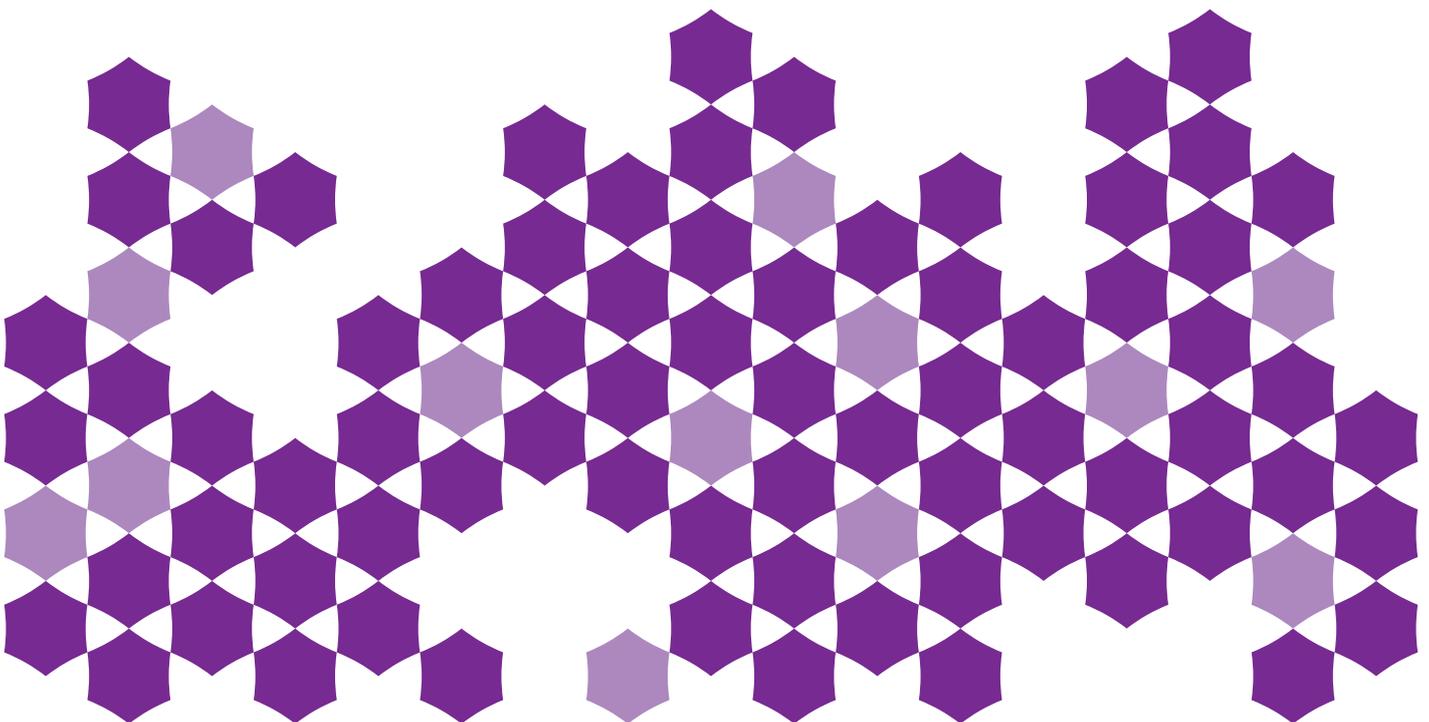




Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes



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Introduction

This guidance document concerns the review of 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. UKÄ conducted a pilot study for the review of HEIs' quality assurance processes in 2016–2017.

National system for quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance in Swedish higher education presupposes that quality assurance is conducted by higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as by UKÄ. This means that the HEIs and UKÄ have a shared responsibility for quality assurance in higher education¹. 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 education. 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 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 applications for degree-awarding powers
- institutional 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 task 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 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
- student and doctoral student perspective
- working life and collaboration
- gender equality.

