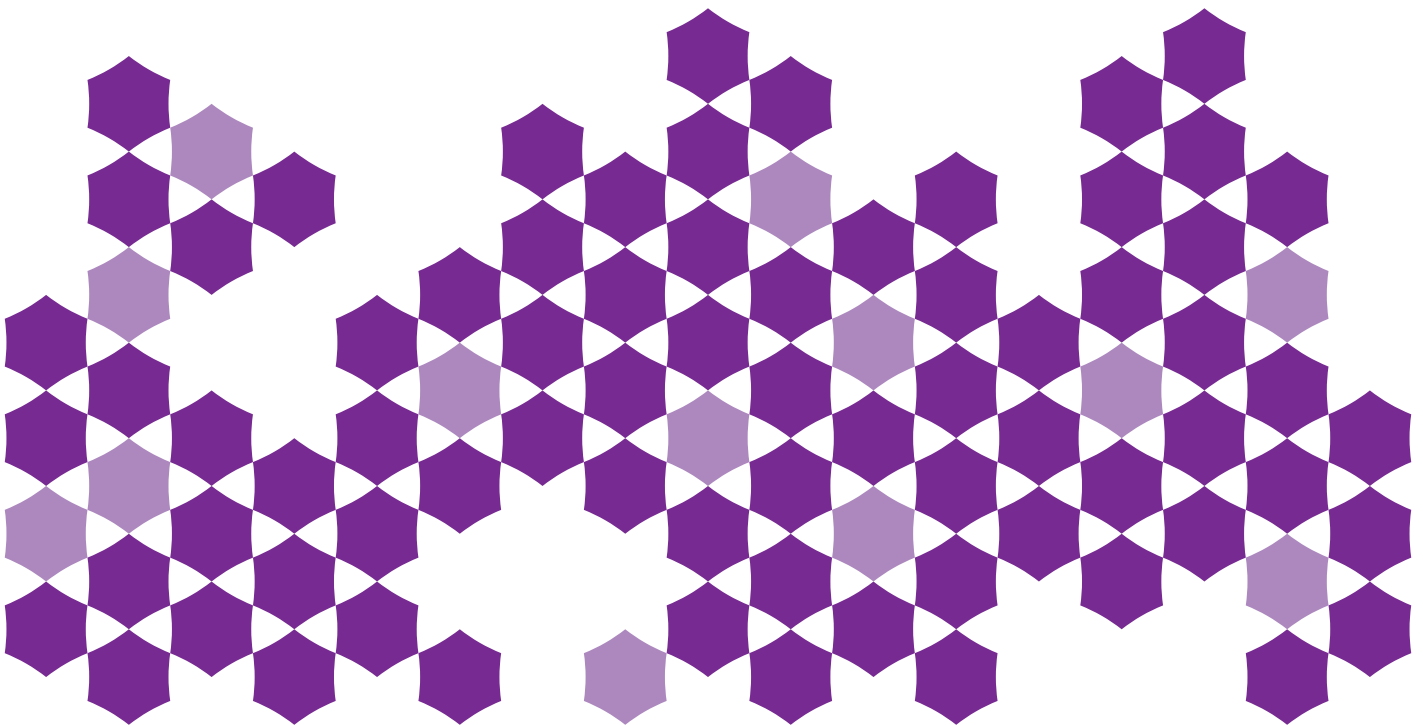




Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes



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Introduction

This guideline concerns the review of higher education institutions' (HEIs) quality assurance processes. The guidelines are based on the national system for quality assurance in higher education, 2016–2022, that the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has reported in the report *National system for quality assurance in higher education – review of a government assignment* (Report 2016:15). The review of HEIs' quality assurance processes is one of four components in the national system for quality assurance of higher education. Since 2017, UKÄ's duties also includes the review of the HEIs' processes for quality assurance regarding research.

National system for quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance in Swedish higher education presupposes that quality assurance is conducted by HEIs as well as by UKÄ. This means that the HEIs and UKÄ have a shared responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. This shared responsibility is a core principle for UKÄ in its work with the government assignment to continue developing a system for quality assurance in higher education¹. It has been important to create a clear link between UKÄ's reviews and the quality work 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)*², which deals with HEIs' internal quality work, the external quality assurance of HEIs' educational activities and the requirements that the quality assurance bodies must meet. To adhere to the agreements in ESG, both the HEIs and UKÄ must ensure compliance with these international principals for quality assurance.

UKÄ's reviews

The objectives of UKÄ's reviews are partly to assess the performance of the academic courses and programmes and partly to contribute to the HEIs' work with quality improvements in higher education. The national system for quality assurance in higher education consists of the following four components:

- appraisals of degree-awarding power
- reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes
- programme evaluations
- thematic evaluations.

UKÄ has strived to develop a model which is useful in various aspects for all four components but that can also support the HEIs' internal quality work. The model consists of the following six assessment areas:

¹ UKÄ's assignment is described in the public service agreement for the 2016 financial year pertaining to the Swedish Higher Education Authority (U2016/01132/UH, U2016/01349/UH), in the government communication *Assuring the quality of higher education* (2015/16:76) and in the report from the Education Committee and from the Riksdag communication (report 2015/16:UbU9, Riksdag communication 2015/16:155).

² *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 2015. See also UKÄ's Swedish translation, *Standarder och riktlinjer för kvalitetssäkring inom det europeiska området för högre utbildning (ESG)*, 2015.

