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The effects of programme evaluations

– An analysis of the effects of the national evaluation system 2011–2014

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Summary

In 2014 the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ – Universitetskanslersämbetet) completed the mission that was assigned to its predecessor, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV – Högskoleverket), to evaluate higher education in Sweden. This task involved evaluating all programmes leading to the award of a first or second-cycle qualification during a four-year cycle (2011–2014). A number of follow-up reviews of programmes that were assessed as being of inadequate quality currently remains to be made. These follow-up reviews are expected to be completed in the spring of 2016.

The aim of this study is to present and discuss the effects of these evaluations. In order to do so a variety of internal and external material has been used.

Analysis of this material reveals that the evaluation system has had a positive impact on quality at different levels. This impact can be discerned both in the form of measures that directly affect the structure and implementation of the programmes evaluated as well as effects of a more general character. An example of one general effect can be found in the overall review of the programmes evaluated due to the increased focus on quality assurance procedures. The review of the educational offerings has also resulted in greater cooperation among different programmes at one and the same HEI. Another general effect of the evaluations is the increased awareness of and focus on the qualification descriptors in the Higher Education Ordinance.

The evaluations have had a large number of direct effects on the programmes. The programmes assessed as having inadequate quality are subject to the most explicit and concrete effects. As the students' independent projects (degree projects) played the most important role in these evaluations, many of the different measures adopted to remedy shortcomings in a programme have therefore involved raising the quality of these projects. If the entire process relating to the independent projects is viewed from start to finish, it can be seen that the HEIs have first tried to limit the access of students who are not sufficiently prepared to begin their projects. This has sometimes been accomplished by stipulating different kinds of requirements for instance, that the students must have completed certain courses before admission. In some programmes restrictions have been imposed concerning the subjects that may be dealt with in an independent project. A measure of this kind can have a negative impact on the overall breadth of a programme. Subsequently, once students have started their independent projects, those responsible for the programmes at the HEIs have not only tried to provide more explicit instructions and guidelines as well as better supervision, but also, finally, tightened the demands made when the projects are submitted for grading and examination.

As has already been pointed out, this analysis reveals that on a more general level the HEIs have both reorganised their programmes and launched measures intended to raise the quality of their entire offerings. Programmes have been restructured, programme and course syllabuses have been revised and new courses have been introduced. Reading lists have been reviewed and greater emphasis has been placed in different ways on theory and methodology to enhance academic standards. Greater

focus has also been placed on the direct practice of certain skills, for instance through the introduction of more hand-in assignments, writing workshops, lab reports and other written reports.

There have also been some changes regarding teaching resources such as the reallocation of the use of teaching hours and specific qualification requirements for the supervisors and examiners of the independent projects. Teachers have also been offered continued professional development to some extent. Those responsible for programmes at the HEIs have also focused on improving the information provided to students in the form of manuals and guidelines. Prior knowledge requirements have been specified more stringently and diagnostic tests introduced.

The increased focus on the independent projects may, however, in certain cases have led to resources having been shifted away from parts of the programmes that could be considered as more important. Some practical training in particular may have had to take second place. The emphasis in the evaluations affects the measures adopted by the HEIs as well as their focus. The teachers have also had to devote a great deal of time to the evaluations – time that could otherwise have been used for other forms of quality enhancement.

This report also contains a comparison between the 2011–2014 evaluation system and the system adopted between 2001 and 2006. One difference can already be found in the aims of the two systems. The 2001–2006 system was intended to contribute to the development of the internal quality systems at the HEIs to assess whether their programmes complied with the aims and provisions of the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance and also to provide potential students, the labour market and other potential receivers with information about the programmes. The earlier evaluation system focused on input and process while the 2011–2014 system was focused primarily on the outcomes of programmes. These outcomes were measured by assessing whether programmes resulted in students attaining the goals laid down in the qualification descriptors. In both systems, however, the evaluation agency had the possibility of questioning and withdrawing entitlements to award qualifications.

One distinct difference is that the 2001–2006 system helped to enhance student influence and the significance of course evaluations, which was not the case with the system that followed. The earlier system also probably led to a greater increase in the number of teachers employed than its successor. One important difference is that there were no systematic reviews of independent projects in the 2001–2006 system. The main similarities between the two systems are that they both contributed to general appraisals of the programmes and enhanced quality assurance procedures. Changes in reading lists and greater focus on teaching methodology are other similarities.

The section headed *Discussion and reflections* analyses the concepts of control and enhancement. These concepts are not infrequently considered to be opposites. This report shows, however, that even if the two evaluation systems had somewhat different outcomes, they can both be characterised as developmental. The report concludes with a number of reflections about the future.

Introduction

During 2014 Universitetskanslersämbetet (UKÄ) completed the evaluations that had formed part of the Government assignment originally undertaken by HSV which involved evaluating all programmes leading to the award of a first or second-cycle qualification during a four-year cycle (2011–2014). During this four-year cycle a total of 2,088 programmes have been evaluated. The focus of the 2011–2014 evaluation system involved appraisal of the outcomes of programmes in a way that made it unique in its approach and design and also, to some extent, rendered its outcome controversial. This approach and design – assessing goal attainment through systematic appraisal of independent projects – has probably never been adopted at national level in any other country.¹

Now that the evaluation period using this approach has been completed, there are grounds for summarising how this method of undertaking evaluations has functioned. This report identifies and discusses what has been determined about the quality-enhancing effects the evaluations may have had on the educational offerings of Swedish HEIs. A comparison is also made with the national evaluation system that was used during the period 2001–2006 and what is known about the effects of this system.² This report forms part of UKÄ's continuous reflection on its operations and is a contribution to the ongoing discussion, both inside and outside Sweden, of how evaluations of higher education should be designed.³

The structure of the report

The analysis of the effects that have been identified can be found in the section entitled *The quality-enhancing effects of the evaluations*. This analysis is preceded by a brief presentation of the evaluation system, the aim of the report and the material on which its analysis was based. In addition some of the study's theoretical premises are presented briefly in the form of definitions, models and assumptions. The conclusion of the report refers back to these theoretical premises in a discussion of the implications of the effects identified for opinions about the different approaches to evaluation systems. This discussion includes a comparison with the previous evaluation system.

Background and circumstances: a brief presentation of the system for evaluation and follow up

To comply with the Government's assignment the evaluations have focused on the outcomes of programmes and these outcomes have been appraised in terms of how well a programme meets the requirements laid down in the legislation and ordinances to

¹ Or at least no other examples of corresponding approaches have so far been found in the international networks to which UKÄ belongs. There is however interest in similar approaches, see for instance *Dimensions of quality*, Graham Gibbs, The Higher Education Academy, 2010, p. 48

² There was also an evaluation system in 2007–2008 but this was terminated prematurely.

³ Studies of the effects of evaluation systems in higher education are infrequent, even from an international perspective. See Professor Jon Haakstad in a "paper" for the European Quality Assurance Forum in November 2014 in Barcelona. Haakstad is senior advisor to NOKUT (Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen) in Norway. www.eua.be/Libraries/EQAF_2014/IVa_1_Haakstad.sflb.ashx

which they are subject, i.e. the Higher Education Act and the qualification descriptors in the ordinances pertaining to it.⁴

The programmes evaluated were those that lead to the award of a first or second-cycle general or professional qualification. Within the framework of an evaluation, programmes in one main field of study have been reviewed together with programmes in adjacent main fields of study. The division into main fields of study took place after consultation with the HEIs.

The evaluations have been conducted by panels made up of subject experts, students and labour market representatives. The evaluations have been based on the students' independent projects, the HEIs' own self-evaluations and interviews with students. Interviews with representatives of the programmes were used to supplement the self-evaluations. The most important material consisted of the independent projects. This is because according to the preparatory work⁵ these projects were viewed as a synthesis of what students have learned during the studies that have led up to them. In addition, all programmes are required to include independent projects, which makes it possible to use them systematically as a basis for evaluation.

The overall results of the evaluations were expressed using a three-point scale: Very high quality, High quality or Inadequate quality. The Government allocated additional resources to HEIs for programmes assessed as having very high quality. The assessment of inadequate quality led to a follow-up evaluation by UKÄ after one year. During this follow-up review the HEI reported the measures adopted to remedy the shortcomings in the programme concerned. If this follow-up review showed that the shortcomings had been remedied, the programme was awarded the overall assessment of high quality. If not, UKÄ made a decision to withdraw the HEI's entitlement to award a qualification for the programme.

As the final evaluation decision was made in October 2014, follow-up reviews will continue until the spring of 2016.⁶

Aims and limitations

This study comprises a tabulation and discussion of the effects the evaluations have had on the educational offerings of the HEIs involved. Not only may it make an important contribution to a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation system used during the period 2011–2014 but also, not least, provide a record of experiences for future use in the design of new evaluation systems. The report can also serve as the basis of a discussion of the expected effects and outcomes of different evaluation measures and approaches where higher education is concerned.

⁴ *Focus on knowledge – quality in higher education*. Govt. Bill 2009/10:139.

⁵ *New world – new higher education*. Govt. Bill 2004/05:162, p. 102.

⁶ For practical reasons the evaluations undertaken by UKÄ were divided into six different cycles. This was partly to enable main fields of study in adjacent disciplines to be evaluated at more or less the same time. One reason for doing so was to facilitate coordination and calibration both at UKÄ (or its predecessor HSV) and the HEIs. The cycles have, however, overlapped as some evaluation projects were considerably larger than others and so required more time. Cycle 1 included several of the major programmes in the social sciences, above all business administration, politics, economics and sociology. Cycle 2 mainly comprised a number of programmes leading to professional qualifications in health and medical care. Cycle 3 mainly covered modern languages. Programmes in engineering and the natural sciences predominated in cycle 4. Cycle 5 included a mixture of fields of study in the humanities and programmes in health care leading to professional qualifications. Cycle 6 comprised a mixture of several different fields. The link below provides an exact list of what the different cycles included

<http://www.uka.se/utbildningskvalitet/tidplanforutvarderingarna.4.782a298813a88dd0dad800010707.html>

The aim has been to use the different forms of UKÄ's own material and information from external sources to categorise what effects can so far be discerned on the educational offerings of the various HEIs. The study also contains a discussion of possible explanations for these effects as well as how they relate to evaluation theory and models. This discussion does not aspire to be exhaustive but rather to raise questions that may be interesting in relation to the significance, intentions, implementation and effects of future evaluations.

The material used

Currently there is not a great deal of external material available regarding the evaluation system and its effects. What has been written about the system focuses mainly on the theoretical underpinning of the model or evaluation process and to a lesser degree on the effects of the system. This applies, for instance, to the article by Lena Lindgren in *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 2012/3⁷ and to a study carried out at Uppsala University in collaboration with The Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF – Sveriges universitets- och högskoleförbund). In 2012, however, SUHF conducted a questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators or their counterparts in Sweden.⁸ Another important external study exists in the form of the surveys of the effects of the evaluations undertaken on behalf of the Riksdag's Parliamentary Committee on Education by a Danish research institute, CFA (the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy Translation).⁹ In our study of these effects we are, given the few external studies that have been made, largely confined to our internal material, i.e. the information compiled by UKÄ in order to monitor the system.

The material on which the report is based on is described below.

Analysis of the follow-up opinions and HEIs' reports on measures adopted:

When a decision is made by UKÄ that a programme is to be judged as having inadequate quality, the HEI must, unless it decides to discontinue the programme, remedy the shortcomings. A follow-up review takes place one year after the evaluation. This centres on the reports on the measures adopted submitted to UKÄ. In these reports the HEI is expected to analyse the causes of the shortcomings for each qualitative target and then account for the measures adopted to remedy them. A panel of assessors, which in most cases comprises experts from the panel that conducted the original evaluation, reviews these reports. It then assesses whether the HEI's analyses are considered and relevant and also whether the measures adopted are reasonable and

⁷ Lena Lindgren, *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 2012/3, En utvärderare om Högskoleverkets system för kvalitetsutvärdering 2011–2014 [Views of one assessor on the National Agency for Higher Education's system for quality evaluation 2011–2014].

⁸ SUHF's studies formed part of a larger project undertaken by SUHF's expert panel on quality issues. It included a report from Uppsala University (appendix 9) by Annika Lundmark and Maiwor Sjölund, from October 2012 entitled *Håller utvärderingsmetoden tillräcklig kvalitet [Is the quality of evaluation methods adequate]*. The empirical material used for this study comprised case studies from a number of main fields of study as well as interviews with analysts at HSV (appendix 9). Another study included was *Kvalitetssamordnares syn på det nationella utvärderingssystemet för högre utbildning – nu och i framtiden [The views of quality coordinators on the national evaluation system for higher education – now and in the future]* (appendix 10), for which a questionnaire was sent to quality coordinators or their counterparts. The author of this appendix was Åsa Kettis from Uppsala University.

⁹ *Autonomi och kvalitet – ett uppföljningsprojekt om implementering och effekter av två högskolereformer i Sverige [Autonomy and quality – a follow-up report on the implementation and effects of two higher education reforms in Sweden]*, Riksdagen reports 2013/14:RFR:21-22 and 2014/2015 RFR:5-7. This report was produced by the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy Translation at Aarhus University (CFA)

appropriate. The panel then writes a follow-up opinion. One of the studies made for this report involved analysing the follow-up opinions of the panels that reviewed all the programmes leading to the award of general first and second-cycle qualifications that began their work in June 2013, in other words after round 2 of the evaluations, that had been published by 1 March 2015, a total of 60 opinions.¹⁰ The purpose of this analysis was to determine on the basis of this selection which measures have most frequently been adopted.

In connection with the follow-up opinions on round 1, HSV made an analysis of all the measures reported by the HEIs for programmes leading to the award of general qualifications.¹¹ This analysis will also be referred to in this report.

The methods used in both these analyses involved compiling a list of the measures adopted for each of the qualitative targets. One of them was based on the follow-up opinions of the review panels, the other on the reports submitted by the HEIs. Minor differences can be found between the two studies with regard to the categorisation of a measure but these have no significant impact on the results and the analysis of the measures reported is therefore presented together with the corresponding analysis of the follow-up opinions in this report. A general difference between the two sources is that the reports on measures adopted are more comprehensive while the follow-up opinions are more concise.