The assessment areas governance and organisation; background; 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 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 prepare 'students 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. This 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. 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 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 and doctoral student representatives, employer and working life representatives, and experts from the higher education sector, who are all participating on equal terms. UKÄ 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).

Institutional reviews of HEI's quality assurance processes

The reviews verify that the HEIs ensure that the 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 enhance and ensure the quality of the programmes at all levels.

The reviews also contribute to improving the HEIs' quality since the assessors provide feedback in their reports on 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 programmes and help to enhance the HEIs' quality.

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 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 assumption 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'. The standard's guidelines state:

"Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards in Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance."

UKÄ's reviews thus focus on assessing whether HEIs' quality assurance processes systematically and effectively help ensure and improve the quality of 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 for good and instructional examples of systematic quality work to be included 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 in the framework of UKÄ's oversight of the HEIs' rule application (HEI supervision). The result of HEI supervision is a 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 are defined in the following. The purpose is to clarify and highlight how UKÄ uses the concepts, not to be prescriptive in how they should be interpreted or used in general.

HEIs' quality assurance processes

HEIs' quality assurance processes are evaluated in UKÄ's reviews. The concept includes HEIs' quality work, both assurance and improvement, and HEIs' quality systems. UKÄ's reviews encompass the following six assessment areas:

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

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 are carried out. The quality system encompasses the documented conditions, 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 includes the work carried out to ensure the educational activities maintains 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.

Assessment areas and assessment criteria

In the reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes, the assessment areas lay the foundation for the overall judgement of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. An assessment area contains one or several assessment criteria made up of parts of the area. The assessment criteria are a minimum level for what the HEI must report in the self-evaluation. In addition to the assessment criteria, however, there may also be other components that are relevant to describe and evaluate within an

assessment area. This means the assessment criteria are not expected to be reported in any particular order.

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 improve and ensure the quality of the programmes at all levels. The review encompasses all assessment areas in the model for UKÄ's reviews.

Assessment area:

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

Within the assessment area 'Governance and organisation', the following are to be also be described by the HEI and assessed by the assessment panel:

- how long the existing system for ensuring and improving the quality of the programmes has been in use and the principles upon which it is based
- the overarching plan for quality assurance of the programmes and what methods are used, for example collegial review.

Below is an account of the assessment areas included in the 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 an instructional text aimed at clarifying how the HEIs are to demonstrate that the assessment areas have been fulfilled.

Assessment area: Governance and organisation

What is judged within the assessment area is how well the HEI's quality system is built, with structures, procedures and processes for ensuring the quality of the programmes. This includes how the quality system for courses and programmes relates to the HEI's overarching goals and strategies.

The quality system is to include all programmes at all levels within the HEI. The quality system contains a clear allocation of responsibilities. The regulations, policies and procedures are well-documented and easily accessible for employees, students and recipients. 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 systematically 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 what needs to be improved and develops its education activities in a dedicated way.

Assessment criteria::

The HEI's quality system is built to ensure the quality of the programmes and is connected to the overarching goals and strategies which the HEI established for its education operation.

The HEI has an established quality assurance policy, or equivalent, which is part of the strategic governance.

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

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

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 in the development of the quality system.

The information generated by the quality system is communicated appropriately with the relevant stakeholders and spread throughout the organisation.

Guidelines for HEIs:

Show how the quality system fulfils 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 if 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.

In addition to what emerges related to the assessment criteria, the HEI can highlight other issues deemed important for the systematic development 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.

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, focus areas are also included as part of the documentation used for the assessment panel's judgment of the assessment area.

Assessment area: Preconditions

The assessment evaluates in the assessment area how well the HEI uses its quality work to follow up, take measures and improve the conditions for the programme's implementation and student learning.

The HEI must ensure that there are good opportunities for teaching staff to further improve both pedagogically and 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 provision. Using the information generated by the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for updating of skills among staff. The HEI takes action and improves the staff's skills.