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

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. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming³ are key quality factors for consideration in the reviews. Public HEIs are tasked with working with gender mainstreaming, which is regulated in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) (Chapter 1, section 5, second paragraph). Student influence and participation are regulated in the Higher Education Act, particularly in relation to the HEI's quality work (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 programmes are to prepare 'students to deal with changes in working life' (Chapter 1, section 8, second paragraph).

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. Assessment areas and assessment criteria for reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes are set out in detail in this document.

All reviews will be carried out by independent assessment panels appointed by UKÄ based on a nomination procedure in which HEIs, student unions and employee/employer organisations propose 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's decision is based on the assessment panels' reviews.

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

³ See the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website: <https://www.jamstalldhetensmyndigheten.se/en/gender-mainstreaming/gender-mainstreaming>.

Review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes

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

The reviews focus on how well the HEIs' quality assurance processes, including follow-up, measures and feedback procedures, help to systematically ensure and enhance the quality of the courses and programmes at all levels.

The reviews also contribute to improving the HEIs' quality since the assessors in their reports highlight both identified good examples, and areas in need of improvement.

Purpose

The reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes aim to confirm that the HEIs' quality assurance processes ensure high-quality education and help to enhance the HEIs' quality improvement.

Main principles for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes

The method for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes has been developed based on applicable laws and ordinances and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), which were developed within the framework of the Bologna Process and Government's communication *Assuring the quality of higher education* (2015/16:76, report 2015/16:UbU9, Riksdag communication 2015/16:155).

The ESG specifies that HEIs are to have a quality assurance policy (standard 1.1), and there are to be processes for approval of courses and study programmes (standard 1.2) and monitoring their achievement of objectives (standard 1.9). ESG standard 1.10 states that HEIs are to undergo periodic external reviews. UKÄ's viewpoint is that this is ensured through the reviews conducted by UKÄ, but this does not exclude that the HEIs themselves initiate external reviews of their educational operations.

According to ESG standard 2.1, external quality assurance processes are to review 'the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines'.

UKÄ's reviews thus focus on assessing whether HEIs' quality assurance processes systematically and effectively help ensure and improve the quality of courses and programmes at all educational levels. The review focuses on the continuous improvement of the programmes and on whether the information generated as a result of follow-ups and evaluation leads to appropriate improvement measures.

Furthermore, how well the HEIs' quality work systematically identifies strengths and ensure they are preserved and developed is reviewed, as well as how areas for improvement are identified, followed up and resolved. It is considered a strength for a quality system to be capable of identifying and handling deviations and areas for improvement. How relevant stakeholders are informed of the results of the quality work is also reviewed.

The reviews are to contribute to HEIs' quality improvement; thus it is important to include strengths and good examples of systematic quality work in the assessment panels' reports. Giving the reviewed HEI the opportunity to highlight identified areas for improvement and measures taken and receiving feedback on these actions within the framework of the review also contributes to quality improvement.

The ESG includes a number of areas pertaining to issues that are regulated in the Swedish higher education statutes and the Swedish Administrative Procedures Act. Compliance with the applicable rules is essential for HEIs to be deemed as having a high-quality operation. UKÄ reviews the legal issues included in ESG within UKÄ's oversight of the HEIs' rule application (HEI supervision). The result of HEI supervision is included as a supporting document in the reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. This means that UKÄ's HEI supervision is coordinated with UKÄ's system for quality assurance.

Central concepts

A number of concepts used in UKÄ's reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes 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.

Quality assurance processes



The HEIs' quality assurance processes

The HEIs' quality assurance processes are what is evaluated in UKÄ's reviews. The concept includes the HEIs' quality systems which in turn provide the framework for quality work at the HEIs. The concept also includes HEIs' quality work, both assurance and improvement.

The guidelines continue to use the concepts of quality system and quality work to clarify which component of the HEIs' quality assurance processes is being referred to.

Quality system

The quality system is the framework within which quality work is carried out. The quality system encompasses the documented preconditions, in the form of organisation, allocation of responsibilities and internal policy documents, as well as the procedures and methods used to work with both quality assurance and quality improvement. 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 and includes both quality assurance and quality improvement. This refers to the work carried out to ensure the educational activities maintain the level of quality established as a goal, and the work carried out to improve the educational activities in light of the established goals. The quality work is carried out at all levels in the HEI and involves both employees and students. This work includes daily operational as well as strategic work with courses and programmes, from the programme level to the central level. Systematic quality work refers to continual improvement efforts within predefined procedures and processes, within the framework for the quality system aimed at ensuring and developing the entire organisation.

Assessment areas and assessment criteria

The review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes focuses on how well HEIs' quality system and quality work help to ensure and improve the quality of the courses and programmes at all levels. The review encompasses the following assessment areas:

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

In UKÄ's reviews the assessment areas form the foundation for the overall judgement of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. An assessment area contains one or more 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 work, specific for each HEI, that are relevant to describe and evaluate within an assessment area.