It is relatively common for the HEIs to report the same or similar measures for several different qualitative targets. In this study these measures have been taken into consideration each time they are presented as remedies for different shortcomings in attainment of the different qualitative targets. As it is the impact on the qualitative targets that is measured this provides some impression of the frequency of a measure. This method is intended to reveal clearly when a measure has affected several targets. The measures that have most frequently been applied for several different targets will then be accounted for in the body of the report. This study does not, however, provide any scope for any further division of the measures per target or analysis of which measures are most frequently adopted for each of the qualitative targets. Nor does the study enable consideration to be taken of the varying extent of the different measures.

For instance an increase in the number of teachers in a programme is counted as one measure and therefore the number of teachers recruited has not been taken into account. Another example is that revision of a reading list has been viewed as one measure, irrespective of how many texts have been replaced.

¹⁰ These comprised 41 programmes at Bachelor's level, 8 60-credit Master's programmes and 11 120-credit Master's programmes. Programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications were not therefore included in the analysis. The reason for limiting the analysis in this way was that the number of programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications that had completed the process in connection with the analysis was not large enough to provide a representative sample. There was a predominance among programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications of those in engineering and the various nursing specialisations, which should in this case be included in a study like this one to enable a general opinion to be expressed about programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications. When the analysis was made these follow-up reviews were not ready and are expected in the case of the specialist nursing qualifications to be complete during the spring of 2016. The follow-up reviews included in the analysis therefore deal with general qualifications in Arabic, biology, English, pharmaceuticals, public health science, physics, Greek, chemistry, dietetics, general literary studies, drug management, mathematics, meteorology, environmental health, environmental chemistry, environmental science, molecular biology, nutrition, modern Greek, public law, optometry, rhetorics, Sami, statistics, Swedish, strategic leadership, German.

¹¹ Altogether 96 reports on measures adopted were submitted, 52 for Bachelor's level programmes, 35 for 60-credit Master's programmes and 9 for 120-credit Master's programmes.

To sum up, the aim of these two studies has been to provide an overall impression of the measures reported by the HEIs to remedy the different shortcomings in attaining the targets in order to illustrate what effects the evaluations have had.

UKÄ interviews with contact persons: Programmes that are assessed as having high or very high quality in UKÄ's quality evaluations are not subject to any follow-up process. This means that UKÄ has limited knowledge about any measures adopted in these programmes as a result of the evaluations, if any at all. In order to find out about this, telephone interviews were made during the spring of 2015 with contact persons in a sample of 20 programmes that had received the assessment of high or very high quality. The sample was made so that there was a spread of large and small HEIs and to include varying types of main fields of study. The common denominator for the contact persons interviewed was that they had all played an active role in the evaluations and the production of the self-evaluations. The majority of them were directors of studies, programme coordinators or subject representatives, both when the evaluation took place and when they were interviewed. This study will be referred to in the report as "interviews with contact persons".

Assessors questionnaire: During the evaluation cycle UKÄ continuously circulated questionnaires among the assessors who have taken part in the evaluations in order to acquire their opinions on the evaluation process and also to enable them to suggest improvements. The last of these assessors questionnaires, for rounds 5 and 6 in the cycle, included questions on whether the assessors considered the evaluations had any quality-enhancing effects. The response rate was 75 per cent. The questions on this topic were posed to the assessors in their "capacity as teachers or educational administrators" and two questions were asked. One required the assessors to judge the effects in their own disciplines from a national perspective and the other what effects they considered the evaluation had had in the specific programme they were themselves active in. They were also given scope in connection with these questions to comment on the way in which the evaluations had been quality-enhancing or not. This study will be referred to below as the "assessors questionnaire".

Written questions to student unions: A number of questions were sent out to all the student unions in Sweden. Their e-mail addresses were provided by SFS (The Swedish National Union of Students), which was also consulted about the wording of the questions. One intention was to assess what different key persons in the student unions knew about the evaluations and to what extent the unions were involved in them. The main purpose was, however, to find out what effects the student unions considered the evaluations to have had. Responses were received from 20 of the 60 unions approached. Although this was not very many, these responses help to fill out the overall picture. There was a certain preponderance of responses from small unions mainly representing students on programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications.

The Parliamentary Committee on Education's study: A comprehensive study commissioned by the Parliamentary Committee on Education and its findings was presented in a report entitled *Autonomi och kvalitet – ett uppföljningsprojekt om implementering och effekter av två högskolereformer i Sverige* [Autonomy and quality

– a follow-up report on the implementation and effects of two higher education reforms in Sweden]. It is based on surveys carried out by CFA (the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy Translation at Aarhus University). Its aim was to evaluate two reforms, the autonomy reform and the quality reform, and as it was the latter that introduced the evaluation system, this study is interesting in the context of this report as well. The report on the Danish study was published in four sections. Section 2 comprised an interview survey in which senior administrators at 26 different HEIs participated (referred to below as “CFA’s interview survey”). Section 3 was based on a questionnaire survey containing questions addressed to those responsible for a large number of programmes. The questionnaires were sent to 893 unique respondents and the response rate was just over 50 per cent for programmes leading to general qualifications and just over 40 per cent for those leading to professional qualifications (this survey will be referred to as “CFA’s questionnaire survey”). Section 4 consisted of a survey based on case studies in which CFA’s researchers interviewed different stakeholders in nine programmes to probe their experiences of the implementations of the reforms and their effects locally (referred to below as “CFA’s case study survey”). This report will refer to what was disclosed in these sections of CFA’s study. It does not aim, however, to provide a complete summary of CFA’s study but to use it rather to enhance and supplement the rest of the material. Readers are therefore recommended to read the different sections of CFA’s study separately.

SUHF’s questionnaire survey of quality coordinators: In 2012 SUHF’s expert group on quality issues carried out a questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators or their counterparts throughout Sweden. The quality coordinators are centrally placed contact persons for UKÄ, most often officials in the central administration of the HEIs, although at some this role is played by a pro-Vice-Chancellor. These individuals have a good overall view of the effects of the evaluations for the entire HEI. The questionnaire was circulated between June and September 2012 and 22 responses were received. At that time no evaluation had gone through every stage, in other words there had been no follow-up reviews of programmes considered to have inadequate quality. This survey will be referred to below as “SUHF’s questionnaire survey”).

Altogether this material will provide a good impression of the effects of the system.

Analysing effects

What is an effect?

The Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV – Ekonomistyrningsverket) defines an effect as “a change occurring as the consequence of an action that would not otherwise have come about”. Effects can sometimes occur in sequence in what is often referred to as a “cause and effect chain”.¹² In this report the quality evaluation of programmes undertaken by UKÄ is viewed as “the action” and the effects are the “changes” that have taken place at the HEIs as consequences.

It is also reasonable to assume the existence of a cause and effect chain in which a change that has been made in order to raise the quality of a specific programme has a quality-enhancing effect. Here it should be observed that quality is undoubtedly a controversial concept. What is relevant in this context is the idea of quality as it is defined according to the stipulations in the legislation and ordinances. Ultimately it means that a student should reasonably, to use the wording of the Higher Education Ordinance, acquire greater “knowledge and understanding”, “competence and skills” as well as “judgement and approach”.¹³ In addition, or alternatively, the evaluations may have had side effects that cannot be claimed to enhance quality.¹⁴

The effects of evaluation

Research into evaluation provides models of how evaluations can affect the undertakings appraised. For instance this can be through what is called instrumental application of the evaluation results to make immediate changes – in the best of cases improvements – of how they operate.¹⁵

An impact can also be made as findings become increasingly influential over time or because the evaluation process itself leads to a review of the operations in question. The mere attention that results from an evaluation is often experienced as something that is fundamentally positive by the individuals affected by it and, even though they may be critical of the method or its implementation, can give rise to discussion. An evaluation may, of course be perceived to have only negative effects for some of those concerned, for instance if it results in the termination of their operations. This standpoint is not, however, unambiguous: in terminating a programme that has not maintained the standard required, for example, an HEI is clearly endorsing the right of students to good programmes rather than the teachers’ possibility of being able to teach their subject and therefore perhaps their continued employment as well.

This can be summed up by saying that it is therefore difficult to envisage an evaluation system that cannot be said to have any form of result or effect and that in the best of cases these are positive and enhance quality.

¹² Effect evaluation, *Att välja upplägg [Choosing an approach]*, 2006:8, Ekonomistyrningsverket [The Swedish National Financial Management Authority] (ESV) p. 9.

¹³ Qualifications Ordinance, Annex 2 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100.)

¹⁴ Side effects can be categorised in a number of ways, for instance as positive, negative or perverse side effects. See, for example, Evert Vedung, *Utvärdering i politik och förvaltning [Evaluation in politics and administration]*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2009, pp. 102–115.

¹⁵ Evert Vedung, Op. cit., pp. 200–201.

CONTROL AND ENHANCEMENT

Asserting that evaluations generally speaking have effects cannot therefore be considered controversial. Whether the effects are those intended is, on the other hand, another question, as is whether the quality enhancement effects of all evaluations are automatically large enough to counteract any negative side effects that such appraisals can be alleged to have, such as increased costs, possible redundancies of teaching staff as a result of criticism, or one-sided regulation or control that could be viewed as restricting freedom and innovation.

Discussions of the aim of evaluation often oppose regulation or control to development or enhancement.¹⁶ Like the models of how evaluations can be used they are based fundamentally on a theoretical model for the categorisation of evaluations.¹⁷

A narrow interpretation of the theoretical model could lead to these points of departure being described as opposites, where control is ultimately viewed as negative and limiting in contrast to development, which is positive and supportive. This report indicates that this is far too simple a dichotomy.

We shall return to these questions in the discussion that concludes this report, which will also include a comparison of the effects of this system with those the previous evaluation system had. What follows here is an account of the grounds that exist for ascribing these effects to the evaluations themselves. This account includes an overall description of what has been determined on the basis of a study of the quality-enhancing effects of the system that has now been concluded. This will be followed by a more detailed presentation of the effects that have been identified.

¹⁶ Professor Jon Haakstad, senior adviser to NOKUT in Norway writes for instance that "...the talk is now mostly about control versus enhancement, with much emphasis on the dialogue that the institution's representatives conduct with expert peers. In fact 'enhancement' is now the most favoured word, while 'control' seems to have acquired mainly negative connotations."
www.eua.be/Libraries/EQAF_2014/IVa_1_Haakstad.sflb.ashx

¹⁷ Evert Vedung, *Op. cit.*, p. 173

Can the effects be explained by the evaluations?

Is it possible to say with any certainty that a change that has been observed is an effect of the evaluations – “would not otherwise have come about” to use the wording of the Swedish National Financial Management Authority’s definition? Not completely, of course, and this problem of linking cause to effect is a general one in follow-up studies of this kind, when there is no group with which comparisons can be made because the evaluations covered the entire country.

It is, on the other hand, reasonable to assume that the measures reported by the HEIs to remedy the shortcomings identified may be viewed as direct changes that have been made in order to attain one or more qualitative targets and so enhance quality. In a number of cases as well, programmes (main fields of study) judged to have inadequate quality have been discontinued by an HEI.

In this case there is much greater uncertainty about the effects on programmes that were judged to have high or very high quality, as the incentives for changes provided by the evaluations are considerably weaker, given that no systematic follow-up was undertaken. For information about effects of this kind, therefore, other less reliable source material, such as interviews, will be used. Nor can equally manifest changes be expected. On the whole, however, the changes indicated by the material used in this study can be credibly viewed as the effects of the evaluations. The grounds on which measures have been placed in their respective categories are described briefly below.

PROGRAMMES WITH INADEQUATE QUALITY

Of the total of 2,088 programmes evaluated during the complete 2011–2014 cycle, 548 were judged to be of inadequate quality. Up until 4 November 2015 UKÄ had conducted follow-up reviews of 355 of them, of which 352 were found to be acceptable. On the basis of the scale used for the evaluations these programmes were then evaluated as attaining high quality.

A large number of measures were adopted to remedy shortcomings, according to the reports submitted by the HEIs. Just over 50 different types of measure are accounted for, such as “revision of course syllabuses” and “reallocation of teaching resources”.

The HEIs’ reports on the measures adopted suggest, therefore, that there were explicit and direct quality-enhancing effects on almost one-quarter of the programmes evaluated.

CFA’s questionnaire survey also reveals that on the whole the evaluations had quality-enhancing effects. According to this study these effects apply mainly to programmes judged to be of inadequate quality.¹⁸ A total of 65 per cent of those responsible for these programmes answered that “greater control of the programmes” had been introduced in preparation for the follow-up review and 74 per cent that they have “new quality assurance procedures for the final independent projects”. In addition, about 40 per cent of those responsible for these programmes agreed to a

¹⁸ Of the 893 responses submitted to CFA’s questionnaire survey, 100 came from programmes that were judged to be of inadequate quality, 2014/15 FRF:6 p 28.

“great” or “very great” extent that the evaluation results had been utilised for further work on quality enhancement.¹⁹ Some of those responding to SUHF’s questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators indicate that the evaluation made it possible to get to grips with “dysfunctional” environments that the HEIs had not on their own been able to deal with.²⁰

DISCONTINUED MAIN FIELDS OF STUDY AND WITHDRAWAL OF ENTITLEMENT TO AWARD QUALIFICATIONS

Not all of the programmes judged to be of inadequate quality were remedied. By 4 November 2015 a total of 67 programmes where this had not been the case were terminated by the HEIs. Up until this date as well, UKÄ had withdrawn the entitlement of three programmes to award qualifications.

It could be argued that the termination of a programme with inadequate quality improves the overall standards at a HEI and at the same time assures the rights of students to be offered high quality programmes. This presupposes that the HEIs has concluded that the programme’s shortcomings are too comprehensive to be remedied or that it lacks adequate resources to resolve them without impairing its other activities, a form of self-regulation.

When programmes are judged to be of inadequate quality, HEIs are forced to set priorities at an overall level. Whether or not these are the correct ones is then decided internally within the HEIs. It could possibly be argued that the HEIs have other and broader goals than an overall increase in quality, at least in the sense that a specific evaluation system gives rise to. At the same time the wording of the Higher Education Act provides no scope for offering programmes without “high quality”.

PROGRAMMES JUDGED TO BE OF HIGH QUALITY AND VERY HIGH QUALITY

All of the contact persons at the different HEIs interviewed by UKÄ state that the evaluations also had effects on programmes evaluated as having “high” or “very high” quality.