The HEI ensures an appropriate environment containing infrastructure (such as lecture halls, technical informational resources, laboratory conditions and workshops) and student support (such as student health and study and career guidance) at the HEI. Through the quality system, the HEI ensures they have sufficient teaching resources (such as language workshops and supervisor resources for placement training). Using information produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for improvement to the academic environments and support services (infrastructure/teaching resources) 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 environment.

Using information produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for improvement and improves the conditions of the programmes. The HEI takes action and continuously improves the conditions of the programmes. Planned or implemented measures are communicated appropriately with the relevant stakeholders.

Assessment criteria:

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

The HEI 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.

The HEI ensures that infrastructure and student support suit students' needs.

The HEI ensures that there are sufficient teaching resources and that these are used effectively.

Guidelines for the HEI:

Show via its quality work how the HEI satisfies the assessment criteria within the area, for example by describing procedures and processes that contribute to it. The description can also include goals and strategies that have been established for the assessment area and the assessment criteria. This could 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 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'.

In addition to what emerges in connection with the assessment criteria, the HEI can highlight other issues which are deemed important for the systematic improvement of the quality work within this 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.

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, focus areas are also included as part of the documentation used for the assessment panel's judgment of the assessment area.

Assessment area: Design, implementation and outcomes

The assessment area evaluates how well, through its quality work, the HEI follows up, implements measures and improves its programmes and thus ensures high quality in all of the HEI's courses and programmes offered.

The HEI is to regularly follow up and evaluate the programmes 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 programmes.

The HEI has a well-functioning improvement cycle, which means it works at the programme level to systematically follow up, evaluate and improve the programmes. The HEI systematically collects information about the programmes. Using information that is produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for improvement and improves the programmes. The HEI implements measures and continuously improves the programmes.

Assessment criteria:

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

The HEI ensures that its 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.

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

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

The HEI ensures that each student and doctoral student is provided good conditions for completing the programme within the planned period of study.

Based on implemented follow-ups, the HEI implements the required measures to improve and develop the programmes.

Planned or implemented measures to improve and develop the programmes are communicated in an appropriate way with the relevant stakeholders.

For independent higher education providers, the following also applies:³

The HEI has and applies good procedures for admitting students, credit transfers and for issuing degree certificates. The HEI also has an established procedure for student appeals of decisions.

Guidelines for the HEI:

Show through its quality work how the HEI 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 programmes. The description can also include goals and strategies that have been

³ These assessment criteria are only for independent higher education providers because these are not covered by UKÄ's HEI supervision.

established for the assessment area and the assessment criteria. This could include how this HEI ensures that these 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. 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.

If there is a difference in how the quality work is carried out between different parts of the HEI or between different types of 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'.

In addition to what emerges related to the assessment criteria, the HEI can highlight other issues deemed important for the systematic improvement of the quality work at the HEI.

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

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, focus areas are also included as part of the documentation used for the assessment panel's judgment of the assessment area.

Assessment area: Gender equality

The assessment area evaluates how well, through its quality work, the HEI systematically contributes to ensuring that gender equality is factored into the content, design and implementation of the programmes. Gender equality is 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 a gender equality perspective in the programmes. The HEI takes action and continuously improves the programmes based on a gender-equal work approach. Planned or implemented measures are communicated appropriately with the relevant stakeholders.

Assessment criteria:

The HEI ensures systematic efforts to take into account gender equality into the content, design and implementation of the programmes.

Guidelines for the HEI:

Show through its quality work how the HEI 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 programmes. The description can also include examples of goals and strategies that have been established in relation to the assessment area and assessment criterion. This could include how the HEI follows up these goals, how it is decided if 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 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'.

In addition to what emerges related to the assessment criterion, the HEI can highlight other issues deemed important for the systematic development of gender equality in the programmes at the HEI.

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

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, focus areas are also included as part of the documentation used for the assessment panel's judgment of the assessment area.