Focus for the *Governance and organisation* assessment area is how well the HEI's quality system is designed to enable systematic quality work for ensuring high quality education. Within this area, the central improvement cycles are to be clearly presented. The *Preconditions* assessment area examines how well the HEI, within the quality system, systematically ensures good preconditions for the implementation of the courses and programmes and for the students' learning. In the third assessment area, *Design, implementation and outcomes*, the focus is on how the HEI at the course and programme level ensures high quality education. The improvement cycle at course and programme level is to be clearly presented. For the assessment areas *Gender equality, Student and doctoral student perspective* and *Working life and collaboration*, the focus is on how these areas make up a part of the continual improvement work within the framework of the HEI's quality system. The starting point for all assessment areas is to show how they, within the framework of the HEI's quality system, are part of the systematic quality work for ensuring high quality education.

Below is a presentation of the assessment areas included in reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. Each assessment area begins with a descriptive text of the area, followed by the assessment criteria included in the area. Thereafter is a description clarifying how the HEIs are to demonstrate that the assessment area has been fulfilled.

1. Assessment area: Governance and organisation

The HEI's quality system is built, with structures, procedures and processes for ensuring high quality education. The quality system for courses and programmes relates to the HEI's overarching goals and strategies.

The quality system includes all courses and programmes at all levels within the HEI and there is a clear division of responsibilities. The regulations, policies and procedures are well-documented and easily accessible for employees, students and other stakeholders. The quality system is designed in such a way that it encourages participation, engagement and responsibility among teachers and other staff as well as students.

The quality system is effective, functions smoothly and is used consistently throughout the entire organisation. The HEI has a well-functioning improvement cycle, which means the HEI works at the central level to systematically follow up, evaluate and improve its quality system and quality work. The information produced within the quality system provides the basis for the strategic governance of the HEI's educational activities. With help of the quality system, the HEI identifies areas in need of improvement and develops its educational activities. The HEI has systematic procedures and processes for ensuring that information is communicated to relevant stakeholders, both internal and external, and that this information is widely shared within the organisation.

Assessment criteria:

1.1 The HEI's quality system is designed to ensure the quality of the programmes and is connected to the overarching goals and strategies which the HEI has established for its educational offerings.

1.2 The HEI has an established quality assurance policy, or equivalent, which is public and a part of its strategic governance.

1.3 The HEI has an appropriate and clearly defined allocation of responsibilities for the quality work.

1.4 The HEI has systematic processes that encourage participation, engagement and responsibility among teachers, other staff, students and doctoral students.

1.5 The HEI ensures that the results and conclusions generated by the quality system are systematically put to use in the strategic governance, quality work and development of the quality system.

1.6 The HEI ensures that the information generated by the quality system is published and communicated appropriately with the relevant stakeholders and spread throughout the organisation.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the quality system satisfies the assessment criteria for the area, for example by describing which policies, or equivalent, procedures and processes contribute to it. The description is to show how the quality system supports the HEI's profile and implementation of the HEI's strategy, and how the system helps the HEI achieve the goals of its education mission. It should also show how the HEI's quality system helps identify areas for improvement.

If the HEI has several different quality assurance policies or equivalent for different parts of its education operation, all quality assurance policies are to be described when relevant. It is to be specified whether

the HEI has a centralised or decentralised organisation for the quality work. A description and justification of the selected organisation is to be provided. Please provide examples of an issue which the HEI has worked with and which illustrates how the quality system functions overall.

Highlight other issues deemed important for the systematic improvement of the quality system at the HEI.

Provide evidence that the quality system is well-functioning and effective, and that it is systematically improved based on the information generated by it.

2. Assessment area: Preconditions

Through its quality work, the HEI ensures that the preconditions exist for the courses' and programmes' implementation and student learning, and the HEI follows up that it takes relevant measures and develops these preconditions.

The HEI ensures that there are good opportunities for teaching staff to further improve both pedagogically and scholarly/artistically within their subject areas. Furthermore, the HEI ensures that teaching staff have scholarly/artistic, pedagogical and professionally oriented expertise, corresponding with the needs of the educational operation. Using information produced by the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for recruitment and continuing professional development of staff. The HEI also takes measures for developing the skills of the staff.

The HEI ensures an appropriate environment that includes infrastructure (e.g. lecture halls, informational technology, equipment and facilities for laboratories and workshops), student support (e.g. student health and study and career guidance) and educational resources (e.g. language workshops and supervisor resources in placement programmes). Using information produced by the quality system, the HEI identifies improvement needs to support students in achieving their expected academic outcomes.

The HEI systematically collects information about students' study situations and uses the information to continuously improve the work environment. Through procedures and processes, the HEI ensures that each student is provided good preconditions for completing the studies within the planned period of study.

Using this information, the HEI identifies improvement needs, takes necessary steps and continually improves the preconditions of the courses and programmes. The HEI has systematic procedures and processes for ensuring that planned measures or implemented measures are appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders, both internal and external.

Assessment criteria:

2.1 The HEI ensures that the skills among the teaching staff correspond with the needs of the educational operation.

2.2 The HEI ensures that it provides a supportive environment that gives teaching staff the opportunity to improve both their pedagogical skills and their subject expertise as well as the conditions required to effectively carry out their work.

2.3 The HEI ensures that infrastructure, student support and teaching resources are appropriate for the students' learning and that these are used effectively.