CFA’s questionnaire study also corroborates this. For instance 18 per cent of those responsible for these programmes answered that they had to a “great extent” or “very great extent” allocated more resources for quality assurance procedures. In addition, CFA’s questionnaire survey shows that the programmes assessed as being of high or very high quality have also adopted a number of measures, the most important being revisions of course syllabuses. Changes like these that have, in other words, been made directly to the programmes will be described later in this report.²¹

CFA’s interviews of vice-chancellors also show that the evaluations have had quality-enhancing effects. The vice-chancellors admittedly express several critical opinions about the evaluation system *per se* but simultaneously acknowledge that it has had the effect of enhancing quality. Above all it has, according to the vice-chancellors, had a quality improvement impact on the process of independent projects, as will be described later.²²

¹⁹ CFA’s questionnaire study, p. 30.

²⁰ *Final report from SUHF’s expert group on quality issues, Åsa Kettis, Kvalitetssamordnares syn på det nationella utvärderingssystemet för högre utbildning – nu och i framtiden [The views of quality coordinators on the national evaluation system for higher education – now and in the future] (Annex 10), 2013, p. 1.*

²¹ CFA’s questionnaire survey, pp. 34–35.

²² CFA’s interview survey, 2013/14: FRF:22 p. 25.

In the conclusions of CFA's report, which is based on all of the surveys included in its study, CFA's researchers write: "The principal conclusion on the issue of the quality reform is that according to the informants it has led to a rise in quality in the higher education system. The quality reform has led to the HEIs placing even greater emphasis than before on the contents and quality of the programmes".²³

The UKÄ's assessors questionnaire included the overall question "Do you consider that evaluation has generally had a quality-enhancing effect in your disciplinary domain in Sweden?" According to 22 per cent of the respondents evaluation has had this kind of effect to "a considerable extent", while 16 per cent responded that it had to "a very considerable extent" had quality-enhancing effects. "To some extent" was the response of 21 per cent. Only 3 per cent, or 6 individuals, answered that evaluation has had this kind of effect to "no extent" and 8 per cent "to only a small extent".²⁴

Several of the informants in UKÄ's interview study with the contact persons stated that the evaluations had spurred the reorganisation of programmes that had long been considered necessary but for which incentives had been lacking. The evaluations also seem to have hastened this kind of process. The interviews also disclosed that in a number of cases the opportunity had been seized to review entire programmes in connection with the evaluation in addition to the appraisals that are regularly made. It is worth noting that during these appraisals those responsible for the programmes have also analysed aspects that the evaluation did not touch on directly.

To sum up we cannot therefore claim with complete certainty that the changes identified would not in the long run have been made without the evaluations but at the same time can determine with relatively great assurance that the evaluations have hastened the process of change. The next section will deal in greater detail with the quality-enhancing effects the evaluations have had.

²³ CFA's report 2014/15:FRF:5, p. 31.

²⁴ About 30 per cent chose the alternative "Cannot or do not want to answer, I am not a teacher or faculty programme director, which roughly matches the c. 28 per cent of the respondents who were student or labour market representatives. This means that only a few of the subject experts (teachers or faculty programme directors) declined to respond to this question.

The quality-enhancing effects of the evaluations

The different measures²⁵ adopted by the HEIs have been assigned to a few overall categories. These can in their turn be placed in two clusters or main groups. The first includes measures that directly affect the structure or implementation of a programme. These are based on the categories that are presented in the follow-up opinions or the reports of measures adopted but do not apply only to these programmes, as the analysis has shown.

The categories in this cluster are:

- Measures affecting the independent projects (independent project courses).
- Measures relating to courses (mainly to courses that precede the independent projects).
- Measures to deal with specific skills.
- Measures that affect the circumstances in which a programme is offered: mainly teaching resources and quality assurance.

The other main group comprises overall general effects on educational activities and quality assurance procedures at the HEIs. The categories in this group are:

- Internal cooperation
 - with a quality unit
 - with other programmes
 - with student unions.
- External cooperation.
- Focus on the qualitative targets.

A total of just over 600 measures relating to targets have been noted and categorised within the framework of the follow-up opinions and just over 1,960 measures within the framework of the study of the measures reported in round 1. The overwhelming majority of measures affect the independent projects or courses preceding them. There are, of course, no firm dividing lines between the various categories so that the categories selected and the specific measures assigned to them can be discussed. “Dealing with specific skills” could, for example, be viewed as belonging to the “Courses” category. It also depends on how the HEIs have chosen to word their reports on the various measures, as this affects the categorisation and makes it rather imprecise. The following section will contain a more detailed discussion of the overall categories to reveal which specific measures have been assigned to each of them. At the same time

²⁵ Here measures refers to the “... change that has taken place ...” in the definition of ‘effect’ in the section headed *What is an effect?*

the findings from the follow-up opinions and the reports on measures adopted will be related to the rest of the material.

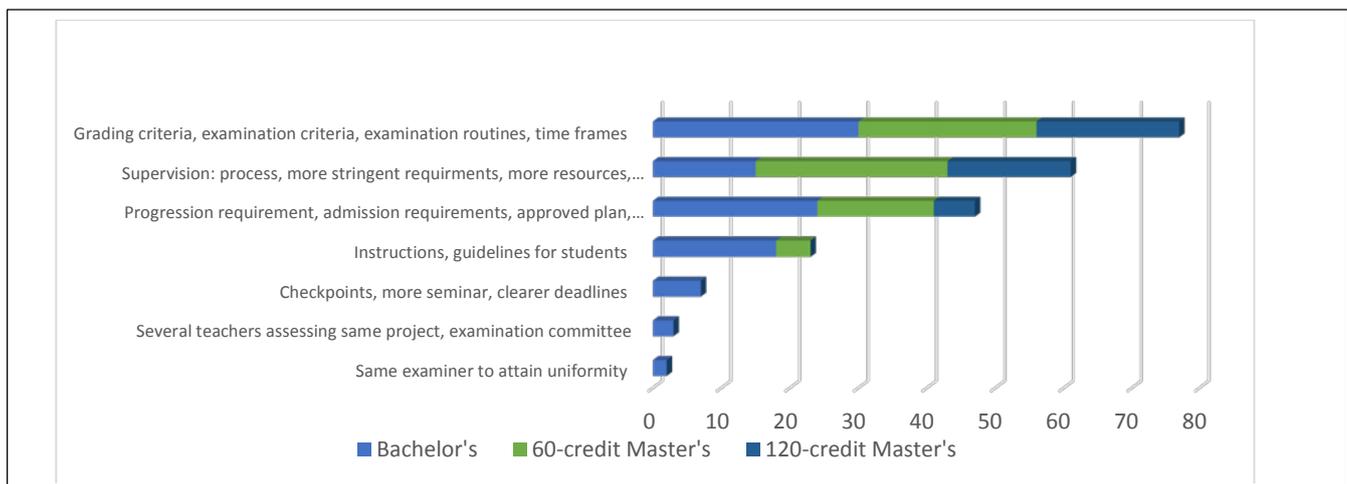
Direct effects

EFFECTS LINKED TO THE INDEPENDENT PROJECTS

In the evaluations the most important material used to assess the student's attainment of the qualitative targets consisted on the whole of appraisal of the independent projects.²⁶ When a programme has been judged to be of "inadequate quality" in most cases this was due to shortcomings in these projects. Many of the measures adopted by the HEIs in relation to the different qualitative targets have therefore involved more specific improvements related to the production and quality assurance of the independent projects, as is revealed by several aspects of the material.

Measures relating to the independent projects and what effects these have had on the programmes can be seen most clearly in the analysis of the follow-up opinions. Diagram 1 presents a number of the measures adopted by the HEIs to remedy shortcomings linked to the different targets that focus on the independent projects. In these diagrams it is not the number of measures *per se* that is interesting, as the analysis was based on a number of follow-up reviews during a specific period of time,²⁷ but it is the proportional distribution of the measures adopted by the HEIs to deal with the shortcomings identified in relation to the different qualitative targets. In other words, it is possible here and in the subsequent diagrams to gain an overall impression of which measures are most frequent and which are less so.

Diagram 1. The number of measures relating to qualitative targets indicated in the review panels' opinions in round 2 until 1 March 2015 in the independent project category. A total of 215 measures were noted in this category.



The most frequent measures relating to the independent projects comprise different types of change to the examination element itself. These changes may, for instance,

²⁶ This applies to the general qualifications. The self-evaluations have often played a more important role in evaluations of programmes leading to the award of a professional qualification.

²⁷ As has already been pointed out, the analysis comprised all the follow-up opinions on programmes leading to general qualifications from the beginning of round 2 until 1 March 2015.

involve more stringent examination criteria and changes in the factors taken into account when grading the projects. In some cases tighter deadlines for submission of the final version have been introduced.

The second most frequently adopted measures relating to the independent projects involves changes in the way they were supervised. This could affect the process itself, the allocation of roles and the resources devoted to supervision.

The third most frequent measure consisted of those responsible for the programmes at the HEI establishing more explicit routines for the way in which the students were to work on the projects, such as requiring approved project plans before the work began or introducing more explicit parameters for the choice of subject, which in concrete terms often took the form of requiring the students to write a project description that had to be approved by the supervisor before work on the project proper could start. One example of this measure, adopted at a number of HEIs in programmes in which English was the main field of study, was to limit the subject areas that the independent projects could deal with. In this case the aim was to shift the emphasis from projects that dealt solely with life and institutions to introduce greater focus on linguistic studies. In Bachelor's programmes this was the second most frequent measure, along with revision of the instructions and guidelines provided for students.

Instructions and guidelines also constituted the measure used most extensively for several of the qualitative targets for Bachelor's programmes. In second-cycle programmes changes in the examination criteria and amendments to the supervision process were the two measures adopted most extensively for several of the targets.²⁸

SUHF's questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators also showed that the evaluations "... create conditions for the implementation of changes affecting the entire HEI relating, for instance, to the independent projects and examination. These include clarification of what have previously been informal processes, for instance in the form of guidelines for the independent projects."²⁹

Structuring the working process also often involves introducing checkpoints during the course of the production of the independent project and with them tighter deadlines for the students. In CFA's questionnaire survey 24 per cent of those responsible for programmes rated as being of high or very high quality stated that "More explicit information for students about the requirements and conditions" was one of the measures adopted after the evaluations.³⁰

The study also reveals certain possible differences between different first and second-cycle programmes. No far-reaching conclusions can be reached as the number of second-cycle programmes followed up was too small. It is perhaps possible, however, to see that measures linked directly to the independent projects were, on the whole, more frequently adopted for 60-credit Master's programmes than for Bachelor's programmes. For 120-credit Master's programmes measures linked to the independent projects predominate entirely in the analysis of round 2 until 1 March 2015. It appears natural for measures to be linked mainly to the independent projects in view of the central role these play in 120-credit Master's programmes. The

²⁸ This paragraph is based on an analysis of the measures referred to for several qualitative targets in the follow-up opinions.

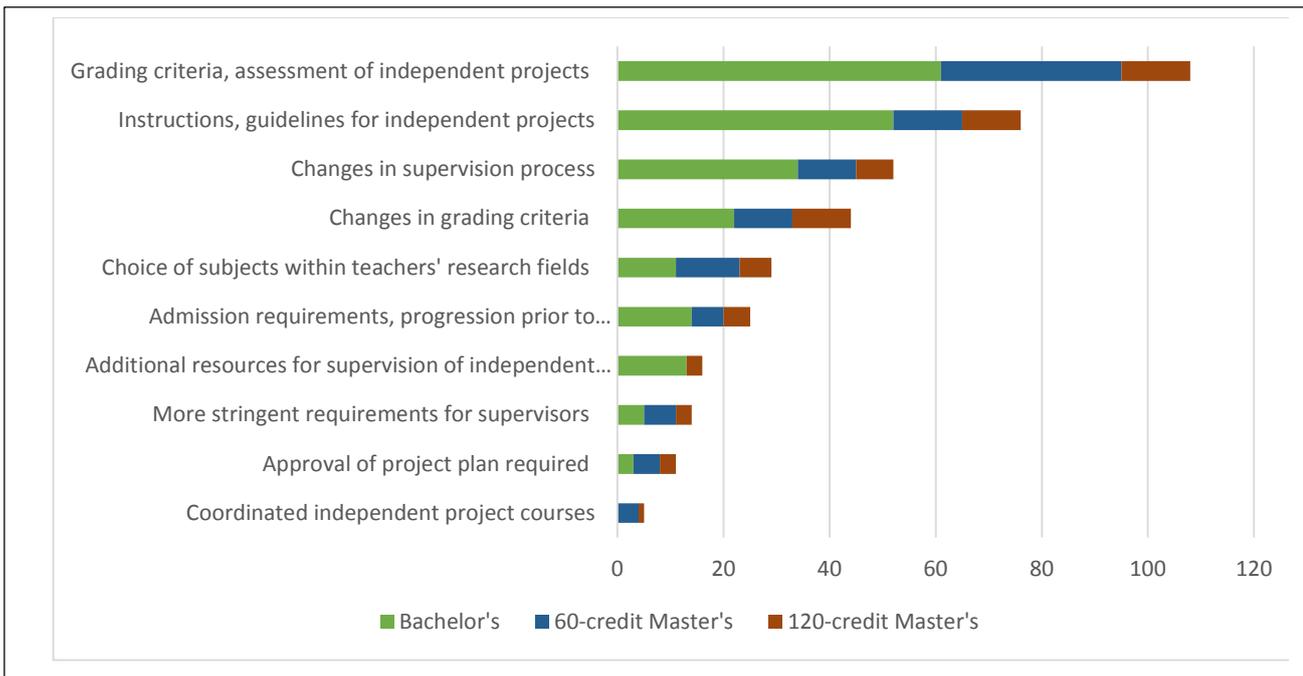
²⁹ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 2

³⁰ CFA's questionnaire survey, p. 35

time devoted to them is also much larger proportionally than in Bachelor's programmes.

The measures adopted after round 1 follow more or less the same pattern as in later rounds, as can be seen from Diagram 2.³¹ Here too grading criteria and examination routines have been tightened as well as the instructions and guidelines that apply to the independent projects. A wider variation of measures may possibly be discernible in second-cycle programmes.³²

Diagram 2. The number of measures related to qualitative targets noted in the reports on measures adopted in round 1 in the category of independent projects. A total of 380 measures were noted in this category.