Assessment area: Student and doctoral student perspective

The assessment area evaluates how well, through its quality work, the HEI systematically works for its students to have good conditions for influencing the programme and their study situation. The HEI engages and motivates the students to take an active role in the work to improve the programmes. The 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 of students' conditions for exercising influence over the programmes and their study situation. The HEI takes action and continuously improves the student perspective. Planned or implemented measures are communicated appropriately with the relevant stakeholders.

Assessment criteria:

The HEI systematically identifies needs for improvement of students' opportunities and conditions for exercising influence over the programmes and their study situation.

Guidelines for the HEI:

Show through its quality work how the HEI 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 perspective and ensure good conditions for students to exercise influence over their programmes. The description can also include examples of goals and strategies that have been established in relation to the assessment area and assessment criterion. This could include how the HEI follows up these goals, how it is decided if 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 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'.

In addition to what emerges in relation to the assessment criteria, the HEI can highlight other issues deemed important for the systematic improvement of the student perspective at the HEI.

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

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, focus areas are also included as part of the documentation used for the assessment panel's judgment of the assessment area.

Assessment area: Working life and collaboration

The assessment area evaluates how well, through its quality work, the HEI systematically ensures that programmes are useful and develop students' preparedness to face changes in the working life. The HEI has well-functioning partnerships and collaborations with the working life that help improve the programmes. The 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 the programmes. The HEI implements measures and improves the programmes to ensure they are useful, and continuously develops students' preparedness to face the working life. Planned or implemented measures are communicated appropriately with the relevant stakeholders.

Assessment criteria:

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

Guidelines for the HEI:

Show through its quality work how the HEI 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 the working life and collaboration into its programmes. The description can also include examples of goals and strategies that have been established in relation to the assessment area and assessment criterion. This could include how the HEI follows up these goals, how it is decided if 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.

The HEI is to describe its work with collaboration and partnerships with the working life. The HEI's description can also include how information and relevant statistics for how the programmes prepare students for the 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 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'.

In addition to what emerges in connection with the assessment criterion, the HEI can highlight other issues deemed important for the systematic improvement of working life and collaboration elements in the programmes at the HEI.

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 programmes, and that the programmes sufficiently prepare students for the working life, based on information generated in the quality system.

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, focus areas are also included as part of the documentation used for the assessment panel's judgment of the assessment area.

Assessment basis

Assessment materials include the following:

- a self-evaluation from the HEI
- a student report from student/doctoral student union(s).
- two site visits
- documentation about selected focus areas.

All assessment materials for the review are to be weighed together. The review process also factors in other data which UKÄ produces, see the section 'other data'.

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 that distributes login information to the HEI's other users and that can answer questions about UKÄ Direkt.

The HEI's self-evaluation

The purpose of the self-evaluation is to provide a description and analysis 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. More specifically, in the reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes, the self-evaluation serves the following purposes:

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 programmes.
4. Provide evidence of how the HEI knows the selected procedures ensure the quality of the programmes and identify further improvements.

The focus of the HEI's self-evaluation is therefore to be on analysing how the quality work system functions and whether it leads to achieving the defined goals. The HEI is also to report how, through its quality work,

it systematically identifies strengths and ensures they are maintained, disseminated and developed, as well as in which ways areas needing improvement are identified, followed up and resolved. The self-evaluation is to show how experience from the HEI's quality work results in improvement to the methods of the quality work.

The self-evaluation template is based on six assessment areas which form the framework of UKÄ's review model. The self-evaluation begins with a brief description of the HEI and its organisation, followed by an overview of the quality work in broad strokes, which includes how this work is organised, which policy documents regulate the work and how responsibilities are allocated. The description is to clarify how long the current quality system has been in use and the principles upon which it is based.

The HEI is to analyse and evaluate how well the quality system and quality work fulfil the six assessment areas. The self-evaluation is to contain concrete evidence that the quality work is done systematically and ensures high quality in the HEI's programmes. It is not the assessors' responsibility to find this evidence.