2.4 The HEI ensures, through procedures and processes, that each student is provided good preconditions for completing the studies within the planned period of study.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the HEI, through its quality work, satisfies the assessment criteria within the area, for example by describing procedures and processes that contribute to it. Include goals and strategies that have been established for the assessment area and the assessment criteria. Include how the HEI ensures that its goals are achieved, how it is determined whether the goals have been achieved and what measures the HEI takes if the goals have not been achieved. Show how the HEI addresses and handles any deviations pertaining to student completion, for example. Also show how the HEI identifies areas for improvement through its quality work and takes relevant measures.

If there is a difference in how the quality work is carried out between different parts of the HEI or between different types of courses and programmes, these differences are to be described. If needed, refer to the policies, procedures and processes described in conjunction with the *Governance and organisation* assessment area.

Highlight other aspects deemed important for the HEI's systematic quality work within the assessment area.

Provide evidence that the quality work is well-functioning, effective, and systematically improved based on the information generated in the quality system within this assessment area.

3. Assessment area: Design, implementation and outcomes

The HEI ensures high quality throughout its educational offerings through its quality work. The HEI follows up, takes measures and develops its courses and programmes. The HEI conducts regular follow ups and evaluations of its programmes and courses to ensure they are relevant and connected to relevant research. The HEI systematically follows up how well the actual study outcomes correspond with the expected study outcomes. Staff, students and external stakeholders participate in an appropriate way in the evaluation and improvement of the courses and programmes.

The HEI has a well-functioning improvement cycle, which means it works at the course and programme level to systematically follow up, evaluate and improve its education. The HEI systematically collects information about the courses and programmes. Using information that is produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for improvement and improves the courses and programmes. The HEI implements measures and continuously improves the education. The HEI has systematic procedures and processes for ensuring that planned measures or implemented measures are appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders, both internal and external.

Assessment criteria:

3.1 The HEI has a clear allocation of responsibility and appropriate procedures and processes for the design, development, establishment, and closure of programmes.

3.2 The HEI ensures that its courses and programmes are designed and implemented in such a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning processes, which is also reflected in examinations.

3.3 The HEI ensures a close connection exists between research and education in its operations.

3.4 The HEI ensures that its courses and programmes are designed and implemented with a clear connection between national and local goals, teaching activities and examinations.

3.5 Based on regular follow-ups and periodic assessments, the HEI implements the required measures to improve and develop the courses and programmes.

3.6 The HEI ensures that the assessment results are published and the planned or implemented measures to improve and develop the courses and programmes are communicated in an appropriate way with the relevant stakeholders.

***For independent higher education providers, the following also applies:*⁴**

3.7 The HEI has and applies good procedures for admitting students, credit transfers and for awarding degrees. The HEI also has an established procedure for student appeals of decisions.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the HEI, through its quality work, satisfies the assessment area, for example by describing procedures and processes that contribute to it. The description is to show how the HEI works continuously to systematically quality-assure and improve its education. It should also include goals and strategies that have been established for the assessment area and the assessment criteria. This can include how the HEI ensures that its goals are achieved, how it is decided whether the goals have been achieved and what measures the HEI takes if the goals have not been achieved. Also show how the HEI identifies areas for improvement through its quality work.

If there is a difference in how the quality work is carried out between different parts of the HEI or between different types of courses and programmes, these differences are to be described. If needed, refer to the policies, procedures and processes described in conjunction with the *Governance and organisation* assessment area.

Highlight other aspects deemed important for the HEI's systematic quality work within the assessment area.

Provide evidence that the quality work is well-functioning and effective, and that it systematically ensures high-quality education based on the information generated in the quality system.

4. Assessment area: Gender equality

The HEI ensures through its quality work that gender equality is factored into the content, design and implementation of courses and programmes. Gender equality means that women and men have the same rights, obligations and opportunities. This involves both even gender distribution and highlighting attitudes, norms, values and ideals that impact the conditions facing women and men.⁵

The HEI systematically includes gender equality as part of its quality system and quality work. Using information that is produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies improvement needs and development needs. The HEI takes action and systematically improves the courses and programmes based on a gender equality perspective. The HEI has

⁴ These assessment criteria are only for independent higher education providers since these providers are not covered by UKÄ's HEI supervision.

⁵ See the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website: www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se

systematic procedures and processes for ensuring that planned measures or implemented measures are appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders, both internal and external.

Assessment criterion:

4.1 The HEI uses procedures and processes to ensure that gender equality is systematically incorporated into the content, design and implementation of the courses and programmes.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the HEI, through its quality work, satisfies the assessment criterion within the area, for example by describing procedures and processes that contribute to it. The description is to show how the HEI works continuously to systematically incorporate gender equality into its courses and programmes. It should also include examples of goals and strategies that have been established in relation to the assessment area and assessment criterion. The description is to include how the HEI follows up that its goals are achieved, how it is decided whether the goals have been achieved and what measures the HEI takes if the goals have not been achieved. Also show how the HEI identifies areas for improvement through its quality work.

If there is a difference in how the quality work is carried out between different parts of the HEI or between different types of courses and programmes, these differences are to be described. If needed, refer to the policies, procedures and processes described in conjunction with the *Governance and organisation* assessment area.

Highlight other aspects deemed important for the HEI's systematic quality work within the assessment area.

Show evidence that quality work is well-functioning and effective, and that it systematically ensures equality in the courses and programmes, based on information generated in the quality system.