CFA's questionnaire survey showed that 74 per cent of those responsible for the programmes judged to be of inadequate quality, including those leading to the award of a professional qualification, had, in preparation for the follow-up review, introduced "New quality assurance procedures for the concluding written project". This questionnaire also reveals that the evaluations had effects on the programmes that were judged as attaining high and very high quality, in which 23 per cent of the respondents stated that they had introduced "New quality assurance procedures for the concluding written project". Of the programmes judged to be of inadequate quality 33 per cent answered that in preparation for the follow-up more resources had been allocated to the independent projects. Only 10 per cent of the programmes assessed as being of high or very high quality stated that they had now (after the evaluation) allocated more resources to the independent projects.³³

³¹ The analysis for round 1 was based on the reports of the measures adopted.

³² As previously pointed out, the analysis of round 1 is based directly on the reports of the measures adopted submitted by the HEIs and not the follow-up opinions as was the case for the analysis of round 2 until 1 March 2015. As the results of the analysis of the measures reported on the whole largely coincide with the analysis of the follow-up opinions they will be presented in the course of this study. Its point of departure is, however, the analysis of round 2 up until 1 March 2015. Any differences in the results could partly be due to differences in the main fields of study included in the rounds or/and differences in the material analysed. Further speculation about the causes is avoided here. Both point, however, in the same direction.

³³ CFA's questionnaire survey, pp. 30–35

The effects on the independent projects are also revealed by UKÄ's assessors questionnaire. Several comments in the responses suggest that greater focus on the independent projects may be quality enhancing:

"I think it will be more difficult to pass poor papers and that we are being nudged towards creating more explicit grading criteria that also affect the way we supervise."
"Awareness that the project paper will be read by an external assessor has in itself a positive effect."

SUHF's questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators also shows that several respondents consider "... that it is positive that the system places emphasis on the independent projects – this has contributed to quality enhancement in this area in the form of concrete measures to improve supervision and grading. Grading criteria have been developed or reviewed for both the independent projects and other examinations."³⁴

It is important to point out here that the responses to UKÄ's assessors questionnaire also contained a great deal of criticism of the strong focus on the independent projects. The vice-chancellors interviewed in CFA's study and some of the contact persons interviewed by UKÄ also claim that the evaluations have affected the emphasis placed on different aspects of programmes, i.e. that greater weight has been given to the independent projects, which may not be appropriate for all field of study. Several vice-chancellors are also critical of the way the independent projects have predominated in the material evaluated. They claim that "in this way there is a risk of other aspects of a programme being overlooked in quality procedures".³⁵ SUHF's questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators also evoked the response that the evaluation system "... affects views of what the independent projects are to display. It then becomes normative and limits academic freedom." These questions will be dealt with in the analysis section below. SUHF's questionnaire also evoked the response that the system "... discourages breadth in programmes as such great weight is placed on probing deeply into the main field of study. There is a trend towards more stringent admission regulations for second-cycle studies. This means that the system does not favour interdisciplinary programmes or applied study".³⁶

Generally speaking the material shows that the evaluations have had major effects on the way the HEIs work with the independent projects. If the entire process is taken into account, from when the students begin work on their independent project to its completion, it can be seen that the HEIs first attempt to limit the possibility of students with inadequate prior knowledge from starting the courses provided. This has sometimes taken the form of stipulating different kinds of requirements, for instance which course have to have been completed before starting on the independent project. In addition requirements have been laid down about the subjects they can deal with. This latter stipulation may possibly discourage the overall breadth of a programme. Then, once students have started their independent projects, those responsible at the HEIs have attempted in different ways to provide more explicit instructions and guidelines, better supervision and have finally also tightened the criteria on which they are graded by examiners.

³⁴ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 1.

³⁵ CFA's interview survey, p. 26

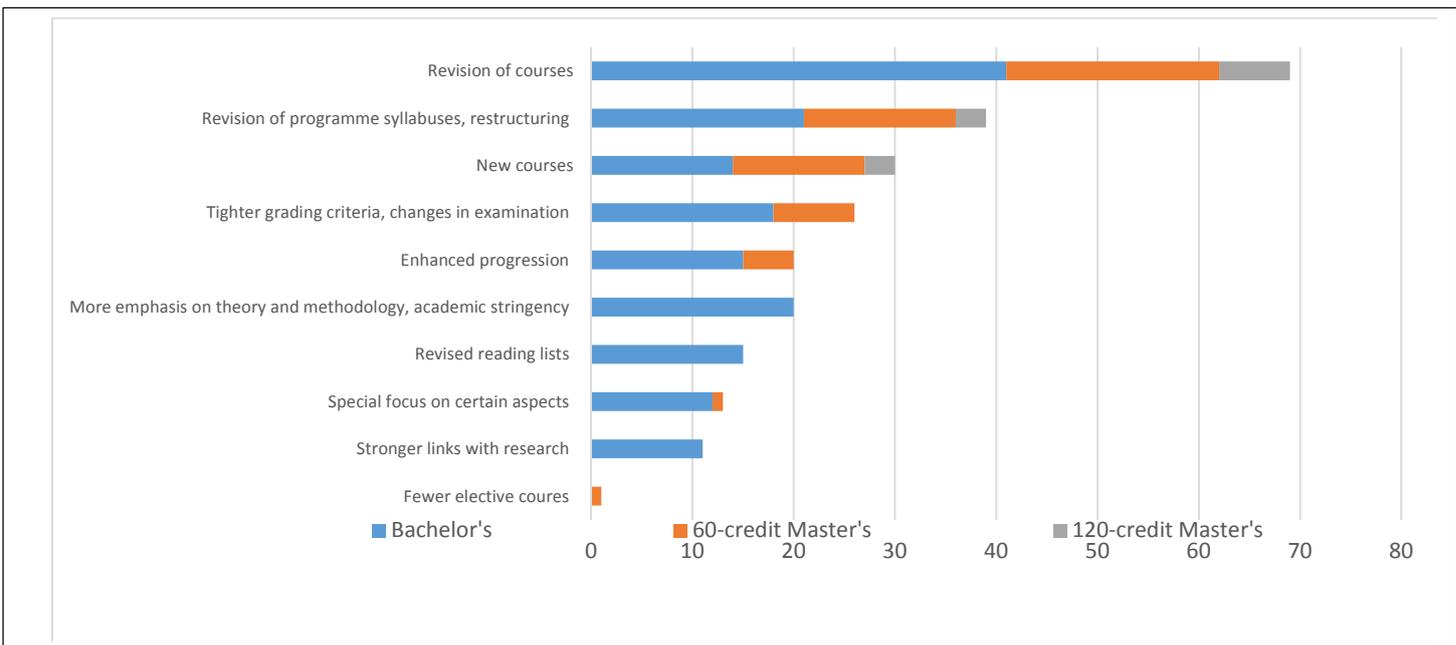
³⁶ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 3

THE EFFECTS ON THE STRUCTURE OF COURSES AND PROGRAMMES

What measures have been adopted that affect the courses? The material reveals that the evaluations have given rise to extensive activity and amendments of the programmes. A general review has taken place, above all of the programmes judged to be of inadequate quality but, to varying extents, of other programmes as well. A conclusion drawn from CFA's case study analysis of nine localities was that: "The quality reform has led to reflection on for instance the structure of programmes, progression and targets. This quality control is experienced as very beneficial and at all nine localities different enhancement methods have been adopted in the light of the process".³⁷

The HEIs have therefore reviewed programmes at an overall level and restructured them in various ways that have affected the courses they include. One frequent overall measure revealed by an analysis of the follow-up opinions is review of programme syllabuses, which is shown in Diagram 3. Even more commonly, the HEIs have, in connection with a follow-up review, conducted a thorough survey of a number of course syllabuses, and this is the most frequent measure in this cluster and generally as well.

Diagram 3. The number of measures relating to qualitative targets indicated in a selection of the review panels' opinions in round 2 until 1 March 2015 in the course category. A total of 240 measures were noted in this category



Almost all programmes report some form of revision of their course syllabuses or other changes linked to the courses among measures adopted to remedy shortcomings related to one of the targets brought to their attention by the evaluations. Revision of course syllabuses is a very broad category and can mean many different things, so it is not surprising that this measure is one that has been adopted to a large extent for several qualitative targets.

Analysis of the follow-up opinions shows that the establishment of new courses was also a frequent measure in this cluster. Sometimes these courses dealt directly and

³⁷ CFA's case study survey, p. 9.

specifically with features in which the evaluation had identified shortcomings. These could include, for instance, special lectures on different aspects of the qualitative targets in the Qualifications Ordinance, such as ethical or societal issues. Other measures were also adopted to deal with specific areas in which the evaluations had identified shortcomings.

The analysis also revealed that the introduction of more stringent grading requirements in various ways and changes in the examination guidelines were also frequently adopted measures.

It was not unusual to enhance the significance of methodology and theory in the courses offered in order to strengthen a programme's academic approach. Measures that involved placing more emphasis on theory and enhancing the academic approach were measures that were adopted for a number of targets in Bachelor's programmes, to were the introduction of more stringent criteria and changes in examination methods.³⁸

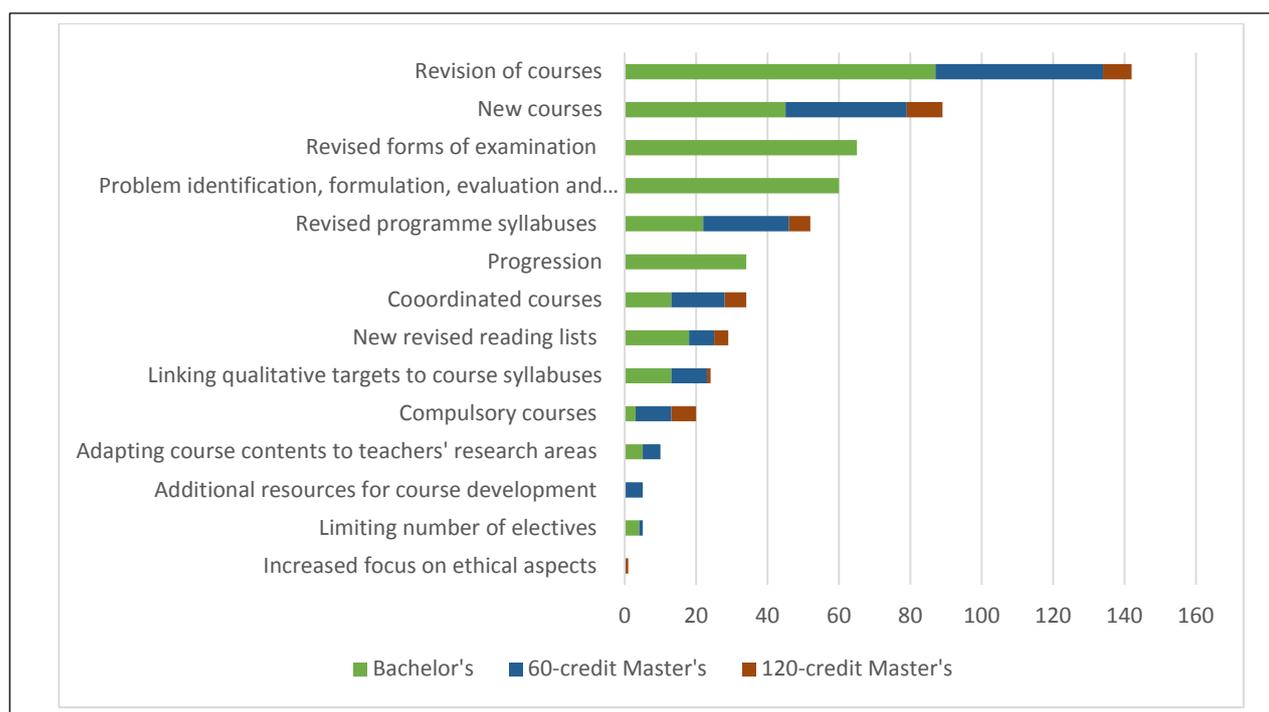
CFA's questionnaire survey also included a question to the programmes judged as having high or very high quality about measures adopted after the evaluations, to which 17 per cent of those responsible for these programmes responded that they had also increased the teaching of methodology. In addition, 34 per cent of those responsible for programmes with high or very high quality reported that course syllabuses had been revised after the evaluation. This occurred mainly in programmes leading to the award of a professional qualification, where 42 per cent of the respondents stated that this had taken place. It is of course possible here to wonder whether the changes made in programmes that were judged positively were the result of the evaluations or would have taken place nevertheless. A frequent measure mentioned in the follow-up opinions involved steps taken to enhance progression within programmes. The HEIs have deliberately focused on ensuring that the academic level rises progressively from one course to the next. Examples of measures adopted to ensure progression in the links with research include relating teaching to the teachers' research topics and requiring students to summarise scholarly papers. In CFA's survey of the programmes assessed as having high or very high quality, only 11 per cent of those responsible responded, however, that the links with research had been augmented.³⁹

Analysis of the reports on the measures adopted after round 1 also indicates similar outcomes, as can be seen in Diagram 4. Our study also shows that revision of the courses was the most frequently adopted measure. Establishing new courses after round 1 was, however, in our analysis the second most frequent measure, largely due to the fact that, for reasons which are not clear, this was a common measure in 60-credit Master's programmes.

³⁸ This paragraph is based on an analysis of the measures most frequently referred to for several of the qualitative targets in the follow-up opinions.

³⁹ CFA's questionnaire survey, p. 35.

Diagram 4. Number of measures noted in the measures reported for round 1 in the course category. A total of 570 measures were noted in this category.



The interviews with the contact persons for the programmes assessed as having high and very high quality also revealed that the evaluations had offered an opportunity for analysis of their structure and content. Work on the evaluations often began at the HEIs before UKÄ had started the process for specific programmes. This applies in particular to programmes in the main fields of study that were evaluated in the later rounds of the cycle, above all rounds 5 and 6 of the total of six rounds in the four-year cycle. By then there was greater awareness of the evaluation system in the sector and the HEIs' own internal quality assurance units had developed better support routines.