In addition to what emerges in connection with the assessment areas, the HEI can highlight other issues which, based on the quality work, are deemed important for systematic quality improvement. Features that are highlighted in the self-evaluation are to be supported with references to relevant documents. These documents are to be attached as annexes to the self-evaluation for use as supplementary information which the assessment panel can access if it needs to verify or understand something in greater detail.

The HEI is also to be aware of the results of past reviews, both those it initiated itself and external evaluations. In addition, the HEI is to comment on the results of UKÄ's HEI supervision.

The self-evaluation is to be 30–50 pages, 12-point font. The HEI is to submit its self-evaluation to UKÄ within twelve weeks from the initial meeting.

Student report

In the reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes, UKÄ welcomes the local student/doctoral student unions to submit a written document, 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. In addition to aspects related to the assessment areas, the student unions can highlight other issues which, based on the HEI's quality work, they consider important for quality improvement.

If an HEI has multiple student and doctoral student unions with union status, UKÄ would prefer for the unions to collaborate and submit a joint student report. However, this is something the unions may determine themselves. A joint report may be up to ten pages at most. UKÄ has developed a special guide to help the student/doctoral student unions 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 it will therefore not impact students' opportunities to be participants in the self-evaluation process.

Audit trails

To review how the HEI's quality work functions in practice, the assessors study a number of audit trails 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? Does systematic quality work take place, are the results followed up, and do they result in measures? Audit trails are also to demonstrate whether there is knowledge flow between the various organisational levels at the HEI so that for all levels are able to take responsibility for their share of the quality assurance process and the improvement of the programmes.

What is an audit trail?

The audit trails consist of quality assurance and development processes that are studied in an education environment. Examples of educational environments that could be audit trails are programmes and departments. What an audit trails could be is governed by each HEI's quality work and by what emerges in the HEI's self-evaluation. An audit trail could be how the HEI has handled recommendations from self-initiated evaluations of a number of study programmes.

Choice of areas 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 the size of the HEI. At larger HEIs, the assessment panel usually chooses three to six audit trails; at medium-sized HEIs, two to four audit trails; and at smaller HEIs, one or two audit trails.

Documentation connected to audit trails

Within 15 business days from the HEI being informed of the assessment panel's selection of audit trails, the HEI is to submit the documentation which the assessment panel and HEI have agreed upon together. The documentation is to be uploaded to UKÄ Direkt and it is to consist 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 address the material, the HEI is also to include a brief description (no longer than half a page) per audit trail, which places the submitted documentation in context.

How are the results of the audit trail 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 programmes. If the HEI identifies a problem, are actions taken and are the results provided to the stakeholders concerned?

Other documentation

Prior to reviews, UKÄ produces documentation about the HEI that is relevant for the assessment areas to be reviewed. Where relevant, these documents are to be factored in by both the HEI and the assessment panel. This can include the result of UKÄ's HEI supervision; appraisals of degree-awarding power; programme evaluations; thematic evaluations and national statistics, which could demonstrate student completion rate and establishment level and 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 focus areas. The material will be available for the HEI in UKÄ Direkt in conjunction with the initial meeting.

Important steps in the review process

Initial meeting

As a first step in the evaluation process, UKÄ requests an introductory, initial meeting for:

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

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

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

Two site visits to the HEI

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 focus areas which the assessment panel will follow during its second site visit to the HEI. 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. In conjunction with this site visit, HEI representatives and UKÄ's analyst and assessment panel chair will go through the types of documentation and their appropriate scope that the HEI is to provide for each audit trail.

Representatives from the HEI, students, and any working life representatives which the HEI collaborates with will participate in the interviews. Students participating in the interviews should be appointed, if possible, by a student and doctoral student organisation that either belongs to a student/doctoral student union or has union status itself at the HEI.

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, and takes place about eight weeks after the first site visit.