5. Assessment area: Student and doctoral student perspective

The HEI's systematic quality work ensures students' opportunities and conditions for exercising influence over their studies and study situation. The HEI engages and motivates the students to take an active role in the work to improve the courses and programmes. The student and doctoral student perspective is systematically factored in as part of the HEI's quality system and quality work. Using information that is produced within the quality system, the HEI systematically identifies needs for improvement and development of students' conditions for exercising influence over their studies and study situation. The HEI takes action and

continuously improves the student and doctoral student perspective. The HEI has systematic procedures and processes and for ensuring that planned measures or implemented measures are appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders, both internal and external.

Assessment criterion:

5.1 The HEI's procedures and processes systematically promote the ability and conditions of students to exercise influence over their studies and their study situation.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the HEI, through its quality work, satisfies the assessment criterion within the area, for example by describing procedures and processes that contribute to it. The description is to show how the HEI works continuously to systematically quality-assure the student and doctoral student perspective and ensure good conditions for students to exercise influence over their studies. It should also include examples of goals and strategies that have been established in relation to the assessment area and assessment criterion. The description is to include how the HEI follows up that its goals are achieved, how it is decided whether the goals have been achieved and what measures the HEI takes if the goals have not been achieved. Also show how the HEI identifies areas for improvement through its quality work.

If there is a difference in how the quality work is conducted between different parts of the HEI or between different types of courses and programmes, these differences are to be described. If needed, refer to the policies, procedures and processes described in conjunction with the *Governance and organisation* assessment area.

Highlight other aspects deemed important for the HEI's systematic quality work within the assessment area.

Provide evidence that the quality work is well-functioning and effective, and that it systematically ensures a well-developed student and doctoral student perspective based on the information generated in the quality system.

6. Assessment area: Working life and collaboration

Through its systematic quality work, the HEI ensures that the courses and programmes develop students' preparedness to face changes in working life. The HEI has well-functioning collaborations with the labour market and with the surrounding society that help improve the courses and programmes. Working life and collaboration are systematically factored in as part of the HEI's quality system and quality work. Using information

produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for development of working life and collaboration elements in its education. The HEI implements measures and improves the programmes to ensure they are useful, and continuously develops students' preparedness to face working life. The HEI has systematic procedures and processes for ensuring that planned measures or implemented measures are appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders, both internal and external.

Assessment criterion:

6.1 The HEI has procedures and processes in place to ensure the courses and programmes develop students' preparedness to face changes in working life.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the HEI, through its quality work, satisfies the assessment criterion within the area, for example by describing procedures and processes that contribute to it. The description is to show how the HEI works continuously to systematically factor working life and collaboration into its courses and programmes. It should also include examples of goals and strategies that have been established in relation to the assessment area and assessment criterion. The description is to include how the HEI follows up that its goals are achieved, how it is determined whether the goals have been achieved and what measures the HEI takes if the goals have not been achieved. Also show how the HEI identifies areas for improvement through its quality work.

Describe how the HEI works in collaboration with the labour market and the surrounding society. The description can also include how information and relevant statistics for how the courses and programmes prepare students for working life is collected and used.

If there is a difference in how the quality work is conducted between different parts of the HEI or between different types of courses and programmes, these differences are to be described. If needed, refer to the policies, procedures and processes described in conjunction with the assessment area *Governance and organisation*.

Highlight other aspects deemed important for the HEI's systematic quality work within the assessment area.

Provide evidence that the quality work is well-functioning and effective, that it systematically ensures a well-developed collaboration in the planning and implementation of the courses and programmes, and that these sufficiently prepare students for the working life, based on information generated in the quality system.

Assessment basis

Evaluation materials include the following:

- a self-evaluation from the HEI
- a student report from student union(s)
- two site visits
- documentation about selected audit trails.

All assessment materials are considered in the assessment. The review process also factors in other data which UKÄ produces, see the section 'Other data'.

The HEI's self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is an important aspect in the assessment of the HEI's quality assurance processes. To facilitate a fair evaluation of the HEI's quality assurance processes, 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 70 pages, 12-point font. The self-evaluation is to be submitted to UKÄ within twelve weeks from the introductory meeting.

The purpose of the self-evaluation in the reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes is the following:

1. Provide an overview of the HEI and its organisation.
2. Describe and analyse the HEI's quality system and its various components.
3. Describe and analyse how, through its quality work, the HEI systematically ensures high-quality courses and programmes.
4. Provide evidence of how the HEI knows the selected procedures ensure the quality of the courses and programmes and identify further improvements.

The following documents are to be included with the self-evaluation. No other documents should be required to read and understand the HEI's self-evaluation. The HEI is to also include a summary of the most central policy documents for the quality work. The assessment panel can, 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:

- Documents that describe the HEI's quality assurance policy (or equivalent) of its courses and programmes
- The HEI's strategy for the current period
- The HEI's latest annual report, or equivalent
- Organisational chart
- Work plan and delegation of authority
- Summary of the most central policy documents for the quality work.

Writing a self-evaluation – Guidelines for the HEIs

The self-evaluation template consists of two parts where the first part provides a broad introduction to the HEI's quality system. The goal of this first section is to allow the HEI to provide an overall description and explain its quality system. The second part consists of the six assessment areas *Governance and organisation; Preconditions; Design, implementation and outcomes; Gender equality; Student and doctoral student perspective; and Working life and collaboration*, which are the core of UKÄ's assessment model. In the second part, the HEI may need to refer to the first part. The first part of the self-evaluation is not an area for evaluation but rather is used as supporting documentation when assessing the six assessment areas.