SUHF's questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators also reveals that some of the HEIs had themselves initiated "pre-evaluations" of the independent projects.⁴⁰ Many of those interviewed in UKÄ's study also stated that the need for thorough reviews of programmes or courses had already existed but not been acted on. Work on the self-evaluations therefore offered them an opportunity to initiate these processes and to make the changes they had often considered but never found time to effectuate. Irrespective of attitudes to the evaluation methodology, the work on self-evaluations has in many cases given the HEIs strong incentives to analyse their programmes component by component – programme syllabuses, course syllabuses and other directives: to scrutinise the programmes from an overall perspective. Not infrequently scrutinies of this kind have also included aspects that extend well beyond what was required for the self-evaluations. The interviews also make it clear that the evaluations have provided many with greater awareness of the targets laid down in the Higher Education Ordinance and that measures have been introduced to link courses more explicitly with these targets. This will be discussed in greater detail in the section headed *Focus on the qualitative targets*.

⁴⁰ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 1.

In their free-text responses to UKÄ’s assessors questionnaire, several assessors refer to the way in which the evaluations have prompted a review of programmes at the HEIs. One of the assessors writes: “Despite the criticism, the analyses of the [qualitative] targets and self-reflection [...] have had a quality-enhancing function. Everything has been subject to scrutiny. The process itself means more than the sum of its results and comments. These were often only confirmation of what an HEI had itself observed during the process.”

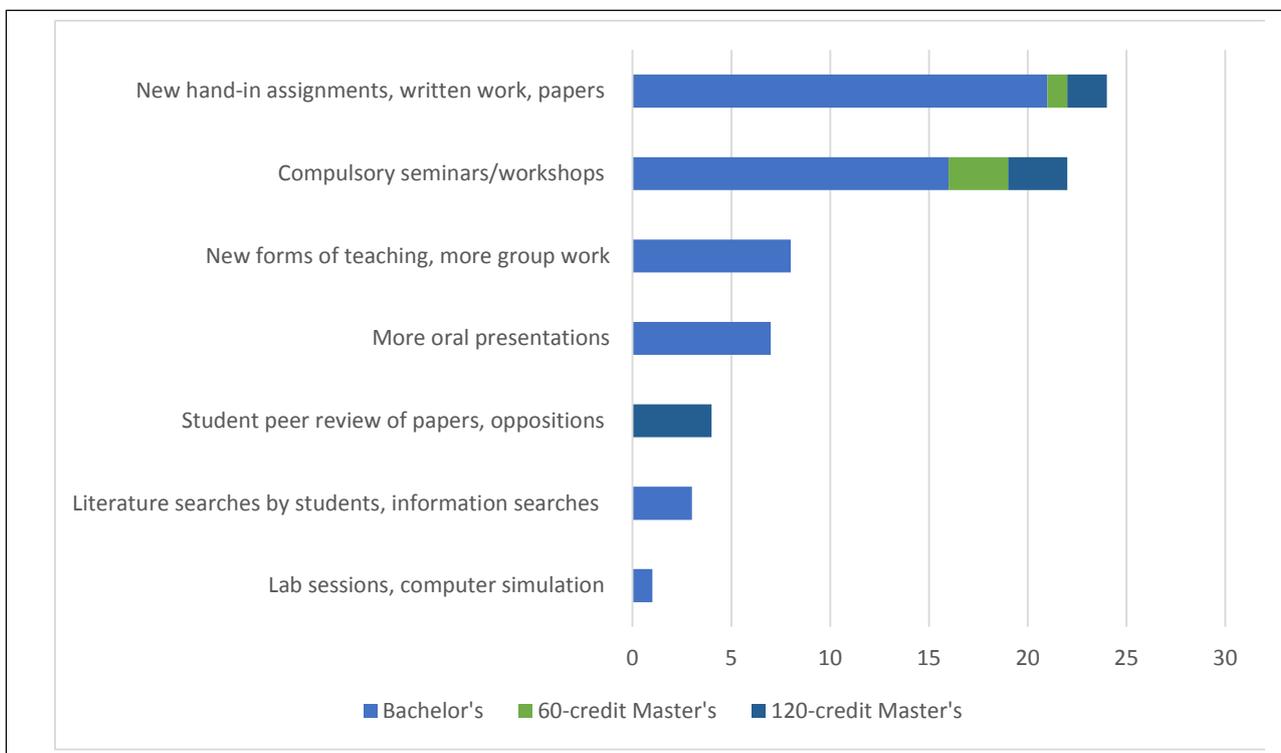
This is corroborated by SUHF’s questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators and in its report it states that: “Some appreciate the way in which the members of a faculty have been given a reason for reviewing ‘their’ programmes together – this has led to discussion and reconsideration of the entire structure of the programmes and a new way of enhancing their quality has been identified.”⁴¹

The material shows, as a whole, that the HEIs have reorganised their programmes and these processes have been prompted by the evaluations. They have renewed programme syllabuses, revised courses or introduced new ones. Reading lists have been reviewed and academic standards enhanced, for instance through the inclusion of more theory and methodology.

EFFECTS RELATING TO SPECIFIC SKILLS

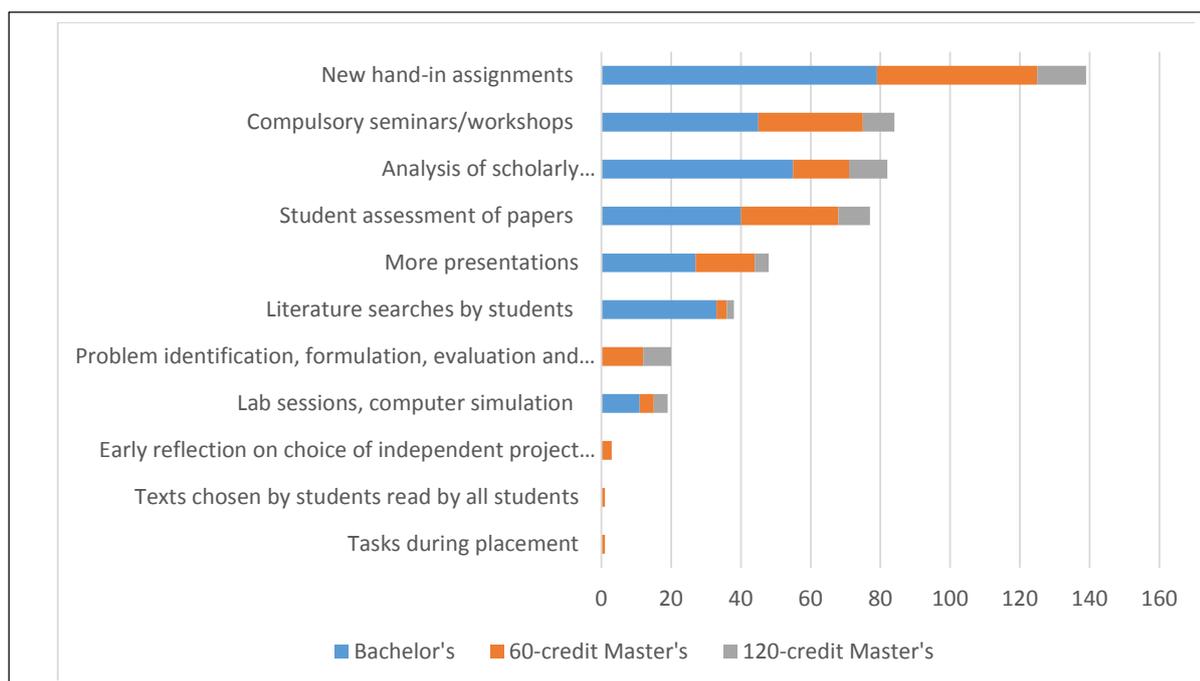
Analysis of the follow-up opinions and the measures reported for round 1 clearly reveals changes in course that more directly involve practice in specific skills. This is shown in Diagrams 5 and 6.

Diagram 5. The number of measures noted in the follow-up opinions for round 2 up until 1 March 2015 in the specific skills category. A total of 69 measures were noted in this category.



⁴¹ SUHF’s questionnaire survey, p. 1.

Diagram 6. The number of measures noted in the measures reported for round 1 in the specific skills category. A total of 512 measures were noted in this category.



The most frequent measures that focused on specific skills, as both studies show, involves those responsible for the programmes at the HEIs introducing greater focus on different forms of writing practice. This can include hand-in assignments, written proficiency classes, lab reports and papers. The next most frequent form comprises compulsory seminars and workshops for the students. Compulsory seminars also belong to the measures adopted most frequently for several qualitative targets.⁴² The various measures in this category often involve providing the students more directly with specific skills that an evaluation has identified as lacking. Quite often, for instance, the students' poor writing skills are mentioned in the evaluation reports. Frequently, the HEIs respond by arranging direct training in this particular skill.

There are a number of instances of the HEIs altering educational methods and forms of teaching in different ways. Most frequently this involved introducing more process and problem based forms of teaching and increasing the amount of group work. It was also possible to discern increased emphasis on oral presentations to some extent.

To sum up, the measures most frequently adopted with regard to specific skills are the introduction of hand-in assignments of different kinds as well as an increase in the number of compulsory seminars and workshops.

EFFECTS RELATING TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH PROGRAMMES ARE OFFERED, SUCH AS TEACHING RESOURCES AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Have the evaluations had quality-enhancing effects with regard to the circumstances in which programmes are offered, above all in terms of teaching resources? Their effect on the allocation of teaching resources can mainly affect the programmes that were judged to be of inadequate quality.

⁴² This is based on an analysis of the measures cited for several qualitative targets in the follow-up opinions.

Diagram 7. The number of measures noted in the follow-up opinions for round 2 up until 1 March 2015 in the circumstances and teaching resources category. A total of 98 measures were noted in this category.

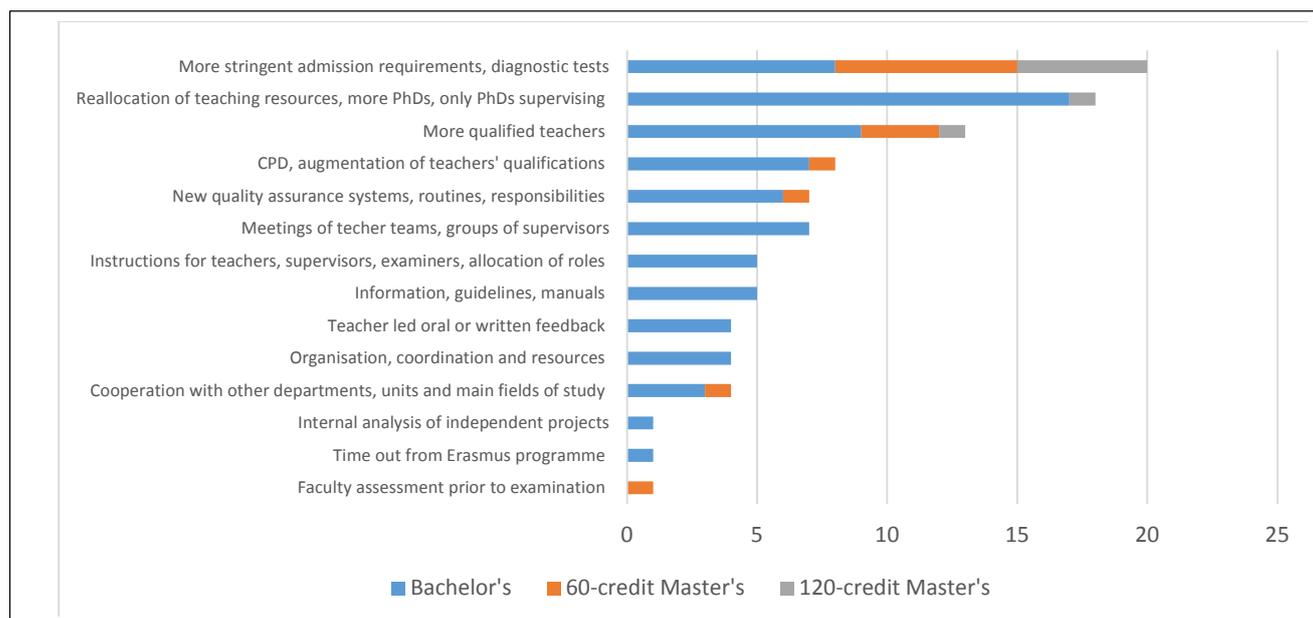


Diagram 7 shows that the most frequent measure that affected teachers was the reallocation by the HEI of existing teaching resources in some way. This is also one of the measures most frequently adopted for a number of qualitative targets.⁴³ It applies above all to Bachelor's programmes. It may consist of an HEI reallocating teaching hours so that more of a department's teachers with PhDs are involved in a programme. A HEI may also lay down guidelines that say, for instance, that only teachers with PhDs may supervise the students producing independent projects. Alternatively, or in combination with such measures, teachers may be allocated more time generally for teaching, supervision and examining. Changing the circumstances for a programme may also include structural adjustments and coordination initiatives within the HEI: both when it comes to teaching capacity and teachers' qualifications, as well as how the work is organised. The employment of more teachers for a programme is a less frequently adopted measure than restructuring. Continued professional development and other forms of skills enhancement for a programme's teachers to augment their qualifications also took place, as did the introduction by the HEI of meetings of teaching teams and of groups of supervisors in order to remedy shortcomings.

Overall, however, the measures most often adopted with regard to the circumstances in which a programme is offered comprised the introduction by the HEIs of more stringent requirements or diagnostic tests before allowing students to start work on their independent projects. This was the most frequent measure in both 60-credit and 120-credit Master's programmes. In the case of the 120-credit Master's programmes only a handful of measures relating to the circumstances in which they were offered could be identified and most of them involved more stringent admission requirements.