At this site visit, the audit trails are studied and the assessment panel may interview the HEI's leadership, teachers, students, and any other staff groups and working life representatives with which the HEI collaborates.

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/doctoral student union(s) notify the responsible analyst at UKÄ which individuals have been nominated to participate in the interview.

If the student and doctoral student union finds they are unable to recruit students, UKÄ, in consultation with the HEI's quality officer or other designated person, will ensure that students are recruited for the interviews.

Assessment panels

The assessors are recruited according to the usual nomination procedure in collaboration with the HEIs, student and doctoral student unions via the Swedish National Union of Students and working life organisations. UKÄ, however, 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 panel is to consist of at least five assessors (one of which is appointed as chair of the panel):

- three external experts
- one employer and working life representative
- one student or doctoral student representative.

Additionally, at least one of the assessors is to be 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 and management work within an HEI, and within some other form of organisation outside of academia. The assessment panel is also to include someone with experience with 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 will receive training in UKÄ's review and work method. The training 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 training includes an orientation about the laws, ordinances and ESG which the assessors must take into consideration, a review of UKÄ's quality assurance system, and the assessment areas and assessment criteria that are connected to the relevant component. The training also covers interview techniques and addresses gender equality issues.

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, justifying 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 working life 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.

A special assessor handbook⁴ describes such aspects as the assessment panel's role in the review process and the primary steps in the implementation of the reviews. Together with the instructions for each component, this handbook serves as support in the assignment as assessor and in the review process.

⁴ The handbook is available on UKÄ's website, www.uka.se

Report and decision

Assessment panel's report

The assessment panel's judgment on whether the HEI meets the assessment criteria for the reviewed assessment areas results in a report that serves as the basis for UKÄ's decision.

The focus of the assessment is to be on the continuous improvement of educational activities, i.e. how the information generated as a result of the follow-up and evaluation systematically and effectively ensures and continuously improves the programmes. Additionally, an assessment is conducted of how well the HEIs' quality work systematically identifies strengths and ensures these are preserved and developed, and in which ways 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. The way in which feedback on the results of the quality work is provided to relevant stakeholders is also assessed.

For the reports to also contribute to enhancing quality at the HEIs, the assessors are to include their own reflections and highlight good and educational examples.

The assessment panel's judgements and reasoning are to clearly present what is not judged satisfactory should there be a negative judgement.

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 review the contents and comment on any factual mistakes in the report. The comment period is three weeks. The assessors read the HEI's responses and make changes to the report where relevant.

The final report from the assessment group forms the basis for UKÄ's decision. The HEI's written response will be attached to the report.

Decision

The overall judgement of the HEI's quality assurance processes 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 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

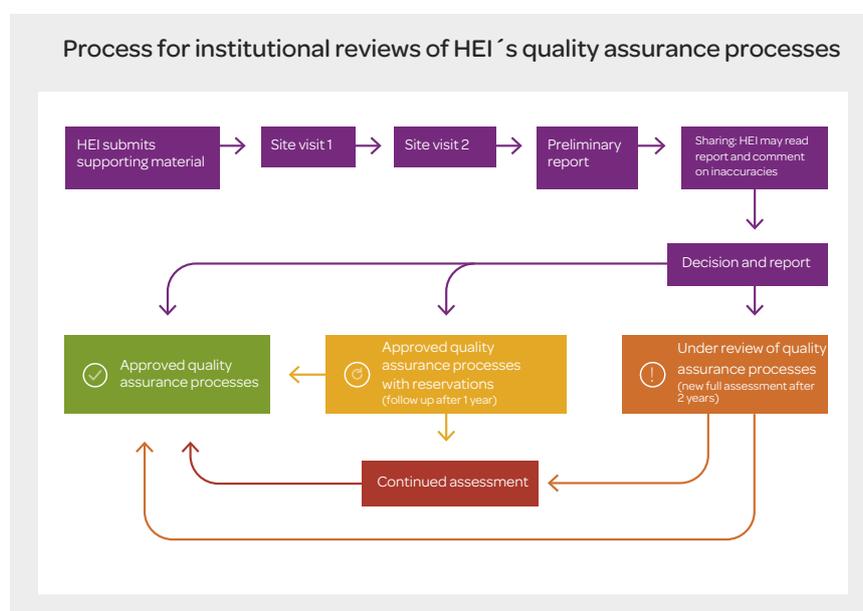
An overall judgement of approved quality assurance processes means the HEI's quality assurance processes are well described, well argued for and well functioning in practice. They are systematic and effective at all levels of the HEI, from leadership level to departmental level. All assessment areas 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, which the HEI is to follow up and take action to remedy within a certain period of time. The deficiencies are of a scope that the assessment panel believes the HEI can rectify them within one year.