Part 1 in the self-evaluation: The HEI's quality system

Under the first part of the self-evaluation "The HEI's quality assurance system", the HEI is to present its quality system on an overarching level. The self-evaluation is to be 3–5 pages, 12-point font size. The following are to be included:

- A general description of the design of the quality system, including a process illustration of all levels in the system.
- Information regarding how long the current quality system has been in use, how it has evolved over time, and the principles upon which it is based.
- A description of the overall plan for quality assurance in education and which methods are used, for example peer review.

The purpose of this introductory section 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.

Part 2 in the self-evaluation: The assessment areas

The second part of the self-evaluation, the six assessment areas, is to focus on describing and analysing the HEI's quality system and quality work. The HEI is to analyse and show how the quality system and quality work satisfy the assessment criteria for each assessment area. In addition to the assessment criteria, there may also be other components that are relevant to describe within an assessment area. This means the assessment criteria are not expected to be reported in any particular order.

For additional guidance for the self-evaluation's second part, see each assessment area.

Student report

In the reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes, the local student unions are invited to submit a written document to UKÄ, known as a student report. The purpose of the student report is to give the unions the opportunity to report their views on and experiences with the HEI's quality work.

The student report is written using a special template and may not exceed eight pages. If an HEI has multiple student unions with union status, 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 student report, the student unions can both relate to the assessment areas and highlight other issues which they consider important for quality improvement. UKÄ has produced a guide to help student unions to write a student report. See Annex 1.

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

Audit trails

To review how the HEI's quality work functions in practice and to validate what is written, the assessment panel studies a number of audit trails prior to and during their second site visit to the HEI. The purpose of the audit trails is to monitor different quality assurance processes in various educational environments within the HEI. Audit trails are a way to carry out random sampling of the ability of the quality work to systematically help the HEI ensure the high quality of its programmes. Audit trails are part of the collected documentation for assessment.

The emphasis for the audit trails is the same as for the reviews in general. Is quality work being done that is known throughout the organisation and that supports development work? Is systematic quality work taking place? Are results followed up and, if so, does the follow-up result in any measures? Audit trails are also to demonstrate whether knowledge is shared between the various organisational levels at the HEI. Do all organisational levels take responsibility for their part of quality assurance and improving the programmes?

What is an audit trail?

An audit trail means that a quality assurance and improvement process is studied in the educational environment. Examples of educational environments where audit trails could be studied are programmes and departments. What an audit trail could be is governed by each HEI's quality work and by what emerges in the HEI's self-evaluation. An example of an audit trail would be how the HEI has handled recommendations from self-initiated evaluations of a number of degree programmes.

Choice of audit trails

Audit trails are selected and justified by the assessment panel after the first site visit and then the HEI is notified. UKÄ's past experience with the HEI from the HEI supervision and other supervisory roles, implemented programme evaluations and statistical documents could be bases for the choice of audit trail. The number of audit trails varies depending on their extent and 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. The documentation is to be uploaded to UKÄ Direkt and it is to consist primarily of documents that already exist at the HEI. Examples of documentation that can be requested include notes from programme board meetings, the HEI's own evaluations of study programmes 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 also to include a page with a brief description and categorisation of the document.⁶

How are the results of the audit trails used?

The factor that is reviewed and assessed in the audit trails is how well the quality work functions in practice within each audit trail, not the quality of the educational activities. The focus of the assessment panel is to review whether the quality work is systematic and functions appropriately for its purpose and is thus able to ensure high quality in the HEI's courses and programmes. If the HEI identifies a problem, are actions taken and are the results provided to the stakeholders concerned?

Other data

Prior to the reviews, UKÄ produces documentation about the HEI. Where relevant, these documents are to be considered by both the HEI and the assessment panel. These documents include the result of UKÄ's HEI supervision; appraisals of degree-awarding power; programme evaluations; thematic evaluations and national statistics, such as statistics that demonstrate student completion rate and establishment rate and that shed light on the HEI from a national perspective. The material can be used as the basis for questions during the site visits and can also help in the selection of audit trails. The material will be available for the HEI in UKÄ Direkt in conjunction with the initial meeting.

⁶ A template found on UKÄ's website is to be used.

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, such as guidance documents and the self-evaluation template, as well as the user manual for UKÄ Direkt. Each HEI has an administrator for UKÄ Direkt which 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:

- two representatives from each HEI
- one representative from each student union at the HEIs
- the chair of the assessment panels
- staff from UKÄ.

The overall objective of this initial meeting is to provide the HEIs with insight and understanding of the review, and its content and focus. Another important purpose is for the HEI to present its organisation and strategic goals to provide UKÄ and the assessment panel chairs with insight and understanding of the HEI. The meeting includes an opportunity for the HEIs and student unions to ask UKÄ and the assessment panel chairs questions about the review process.

During the meeting UKÄ presents what other documentation (see the section 'Other data') is included in the review and a schedule for the review round.

Two site visits to the HEI

At the site visits, the assessment panel interviews representatives from different levels and functions within the organisation and the HEI's leadership, teachers, students, and any other staff groups. 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 itself 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 union(s) notify the responsible project manager at UKÄ which individuals have been nominated to participate in the interview. If the student union finds they are unable to recruit students, UKÄ, in consultation with the HEI's quality coordinator or other designated person, will ensure that students are recruited for the interviews.