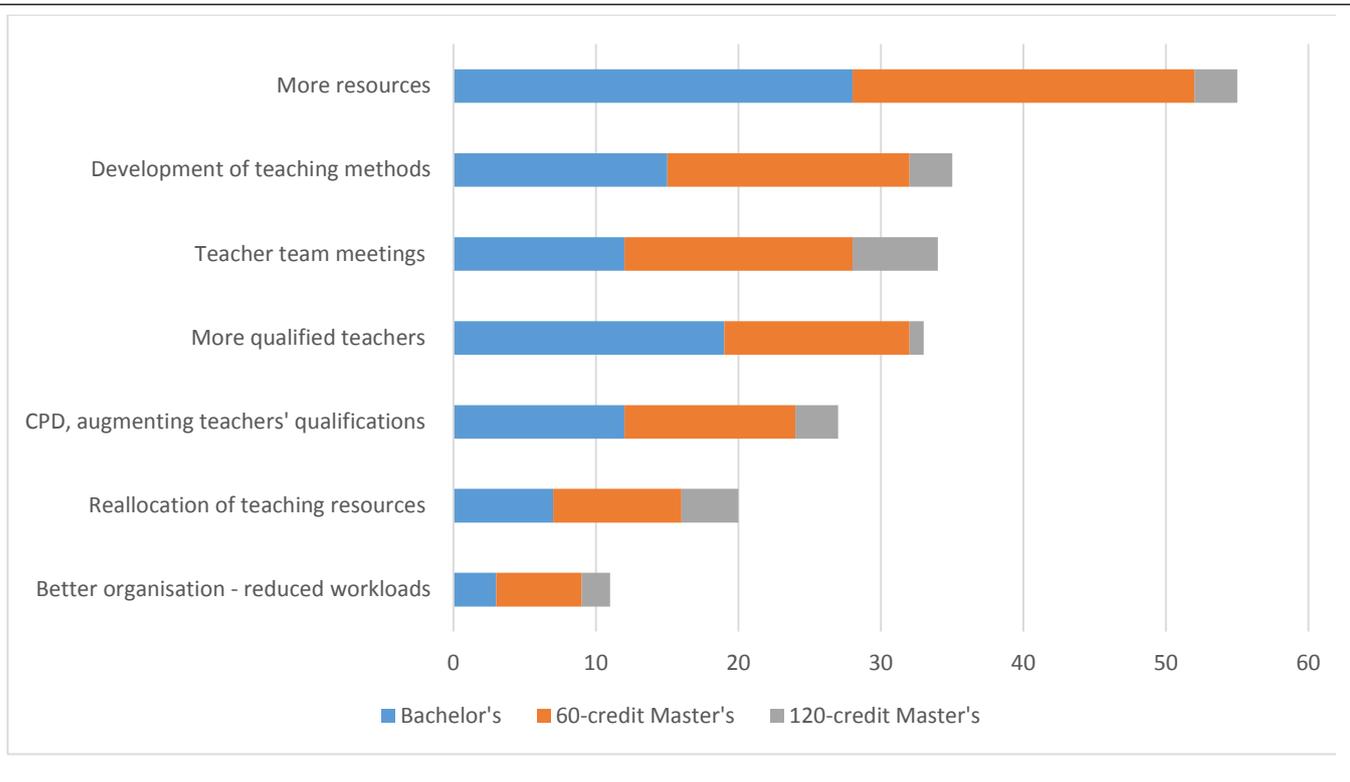
Another aspect of the circumstances in which programmes are offered comprises internal quality assurance and quality control procedures and these were referred to by a number of HEIs in their reports on the measures adopted. This will be dealt with

⁴³ This is based on an analysis of the measures mentioned for several targets in the follow-up opinions.

more closely in the section on overall effects in the next section of this report. A number of programmes described enhancement of their quality assurance systems and tighter routines for the meetings of teacher teams and of groups of supervisors, which have already been mentioned, as well as systematic cooperation with other units and main fields of study within the HEI. This too will be dealt with in the next section of this report. Changes in the circumstances surrounding programmes also included the introduction of better information for students in the form of guides and manuals as well as cooperation with other HEIs.

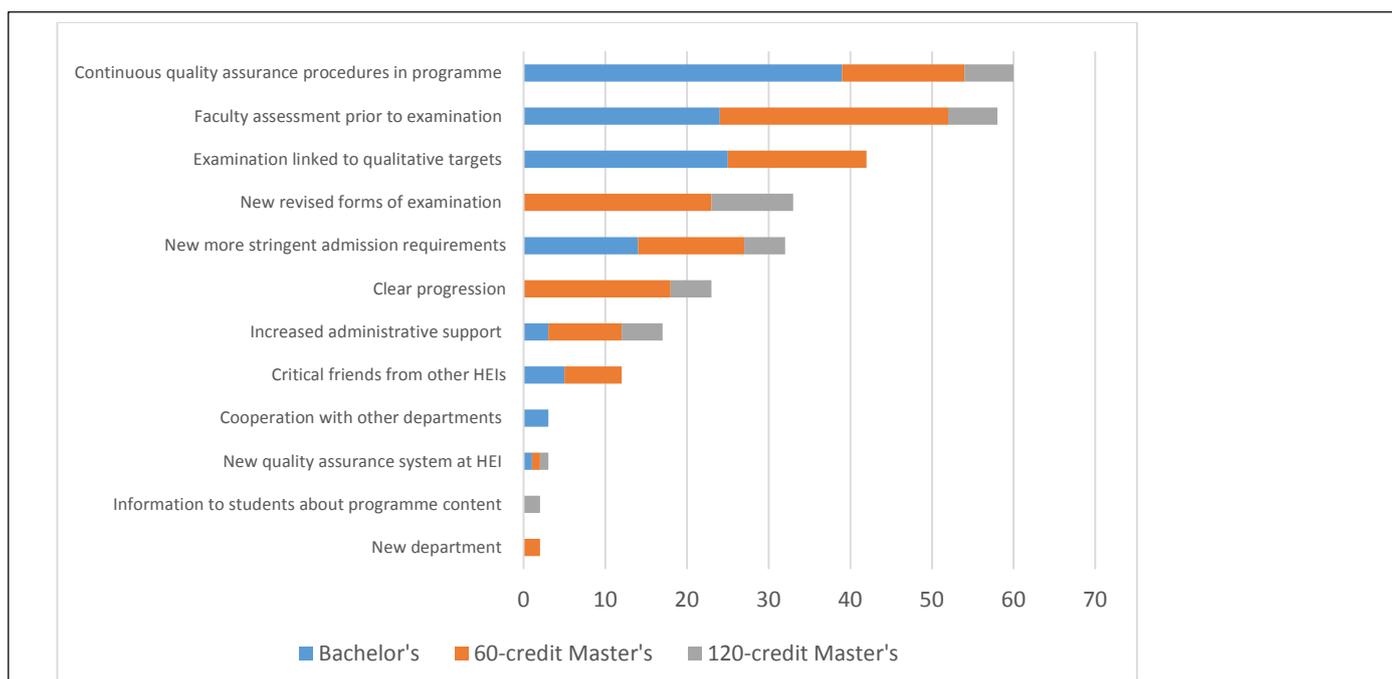
The analysis of the measures reported for round 1 placed teaching resources and quality assurance in two separate categories, see Diagrams 8 and 9. Nevertheless the evaluations seem to have had more or less the same effects as in round 2 up until 1 March 2015. Here, however, measures involving quality assurance procedures and the provision of more resources seem to be more frequent.⁴⁴

Diagram 8. The number of measures noted in the measures reported for round 1 in the teaching resources category. A total of 215 measures were noted in this category.



⁴⁴ As has already been mentioned there are certain minor differences between the studies with regard to the categorisation of measures and these can be seen most clearly here. This may have affected the results for these clusters. As has also already been mentioned, differences in the results may also be the result of including different main fields of study in the various rounds or/and variations to some extent in the nature of the material.

Diagram 9. The number of measures noted in the measures reported for round 1 in the quality assurance/control category. A total of 287 measures were noted in this category.



Generally, the most important effects relating the circumstances in which programmes are offered consist of the introduction of more stringent requirements before students begin work on the independent projects. This applies above all to 60-credit Master's programmes. Different measures affecting the teachers, such as reallocating hours, continued professional development and teacher-team meetings are also very frequent. Another measure often adopted was to change the information provided to both teachers and students. Improvement of quality assurance procedures was common, as can be seen in this study mainly from the reports on measures adopted for round 1.⁴⁵

General effects

In addition to the direct effects it is also possible to identify a number of more general effects of the evaluations, i.e. effects that cannot directly be attributed to specific evaluations or follow-up reviews. These effect could be categorised as indirect effects.

PROGRAMME REVIEW

In the section headed *Effects on the organisation of courses and programmes* it has already been pointed out that the evaluations often meant that the different programmes at the HEIs have undertaken general reviews of their work. The section *Can the effects be explained by the evaluation* also makes it clear that the HEIs have conducted their own reviews. In CFA's interview survey it is also pointed out that the evaluations have led to "... strategic considerations about the programmes offered at the HEIs".⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The reason why quality assurance procedures are more prominent in the material from round 1 may be due to the differences in the material, where the reports on measures adopted are more extensive than the follow-up opinions.

⁴⁶ CFA's interview survey, p. 22

FOCUS ON THE QUALITATIVE TARGETS

The evaluations have also meant that the HEIs have increased their focus on the qualitative targets. For example several of the vice-chancellors interviewed in CFA's study state that "... it has led to greater awareness and understanding of the qualification descriptors and the qualitative targets".⁴⁷ Interviews of representatives of the HEIs at both central and local level made in connection with UKÄ's internal methodological development in 2014 also showed that there was greater awareness of the national qualitative targets and that the evaluations had stimulated discussion of these targets and their relationship to the programmes at the HEIs. In addition, this aspect was prominent in the interviews of the contact persons, during which all respondents cited greater awareness of the qualitative targets as one effect of the evaluations.

To begin with, therefore, the evaluations have raised awareness and knowledge about the targets in the Qualifications Ordinance and focused attention on them. Several of the quality coordinators responding to SUHF's questionnaire survey answered that the evaluation had helped to place focus on the targets in the Qualifications Ordinance and how students were examined, as well as how progression could be ensured. A number also claim that the evaluations contributed to the implementation of the Bologna reform.⁴⁸

Secondly, as is shown mainly by UKÄ's interviews, the evaluations also gave the HEIs an opportunity to compare their own local targets for their programmes with those laid down in the Qualifications Ordinance. In many cases the HEIs have linked these to different courses, which has made the work of many of those involved concrete and constructive. This process has resulted in revision of course syllabuses in order to substantiate the progression in a programme. This applies irrespective of whether in practice the qualification evaluated was one awarded on completion of a degree programme or after sufficient credits had been gained through freestanding courses. The HEIs have, in other words, taken great care to ensure that there is clear progression in the programmes as a result of UKÄ's evaluations.

Greater focus on the qualitative targets is also referred to in responses to UKÄ's assessors questionnaire. By far the most frequent comment from those who responded to the questionnaire's free-text questions related to this. The assessors confirm the view of the contact persons that previously there had not been a great deal of knowledge about the qualitative targets in programmes offered. One assessor wrote: "The need to interpret the qualitative targets in the Qualifications Ordinance and relate to them to the local targets has grown, which in itself has engendered greater awareness of the aim and targets of different aspects and courses in the programmes".

CFA's questionnaire survey also provides strong support for the view that focus on the targets in the Qualifications Ordinance has increased. Of those responsible for programmes who responded to the study, 51 per cent are in "great" or "very great" agreement with the statement that "The quality reform has created greater awareness and understanding of the Qualifications Ordinance and the qualitative targets". Those responsible above all for programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications agree with this statement (61 per cent).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ CFA's interview survey, p. 21.

⁴⁸ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 1.

⁴⁹ CFA's questionnaire survey, p. 46.

The responses from the student unions also mention this. What differentiates the students' responses from the others is that the unions' representatives make a clearer link between examination and the targets. A few of these representatives point out that as a result of the evaluations examinations have become more comprehensive in order to cover all the qualitative targets, which does not seem to have had an unquestionably positive reception from the unions and their members. The material is not, however, extensive enough to enable any conclusions to be drawn about whether this is something that has occurred to any great extent at the HEIs.

Internal cooperation

WITH CENTRAL QUALITY UNITS

The support provided by the HEIs for the contact persons varied widely both in form and extent. Some felt that they had been given a great deal of assistance by a central quality coordinator at their own HEI, while others described how they had instead been given more or less extensive support by their faculties. This support could, for instance, take the form of someone who had an overall view of several evaluations reading through the draft version of their self-evaluation and making comments. It is also clear that the HEIs had become better prepared or more competent in providing central support for later rounds in the evaluation cycle. Some contact persons stated that they had been allocated specific hours for work on the evaluation but this does not seem to have been too common, as several were unhappy about having to work on the evaluations in addition to all their other duties. With regard to the time devoted to the evaluations, some of those interviewed when asked directly about negative effects said that even if the evaluation has been valuable it had still taken too much of their time – time that could have been used for other quality-enhancing activities. In SUHF's questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators it also became clear that the "short time frame" for the self-evaluation had been a problem as it collided with other activities. Evaluation involves a great deal of work.⁵⁰

A number of HEIs have units that work specifically with quality assurance issues. Their work has included providing support for those working locally with the evaluations. It was above all in connection with the self-evaluations that these central units participated and provided points of view and material. CFA's questionnaire survey shows that the evaluations have had an impact on the HEIs' central, coordinated and systematic quality assurance procedures. This is made clear by the responses of 70 per cent of those responsible for the programmes saying that their HEI had a unit of this kind or had set one up in connection with the evaluations. Five per cent responded that a central quality assurance unit had been established in their HEI in connection with the evaluations, while 20 per cent did not know if such a unit existed.⁵¹ CFI's interview study contains a description of how many HEIs "... have taken a more active role centrally in quality assurance procedures through assigning, for instance, a pro-vice-chancellor to head the coordination of these endeavours or

⁵⁰ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 2.

⁵¹ Here it can also be added that just under 5 per cent of the respondents did not at all expect a quality assurance unit to be established. CFA's questionnaire survey, p. 23.

creating a support structure around the self-evaluation processes and the general quality assurance procedures in the different programme settings".⁵²

In other words the evaluations have made an impact on the HEIs' central, coordinated and systematic quality assurance procedures. In CFA's questionnaire, however, 57 per cent of those responsible for the programmes responded that systematic quality assurance procedures were in place even before the evaluations.⁵³ SUHF's questionnaire survey of the quality coordinators also shows that the evaluation system had "... stimulated review of the programmes in their entirety and dialogue between those responsible for the various programmes in the same round as well as between different levels within the university".⁵⁴

Analysis of the follow-up opinions reveals that changes in the systematic quality assurance procedures are sometimes mentioned as measures adopted to remedy shortcomings, although not frequently at this level.