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 of a scope that the assessment panel believes the HEI cannot rectify them within one year. In the decision, UKÄ specifies that the HEI's quality assurance processes must be reviewed again in their entirety.



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 monitoring is mentioned as part of the external quality assurance process.

In the case of approved quality assurance processes with reservations

HEIs with assessment assurance work approved with reservations are followed up in the assessment areas judged as not satisfactory. The HEI has one year to present the measures it has taken to address the problems. UKÄ appoints an assessment panel that follows up the measures taken. Online interviews and site visits 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, this means that an additional follow-up review will be conducted after a period agreed upon by UKÄ and the HEI jointly on a case-by-case basis.

In the event of quality assurance processes under review

All assessment areas will be followed up at HEIs with quality assurance processes that are under review, i.e., a new, complete review of the HEI's quality assurance processes will be carried out two years after UKÄ's decision is made. An assessment panel will be appointed to review the self-evaluation and other documentation. Online interviews and site visits 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 under review after the new review, this means that a follow-up will be carried out after a period agreed upon by UKÄ and the HEI on a case-by-case basis. This also means that additional programmes at the HEI may be evaluated by UKÄ's representatives.

Annex 1

Guide for student and doctoral student unions when writing the student report

This guide was developed to provide guidelines to the student and doctoral 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 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)⁵. 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 working life. The assessment panel's starting points are the assessment areas and assessment criteria

⁵ The concepts 'quality assurance processes', 'quality system' and 'quality work' are defined on page 9 in this guide.

developed by UKÄ in dialogue with representatives from the higher education sector and the working life, and which originate in the Higher Education Act, Higher Education Ordinance, and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015⁶.

- 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 for 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 level, 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 focus areas.
- The assessment panel carries out an initial site visit with representatives from the HEI, students, and any working life 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 focus areas 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 with leadership, staff and students on site. The purpose of the second site visit is to, via the selected focus areas, review whether the HEI's systematic quality assurance processes function in practice so that the system and work that is pursued ensure the high quality of the HEI's educational activities.
- The assessment panel formulates preliminary assessments in the reports and shares them with the HEI so that the HEI has the opportunity to comment on factual errors or misunderstandings that may have occurred during the assessment process. The HEI is responsible for verifying with the parties concerned, such as the student and doctoral 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 abstains from stating in detail

⁶ 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.

what the student report is to contain in order to avoid directing or limiting its content. UKÄ requests that information in the student report pertains primarily to two overarching questions. It should describe and analyse:

5. How student influence functions in the HEI's quality work and/or quality system, with support from the assessment areas listed below?
6. 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
- student and doctoral student perspective
- working life and collaboration
- gender equality.

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 and doctoral 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 based upon which the HEI are 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 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, ten pages if several 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 and doctoral 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 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/doctoral student unions or HEI
- published compiled results of course evaluations
- published alumni follow-ups
- HEI's or student union's approved documents.

Preparation and approval of the student report

It is important that student and doctoral student unions have thought through the preparation and approval 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 and doctoral 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. The student report is also a public document that can be accessed by everyone once it has been submitted to the Swedish Higher Education Authority. 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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