Employer and labour market representatives can potentially also take part in the interviews.

The first site visit

The purpose of the first site visit is partly to give the assessors a chance to ask remaining questions based on the HEI's self-evaluation and partly 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, via the selected audit trails, review whether the HEI's quality work is systematic in practice so that the quality system and quality work improve and ensure that the HEI's educational activities are of high quality. The second site visit is more comprehensive and requires one to three business days, depending on the size of the HEI. The second site visit takes place about eight weeks after the first.

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, and labour market organisations. UKÄ determines the members of the assessment panels. The group is to consist of at least five assessors (one of which is appointed as chair of the panel):

- three expert assessors
- one employer and labour market representative
- one student or doctoral student representative.

Collectively, the panel is to have sufficiently broad and extensive expertise to assess all assessment areas included in the review. The ambition is for at least one of the assessors to be or has been working abroad. Collectively, the assessment panel is to be very familiar with the Swedish higher education system and international higher education systems, and also have extensive knowledge of and experience with the quality work at different levels. The assessment panel is also to include someone with experience of management work within the HEI and within another form of organisation outside of academia. The group is also to have someone with experience of gender equality work. 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 task and expectations and is usually given together with assessors from several review projects within a single component and review round.

The assessors' assignment 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 HEI and student representatives, and any labour market representatives with which the HEI collaborates;
- 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 takes a decision.

There is a document "Information to assessors"⁷, which together with the instructions for each component, provides support to assessors.

Report and decision

Assessment panel's report

The assessment panel's report indicates 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 errors in the report. The period for comment is three weeks. 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.

⁷ The document "Information for assessors" is available on UKÄ's website.

Decision

The overall judgement of the HEI's quality assurance processes 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" means the HEI's quality assurance processes are well described, well argued for 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.

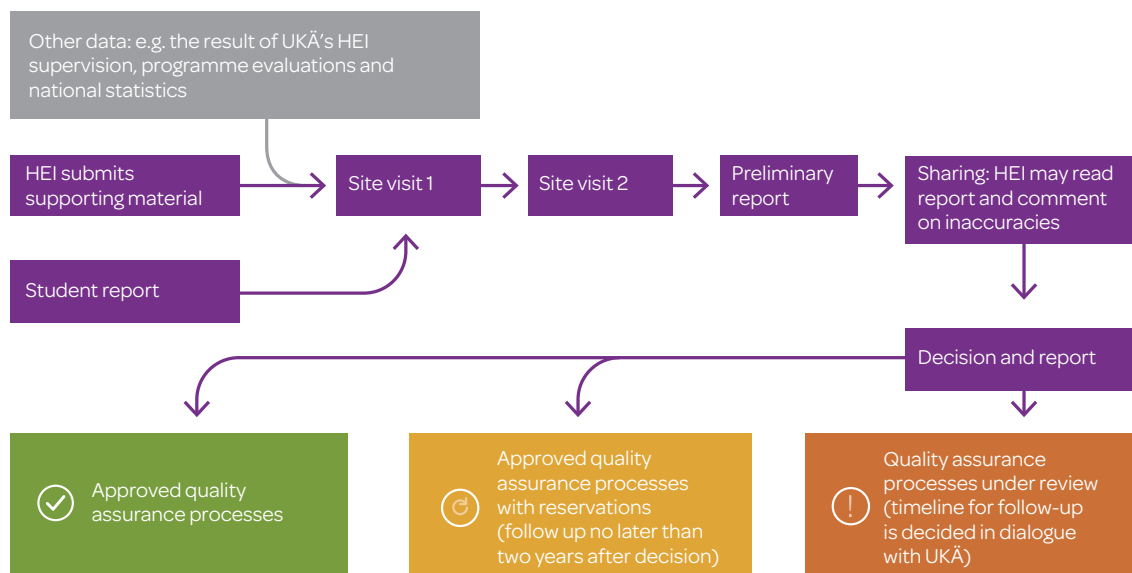
Approved quality assurance processes with reservations

With the overall judgement of "approved quality assurance processes with reservations", the HEI's quality assurance processes are fairly well described, well argued for and well-functioning in practice. The decision clarifies which assessment areas are not satisfactory and which assessment criteria belonging to it that are not fulfilled, which the HEI is to follow up and take action to remedy within a certain period of time.

Quality assurance processes under review

With the overall judgement of that the "quality assurance processes is under review", there are several significant deficiencies in the HEI's quality assurance processes with regard to how they are described, argued for and how well they function in practice. The deficiencies are substantial, and the assessment panel's opinion is that the assessment areas that are not satisfactory are to be reviewed again in their entirety.

Process for institutional reviews of HEI's quality assurance processes



Follow-up

In the case of approved quality assurance processes

HEIs that have had their quality assurance processes approved are followed up through dialogue meetings, surveys, conferences and in other ways. UKÄ believes it is important that even HEIs that receive approval for their quality assurance processes have follow-ups, which is also consistent with ESG standard 2.3 where follow-ups are noted as part of the external quality assurance process.