The interviews with the contact persons show that they were nearly all satisfied with the support they received from their HEI's central administration or their faculties. Some of those interviewed stated that they had been given extra resources to work with the evaluations, but these seem to be exceptions. Among the respondents to CFA's questionnaire survey 58 per cent agreed with the statement that they "had been given instructions and guidance by their own administrations or those responsible for quality as preparation for the evaluation". It is also clear that the programmes judged to have high or very high quality considered to a somewhat greater extent that they had received central support than those considered to have inadequate quality.⁵⁵ This study provides no scope, however, for an answer to the question of whether or not the evaluation of the attainment of high or very high quality can be explained in terms of the support provided centrally by the HEIs.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES

The interviews with the contact persons reveal that the evaluations stimulated greater cooperation between different main fields of study within an HEI. This has often come about through the HEI's quality unit. Frequently this can take the form, for instance, of a seminar at which representatives of programmes that have undergone evaluation provide information for those next in line about the process and how it was experienced. In a few specific cases, which is shown by the interviews, programmes evaluated as attaining high quality have benefited from improvements made in programmes at the same HEI previously considered to have inadequate quality. For instance at one HEI all the main fields of study have been able to take advantage of a joint writing workshop established to remedy the shortcomings that had earlier been identified in one of them. How common this was generally it is impossible to say, however.

⁵² CFA's interview survey, p. 22.

⁵³ CFA's Questionnaire survey, p.32. This is in other words irrespective of the existence of or support from a central quality assurance unit.

⁵⁴ SUHF's questionnaire survey, p. 2.

⁵⁵ CFA's Questionnaire survey, p. 24.

STUDENT UNION INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY-ENHANCING PROCESSES (INTERNAL COOPERATION)

One of the questions posed to the student unions about their involvement in quality-enhancing processes read as follows: “What effects do you consider the evaluations have had at your HEI? For instance with regard to the quality of programmes, the way in which the HEI works with educational quality or the student union’s way of working with quality issues? Or in any other way?” Some student unions report that they have worked with the programmes evaluated as having inadequate quality and that focus has been placed on these programmes at the HEI. It seems that it is mainly the student unions at HEIs offering programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications that have become involved in the work of remedying shortcomings. One of these student unions described the follow-up process after such an evaluation as follows: “The student union has been highly involved in this process and was invited to take part in all the discussions. As far as we know the outcome has been positive and the students are very satisfied with the new structure”.

One question that has been raised in connection with the follow-up process is whether a programme should interact more with other professional groups. The evaluations seem, according to several student unions, to have put pressure on the HEIs to systematise their quality assurance procedures and have therefore created greater awareness of them. Some student unions say that this has given rise to different kinds of scrutiny and the links between examinations and targets have been strengthened. Some student unions have discussed targets that were felt to be uncertain. The representative of one student union writes: I believe, however, that the quality evaluations, although they are sometimes described as a ‘necessary evil’ have had an impact on the HEI’s quality assurance procedures in several ways”.

There are signs to suggest that sharing work on the evaluations, above all the task of recruiting students for the interviews, helped to bring the student unions and the HEIs closer to each other. Cooperation on recruiting students may have helped to establish a sound dialogue and also a chance to exert influence. The representative of one of the large student unions writes: “Cooperation on the interviews helped to establish a very positive and continuing dialogue between the departments concerned and the student union. I also feel that a number of students realised that they can participate and influence their programmes and that the positive response from the university and the dialogue with UKÄ increased their appetite for involvement in educational policy issues”.

There are therefore indications that the evaluations also increased the concern of students active in the student union for the quality of programmes. CFA’s case study survey covering nine educational localities showed that “ordinary” students (i.e. not those who play an active role in the student union) rarely knew about the evaluations. Only a few of the students interviewed in CFA’s study were aware, either, of what evaluation their programme had received.⁵⁶ One conclusion is, therefore, that it was mainly a few active members of the student unions that were knowledgeable about the evaluations and involved in the responses of the HEIs to the various evaluations programmes have received.

⁵⁶ CFA’s case study survey, p. 45.

It should, however, be pointed out that students are involved in the quality assurance of their programmes in contexts other than UKÄ's quality evaluations. The course evaluations students are asked to complete offer one example of quality enhancement measures that lie well outside the parameters of UKÄ's evaluations and almost certainly interest many students.⁵⁷

External cooperation

Several of the contact persons interviewed in UKÄ's survey state that contacts with programmes at other HEIs have increased as an effect of UKÄ's quality evaluations. The meeting to which representatives of the HEIs are summoned by UKÄ in the start-up phase of the evaluations resulted in some cases in the establishment of contacts with others involved, and in a few cases this led to new cooperation between programmes at different HEIs. This cooperation applied to the HEIs' quality assurance procedures and also led to exchanges of supervisors and examiners for the independent projects. To what extent effects of this kind are general cannot be determined on the basis of the material available. The feed-back conferences that UKÄ arranged were highly appreciated and offered good opportunities for networking and fertile soil for future cooperation.

Summary of the overall effects

Altogether the analysis of the indirect overall effects shows that reviews have been made of programmes in their entirety or of their constituent elements and that awareness of and focus on the qualitative targets have increased. The evaluations also resulted in greater internal cooperation at the HEIs. This concerns both cooperation with the internal quality assurance units, which have often provided support, as well as with other programmes to some extent. The evaluations may also have had some degree of impact on the external cooperation of the HEIs. A limited number of members of the student unions also acquired awareness of, and were involved in, the work carried out by the HEIs on the evaluations, which could have had a quality-enhancing effect.

⁵⁷ Appraisal of the way in which the HEIs deal with course evaluations may, however, be included in UKÄ's supervision of the HEIs, in connection with inspections, for instance.

Discussion and reflections

This report shows that the 2011–2014 quality evaluation system had quality-enhancing effects at several levels, both overall effects as well as measures that impact directly on the structure and implementation of programmes (direct effects). The evaluations had a major influence on the programmes judged to be of inadequate quality when compared with those assessed as attaining high or very high quality. But judging from the material there were also explicit effects on these programmes as well.^{58, 59}

Overall effects

- The HEIs were given an opportunity to make thorough reviews of their programmes, which led to greater focus on quality assurance procedures.
- The evaluation gave rise to greater cooperation between different programmes in the same HEIs. This cooperation has often been aided by the central administrative unit working with quality issues at the HEI or assistance has been provided at faculty level.
- Awareness of and the focus on the qualitative targets laid down in the Qualifications Ordinance increased.

Direct effects

- The most frequent direct effect consisted of extensive revisions of course and programme syllabuses, which are also linked to the reviews referred to above. New courses were introduced, for instance to deal with certain specific aspects in which the evaluation has identified shortcomings. Reading lists were revised.
- The evaluations resulted in greater focus on the independent projects. The requirements laid down before students can start to work on them were made clearer to make it more difficult for students who lack the knowledge needed to begin. Additional instructions and guidelines for the independent projects have been produced. They are graded on more stringent criteria.
- Supervision of the independent projects has been enhanced, developed and improved.
- More teaching of theory and scholarly discussion was introduced. Additional methodology teaching was added to the programmes.
- There was greater focus on specific skills, for instance through the introduction of more hand-in assignments, written proficiency classes, lab reports and papers.
- Changes were made in the allocation of teaching resources as well as reorganisation of how teachers are used. Higher qualifications were required of both those supervising and acting as examiners of the independent projects. A

⁵⁸ The great extent to which the evaluations have had effects on programmes judged to be of inadequate quality is corroborated by CFA's questionnaire survey. Its conclusion is basically that this kind of measure is more or less the same for these programmes and those judged to attain high or very high quality. The only systematic difference is that the programmes that have undergone the follow-up process "... adopted measures to a very much greater extent. CFA's questionnaire survey, p.33.

⁵⁹ Given the material selected for this report about the follow-ups it is possible to show the effect on programmes leading to the award of general qualifications with greater certainty. But as the follow-up process is the same as for these programmes one can, however, expect the same effects in those leading to the award of professional qualifications. Whether these effects differ systematically from those in programmes leading to general qualifications will have to be determined in a future study when the follow-up process has been concluded.

certain amount of continued professional development has also been offered to teachers.

- Better information was provided to students about the structure of their programmes.
- Diagnostic tests and more stringent admission requirements were introduced.

In addition to the quality-enhancing effects this analysis has also been able to discern a number of negative effects.

- Greater emphasis on the independent projects may in certain cases have led to a shift of resources from other aspects of a programme which, in some areas could be considered more important. The focus of evaluations can always have an impact on the direction taken by the programmes concerned. Priority may be given to theoretical knowledge at the expense of training in practical skills. The evaluations could also threaten to reduce the breadth of programmes, if a greater degree of in-depth study is required before allowing students to start on their independent projects. There is also a risk that evaluation could become normative and restrict academic freedom.
- Teachers also had to devote a great deal of time to the evaluations: time that could otherwise have been used for other quality-enhancing measures.

In addition, there has been criticism that the method adopted in the most recent system to review outcomes threatens to undermine the trust between UKÄ and the HEI.⁶⁰ Some of this criticism is based, to put it simply, on the idea that the most recent system does not support the HEIs' own quality assurance procedures as it is not based on these internal procedures and in consequence the HEIs are hindered from developing their ownership of and responsibility for quality evaluations of their own programmes.⁶¹ This criticism, which has been expressed mainly by senior administrators at HEIs, can be linked to the negative regulatory aspect often attributed to the evaluation system in discussions. One version of this criticism has also been voiced in an international context. In 2014 UKÄ was demoted from full membership to "associate membership" of ENQA.⁶² One important reason for this was that the evaluation system's focus on outcomes did not permit assessment of the HEIs' internal quality assurance procedures.

⁶⁰ In SUHF's report entitled *Internationella utblickar i kvalitetssäkring av högre utbildning* (2013) its expert group on quality issues write: "As the Swedish system is purely regulatory it provides no incentives for the development of trust between the National Agency/Swedish Higher Education Authority and the HEIs, even though this would provide advantages for many other reasons", p. 12.

⁶¹ SUHF's expert group on quality issues advocate, for example, an evaluation system based on the HEIs themselves assuming responsibility for directly controlling the quality of their various programmes and in which the role of UKÄ would mainly be to check that inspections of programmes are undertaken appropriately. *Slutrapport från SUHF:s expertgrupp för kvalitetsfrågor 2012 – 2013 [Final report from SUHF's expert group on quality issues 2012–2013]*, pp. 9 – 11. See also p. 5 in appendix 10 of the same report. Several of the vice-chancellors interviewed in CFA's survey express support for SUHF's proposal (CFA's interview study, p. 25). This interview survey also states that "... among the vice-chancellors there is broad agreement that the evaluation system places too much weight on outcomes and too little on process", p. 23

⁶² ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) is an organisation that promotes the quality assurance of higher education in Europe.

The aims and approaches of different systems

COMPARISON WITH EARLIER SYSTEMS

One way of attempting to assess the effects is to make a comparison with the previous evaluation systems undertaken by HSV. There have been two previous evaluation cycles, of which only the 2001–2006 cycle was completed. A comparison of the overall aims as well as the approaches and the effects of the 2001–2006 and 2011–2014 evaluations is presented below.

AIMS

The aim of the 2001–2006 evaluation system was, as described in the directives issued by HSV to the HEIs, threefold: to contribute to quality development at the HEIs or their counterparts, to assess whether the programmes complied with the targets and provisions laid down in the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance and to provide information about programmes, for instance to students before they choose their course of studies.⁶³ In other words there were three watchwords or tasks: enhancement, control and information, and enhancement was placed first while the importance of control was played down. At the same time the evaluation assignment included control: shortcomings were to be identified and HSV could invoke its mandate to withdraw entitlement to award qualifications if quality was inadequate.

The task of developing the quality of the programmes was mainly accomplished through recommendations to the HEIs, which formed part of the otherwise fairly comprehensive reports submitted by the panels of assessors. The information aspect was mainly discharged by publishing a summary of these reports and their recommendations on the agency's website.

How then did this differ from the most recent system (2011–14)? In its report *Högskoleverkets system för kvalitetsutvärdering [The National Agency for Higher Education's quality evaluation system]*⁶⁴ it is stated that the evaluations in the latest system “are to focus on the outcomes of programmes and are intended to judge whether a programme results in the attainment of the targets in the qualification descriptors”. This means that the focus has been placed on control at the expense of enhancement. Does this mean that the quality enhancing aspect of the task has been eliminated completely?

Not entirely, as the report also states that the evaluations are also to “be able to provide grounds on which the Government may allocate a small proportion of funding”. The idea here was, as is described in the Government Bill *Fokus på kunskap [Focus on knowledge]*, that quality should be rewarded: a high rating of a programme would result in additional resources to the HEI concerned.⁶⁵ This can be said to mean that the impetus to development once provided by the recommendations now took the form of an incentive in the shape of rewards for excellent quality.

Finally, HSV's description of the new quality evaluation system also pointed out that “students, the commercial sector, public agencies and other stakeholders [need]

⁶³ *Nationella ämnes- och programutvärderingar [National evaluation of subjects and programmes]*, Directives and material for self-evaluation, Högskoleverket, 2002.

⁶⁴ *Högskoleverkets system för kvalitetsutvärdering [The National Agency for Higher Education's quality evaluation system]*, Report 2012:15 R, HSV, p. 8 ff. This report was adopted in December 2010, but revised in June 2012.

⁶⁵ *Focus on knowledge – quality in higher education*. Govt. Bill 2009/10:139, pp. 27–32.

information about the quality of programmes”.⁶⁶ The information requirement remained, therefore, unchanged.

The task of control and enhancement was discharged through brief evaluations of goal attainment using a three-point scale and responsibility for allocating any extra resources lay with the Government. The information aspect was dealt with in a special internet application, *Resultatsök*, which made it easy to access the results of the evaluations on the agency’s website.

This means that the aims of the two systems have many points in common, even if their emphasis differed. The same applies to the approach used to attain these aims.

APPROACHES

The approach adopted in the recently completed 2011–2014 system involved assessing outcomes. This focus on results is often compared to the lack of any counterpart in the previous 2001–2006 system.

Appraisal of the outcomes of programmes was included in the evaluations undertaken then as well, but only as one element of several in what was described as the explicatory approach in the model on which the system was based. This approach meant that both preconditions, process and outcomes were to be reviewed and that a programme’s characteristic features were to be aggregated and explained. This was a wide-ranging approach and in practice the system focused on preconditions and process and in it descriptions of the teaching resources as well as of the course syllabuses played a decisive role for the evaluation results determined by HSV. In this way the system closely resembled in its implementation the methods used by UKÄ to appraise applications for entitlement to award qualifications. While this was a strength, a weakness lay in the lack of any element of evaluation of outcomes in the form of the results of programmes.