In the case of approved quality assurance processes with reservations

HEIs with the assessment “quality assurance processes approved with reservations” are followed up in the assessment criteria judged as unfulfilled, for the assessment areas that are deemed as not satisfactory. 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 material and online interviews are included in the follow-up if needed. If the follow-up review leads to a positive assessment

from the assessment panel, then the HEI's quality assurance processes in their entirety will be approved by UKÄ. If the HEI's quality assurance processes still do not meet the assessment criteria in the follow-up review, the overall assessment of "approved with reservations" remains. An additional follow-up is not conducted.

In the event of quality assurance processes under review

All assessment areas deemed as not satisfactory will be followed up at HEIs with quality assurance processes that are under review. UKÄ and the HEI will in dialogue decide on the time for the follow-up review, and when the HEI will present the measures it has taken. An assessment panel will be appointed to review the self-evaluation and other documentation. Additional material and online interviews are included in the new review. If the review leads to a positive assessment from the assessment panel, then the HEI's quality assurance processes in their entirety will be approved by UKÄ. If the HEI's quality assurance processes are still not approved after the new review, the overall assessment of "under review" remains. An additional follow-up is not conducted. This means however that additional programmes at the HEI will be evaluated by UKÄ.

Annex 1. Guide for student unions when writing the student report

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

Starting points

The UKÄ's reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes are intended to make sure that the HEIs' systematic quality work ensures high quality in the courses and programmes and to help improve the HEIs' quality.

The purpose of the student report is to give the unions the opportunity to present their views on and experiences with the HEI's quality assurance processes (quality system and quality work).⁸ A student report is an opportunity for students to submit viewpoints on the HEI's quality assurance processes and on actual conditions that are affected by these processes. This helps ensure student influence and participation in the HEI's quality work, and it provides information about conditions or results that these processes produce. However, UKÄ does not require a student report.

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

Review process in brief

UKÄ recruits an assessment panel consisting of experts in quality assurance of higher education, student representatives and representatives for employers and the labour market. 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 the labour market, and which originate in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), and *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), 2015⁹.

⁸ The concepts 'quality assurance processes', 'quality system' and 'quality work' are defined on pages 8–9 in this guide.

⁹ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), 2015. See also UKÄ's Swedish translation, *Standarder och riktlinjer för kvalitetssäkring inom det europeiska området för högre utbildning* (ESG), 2015.

- The assessment panel analyses the assessment criteria included in the review. The assessment material for the reviews consists of a self-evaluation from the HEI, one or several student reports, two site visits, and documentation on the selected audit trails. All assessment materials are considered in the assessment.
- Where relevant, other supporting material is to be considered by both the HEI and the assessment panel. The supporting material includes the result of UKÄ's HEI supervision; appraisals of degree-awarding power; programme evaluations; thematic evaluations and national statistics, such as statistics that demonstrate student completion rate and establishment rate, and that shed light on the HEI from a national perspective. The material serves as the basis for questions during the site visits and can also be the foundation for the selection of audit trails.
- The assessment panel carries out an initial site visit with representatives from the HEI, students, and any labour market representatives with which the HEI works. The purpose of the first site visit is partly to give the assessors a chance to ask remaining 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 systematic quality assurance processes function in practice so that the system and work that is pursued ensure high quality in the HEI's educational activities.
- The assessment panel formulates preliminary assessments in reports and shares them with the HEI so that the HEI has the opportunity to comment on factual errors. The HEI is responsible for verifying with the parties concerned, such as the student unions.
- The assessment panel reviews the received viewpoints and then submits its final judgement in a report to UKÄ, which determines whether to approve, approve with reservations, or to fail the HEI's quality assurance processes.

Content of the student report

The student report is to include student views of the HEI's quality assurance processes. UKÄ purposefully refrains from stating in detail what the student report can include to avoid directing or limiting its content. UKÄ requests that information in the student report pertains primarily to two overarching questions, which should be described and analysed:

1. How student influence functions in the HEI's quality work and/or quality system, with support from the assessment areas listed below?
2. What effects or results of the quality work and/or quality system do students have opinions on (both positive and areas for improvement)?

Assessment area:

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

The student report does not need to include evaluations of all the assessment areas. Rather, it can focus on specially selected areas on which the students have opinions. In addition to issues related to the assessment areas, the student unions may also highlight other issues that are considered important for quality improvement.

The document *Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes* provides a complete description of the method for review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. It includes the assessment areas and assessment criteria upon which the HEI is to describe and evaluate its educational activities, and from which the assessors base their assessments. 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).

Scope of the student report

The 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 material for the student report

Please make clear whether the student report has been approved by an organisation connected to the student unions. Furthermore, it will help the assessment panel's work if the content of the student report refers to different surveys or official documents which are available. However, the student unions are not expected to carry out their own surveys to produce a student report. Examples of existing reference material are:

- any previous surveys of students by student unions
- any student surveys by the HEI
- issues which student unions are pursuing or have recently pursued
- meeting notes or protocols from meetings of the student unions or HEI
- published compiled results of course evaluations
- published alumni follow-ups
- HEI's or student union's adopted documents.

Preparation and approval of the student report

It is important that student unions have thought through the preparation and adoption of the student report. A good approach, for example, is to send out a proposal for the report for comment to any organisations connected to the union, such as study councils, subject groups, advisory councils or the equivalent at the HEI.

If there are multiple student unions at the HEI, then UKÄ recommends the unions collaborate on a joint student report. If this is not possible, the unions may submit separate student reports. A third option is for the unions to write some parts together and others separately.

Keep in mind

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