There may be several different reasons for the way in which the 2001–2006 evaluation system did not take outcomes into account to any great extent. In practice, one difference between the systems was that quality was mainly assessed in the earlier system on the basis of the relevant sections of the Higher Education Act while the starting point for the later system was derived from the qualitative targets laid down in the Qualifications Ordinance, which is Annex 1 of the Higher Education Ordinance. The wording of the Higher Education Act mainly lays down the fundamental requirements and principles for the provision of higher education, i.e. prerequisites and processes. The Qualifications Ordinance stipulates what students have to have attained when they graduate, i.e. the outcomes of their programmes.⁶⁷

In this context the composition of the panels of assessors is important as well, as it provided the expertise to enable appraisal of the various and relatively distinct aspects on which high quality is based according to the legislation, ordinances and regulations.

EFFECTS

The analysis presented above makes it clear that the recently completed 2011–2014 evaluation system had quality-enhancing effects at several levels. What then was the impact of the system adopted between 2001 and 2006?

⁶⁶ *Högskoleverkets system för kvalitetsutvärdering [The National Agency for Higher Education’s quality evaluation system]*, Report 2012:15 R, HSV, p. 8.

⁶⁷ A prerequisite was the introduction of qualitative targets for general qualifications in 2007. See the Qualifications Ordinance, annex 2 to the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100).

Making recommendations to the HEIs intended to contribute to the enhancement of quality was one of the tasks assigned to the assessors in this system. Recommendations leading to improvements were to be made generally, in principle irrespective of the results of an evaluation. HSV summarised these recommendations in its own conclusions. The HEIs' compliance with these recommendations was, however, voluntary except when a programme was judged to be of inadequate quality, when, as in the recently completed system, there was a mandatory review after one year. Whether or not the recommendations had been complied with or not played a decisive role in determining if shortcomings had been remedied.

In addition a general follow-up review was undertaken after three years of all the programmes included in the evaluations in a specific year. The aim of these reviews was to study how the HEIs had dealt with the recommendations and proposed improvements the evaluations had provided, as well as what other effects they had had. The results were then compiled in a report.⁶⁸

Effects that were repeatedly listed in these follow-up reports are the following (ranked here for the sake of clarity in the order of how frequently they were mentioned):

- Emphasis of the value of the evaluation for the HEI's internal quality assurance procedures and that work with the self-evaluation had been particularly valuable.
- Reviews of teachers' qualifications and more teachers being hired, and above all augmentation of the academic qualifications of the teaching community by increasing their research qualifications.
- Endeavours to organise more coherent programmes with more explicit unifying themes.
- Increasing national cooperation between programmes and HEIs that was considered to have resulted from the evaluations.
- Intensification of effort to create labour market links.
- Intensification of the work on improving course evaluation systems and student influence.
- Reorganisation of departments and subjects.
- Revision of reading lists and the introduction of more academic texts in the teaching.
- Teaching methodology and the organisation of supervision and examining seems to have been enhanced at certain HEIs but hardly generally.

The responses accounted for in the follow-up reports demonstrate the concrete effects of the previous 2001–2006 evaluation system. Some of these effects or measures were also reported after the 2011–2014 system as well, others not. Some of these differences can probably be explained by the different approaches of the two systems referred to above: the first was based mainly on the Higher Education Act, the second on the qualification descriptors in the Higher Education Ordinance.

⁶⁸ Follow-up report on the National Agency for Higher Education's evaluations of subjects and programmes 2000 and 2001, Report 2006:25 R, Follow-up report on the National Agency for Higher Education's evaluations of subjects and programmes 2002, Report 2008:9 R, Follow-up report on the National Agency for Higher Education's evaluations of subjects and programmes 2003, Report 2008:39 R, Follow-up report on the National Agency for Higher Education's evaluations of subjects and programmes 2004, Report 2010:6 R, Follow-up report on the National Agency for Higher Education's evaluations of subjects and programmes 2005, Report 2011:1 R.

One example of the difference in effects can be found in the attention paid to student influence that was one aspect of the first system but played no role in the later system. Another is provided by the emphasis on teachers' qualifications in the first system, which was a reflection of the link made in the Higher Education Act between teaching and research. Appraisal of the teachers' formal qualifications offered a concrete and pragmatic way of assessing this. In contrast teachers' qualifications were of little significance in the latest system and did not therefore have any major impact on the measures adopted except when HEIs have given them specific emphasis. The corresponding concrete and pragmatic data in the second evaluation consisted instead of tabulations of the assessments of goal attainment in the independent projects. There was virtually no systematic scrutiny of the independent projects during the earlier evaluation. These tabulations were based on the subject experts' qualitative assessment of the projects and they have probably played an important role for the manifest enhancement of the programmes provided by the system when it comes to the students' completion of their independent projects.

Another important difference between the systems applies to the impact on strengthening labour market links, an aspect considered significant in the preliminary planning of both systems. Its impact seems, however, to have been greater in the earlier system, even though labour market representatives were not included as a matter of course in the panels of assessors for programmes leading to the award of general qualifications, as they were in the later system. In addition, labour market representatives were consulted before each evaluation in the second system, even for general qualifications. One explanation of this difference may be that interaction with society (the third mission) was included as a specific item in the earlier system, based on the second paragraph of the Higher Education Act.⁶⁹ The evaluations made in the 2011–2014 system did not, as a rule, include any corresponding item.⁷⁰

The strong focus on the independent projects in the most recent system may also have meant that it has not been possible to assess more practical elements of programmes and therefore the evaluations have had no major impact on labour market links, for instance. Naturally it can then be argued that according to the wording of the Government Bill independent projects are themselves practical training. In a number of programmes they are also written in collaboration with external partners, even though there is a great deal of variation on this point between different main fields of study.

One similarity in the effects can be seen in the reviews of programmes in their entirety, which seem to have been prompted by both systems, but probably to some extent for different reasons. In the earlier system the self-evaluations and focus on course syllabuses exerted significant influence on the structure of programmes, in the later system structural changes can largely be attributed to the need to prepare students earlier in their studies for the academic and methodological demands that their independent projects entail.

The effects of the two systems in the form of the importance, impact and number of measure adopted are of course difficult to compare because, for instance, of the

⁶⁹ *Nationella ämnes- och programutvärderingar [National evaluation of subjects and programmes]*, Directives and material for self-evaluation, HSV, 2002.

⁷⁰ If the analysis of follow-up opinions and reports on measure adopted had included programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications, it is possible that a larger number of measures relating to labour market links would have been listed. The effects relating to labour market links in the 2001–2006 system are, however, general and not affected by the type of qualification involved.

differences in their approach and in the material and methods used to identify their consequences.⁷¹ Bearing this in mind, it is, however, worth noting that the earlier system does not seem to lead to any greater enhancement of quality than the second, even though its intention was to place more emphasis on development rather than control.

What the two systems had in common was that they have both been criticised.

CRITICISM

A number of the reports and opinions on which the analysis of the effects of the recently completed system has been based contain criticism of the evaluations.

The most frequently expressed criticism which comprises, in its turn, a number of facets, relates to the one-sided focus on outcomes through assessment of the independent projects. This criticism is expressed above all by the vice-chancellors in the CFA's interview study and by the assessors in UKÄ's assessors questionnaire. It is also voiced by some of the contact persons interviewed by UKÄ. UKÄ has, of course, also heard this criticism from other quarters, for instance via SUHF.

One aspect of this criticism comprises the thesis that focus on the independent projects is unfair for programmes that lead to the award of professional qualifications or have specific profiles, in which the independent projects do not reflect their qualitative targets as well as they do for general qualifications. Another aspect is the risk that focus on the independent projects will be at the expense of other parts of a programme.⁷²

Further expression of the same criticism is that the qualitative assessments of the independent projects are tabulated in quantitative terms so that a few individual ratings may have a major impact on the final evaluation.

In addition there is criticism that refers to other aspects of the system, such as lack of feed-back on the self-evaluations, or the lack of recommended improvements. The effects of the self-evaluations are not as obvious in the most recent system as in the first, and this applies both to the model and its practical application. In the earlier system the self-evaluations were an important element of the process, as they provided the material on which the evaluations were largely based. It can also be added here that the 2001–2006 system offered greater opportunity for dialogue with the panels of assessors as they consistently made site visits in person and regular feed-back conferences were arranged a few months after publication of the evaluation results.

Finally, there has also been the overall criticism that the most recent system has had a one-sided emphasis on control and that it has not therefore been developmental. This can be linked to the objections that have been made to the system's underlying premises: the assignment from the Government was far too detailed and focused on control.

There was also quite a lot of criticism of the 2001–2006 system. Some of this related to the emphasis on preconditions and the way this found expression in the

⁷¹ Another difference is that the earlier system was based on evaluations of subjects and the later one on evaluating main fields of study that led to the award of general qualifications. In both systems programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications were evaluated in their entirety.

⁷² The latter is not far from what is referred to in the research on evaluation as "teaching to the test", which can briefly be described as adapting teaching to the evaluations. This is described for instance by Lena Lindgren in her article in *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 2012/3, *En utvärderare om Högskoleverkets system för kvalitetsutvärdering 2011–2014* [Views of one assessor on the National Agency for Higher Education's system for quality evaluation 2011–2014], p. 480.

quantification of teachers' qualifications and teaching resources in terms of FTEs. As pointed out above, this offered a concrete way of evaluating the links between research and programmes. In the most recent system the corresponding quantitative assessment data comprised the tabulations of the appraisals of goal attainment in the independent projects. In principle, both systems lacked any qualitative data that could play a decisive role for the evaluations, despite the desire to develop this kind of material. Attempts to do so have been thwarted by the way in which data of this kind, if they are to be predictable and therefore transparent, can be perceived as far too normative. UKÄ and other agencies undertaking evaluations face the challenge of trying to identify methods of acquiring qualitative data that can be used in an explicitly quality-enhancing system. Another criticism concerned the emphasis in the system on processes and the great focus on the structure of course syllabuses this entailed.⁷³

It was also criticism of this system that prompted some of the features of the system that has now been completed. The Government Bill on the 2011–2014 evaluation system, *Focus on knowledge*, states that criticism "... found expression in the responses from the HEIs when the report from the Enquiry on Resources was circulated for comment and the proposal submitted by HSV in conjunction with its own response on this document. In the autumn of 2008 SUHF had also strongly criticised the earlier evaluations and advocated placing the focus on the outcomes of programmes".⁷⁴

This was augmented by the criticism of the system that applied from 2007 until 2008,⁷⁵ not least because a focus on outcomes was desired. Another critical opinion of this system was that the recommendations were far too binding. The criticism then expressed led to the introduction of a system intended to appraise the results of programmes in terms of goal attainment, not the ways in which this was achieved.

There will be no further discussion of the methodological shortcomings and advantages of the various systems here, even though there are good grounds for making them the subject of another study. We will return, on the other hand, to the question of control and enhancement and how distinct the dividing lines between these two functions are in reality.

Final discussion: control versus enhancement or control and enhancement.

The section on the effects of evaluations raised the question of whether the polarised division between the aim of evaluations as either mainly to control or to enhance. In discussions of UKÄ's recently completed evaluation system it has often been described as strongly focused on control in the negative sense.⁷⁶ Describing it like this also

⁷³ Qualitative data is used in the evaluations as they are based on "peer-review". In the earlier system this applied perhaps mainly to course syllabuses and programme structure, in the later one to the independent projects.

⁷⁴ *Focus on knowledge – quality in higher education*. Govt. Bill 2009/10:139., p. 13.

⁷⁵ HSV introduced a new evaluation system that it intended to apply from 2007 to 2012. The system was terminated, however, during the autumn of 2009. This was due to criticism of the system's emphasis on the quality of programme's outcomes and methodological concerns. *Focus on knowledge – quality in higher education*. Govt. Bill 2009/10:139., p. 11.

⁷⁶ As has been pointed out, this can be found in SUHF's report *Internationella utblickar i kvalitetssäkring av högre utbildning [International perspective on the quality assurance of higher education]* (2013) in which its expert group on quality issues write: As the Swedish system is purely regulatory it provides no incentives for the development of trust between the National Agency/Swedish Higher Education Authority and the HEIs, even though this would provide advantages for many other reasons", p. 12.

implies that the system lacks or has only weak quality-enhancing or developmental effects. The image presented in this report is, however, a different one. Analysis of the different forms of material has shown, for instance, that amendments have been made to programme and course syllabuses and that instructions and criteria have been tightened in order to improve the quality of programmes. These changes of components and specific details together with the general reviews of entire programmes that have been made at the HEIs must reasonably be viewed as developmental. Moreover it must be added that some of the measures adopted at the HEIs also comprise an analytical element. Here they are expected to make an analysis of the causes of the shortcomings for each qualitative target. There has been no scope in this study to include a review of these analyses as well, but it can reasonably be assumed that they have also played a quality enhancing role.

What is meant, then, by the claim that the recently completed system focused largely on control and was not therefore developmental? Three possible explanations will be discussed here: focus on outcomes, the lack of specifically addressed recommendations and the possibility of withdrawing entitlement to award qualifications.

Can the references to control be due to the system's focus on outcomes? The background and justification for this focus is provided by the Government Bill 2009/10:139. The decisive factor is the autonomy of the HEIs: the design of the evaluation must as far as possible eliminate impact on the way they operate as long as the targets laid down for them are attained. Another reason given in the bill is that criticism has been expressed of the previous evaluation system, not least by the HEIs, for focusing far too much on input and process and far too little on the outcomes of programmes. Even though outcome is a concept that can include a number of different results from a programme, evaluation by assessing outcomes hardly involves greater control than assessing input and process. Evaluation and review are forms of control, irrespective of the intention or approach.

Has the absence of specifically addressed recommendations reduced the developmental effect of the system? It would appear reasonable that this is the case. Recommendations can offer the experts in the evaluation panels a good way of circulating the experience they possess or acquire during the course of their appraisal. At the same time it is worth pointing out that the recommendations made in the previous evaluation system were criticised for exerting undue influence on the autonomy granted to the HEIs.⁷⁷

Moreover, there is only limited scope for recommendations in a system that focuses solely on assessing outcomes and not how these are attained. The latest system shifted responsibility for analysing any shortcomings in their programmes to the HEIs and with it the task of judging what measures are needed to remedy them. In this way it could be said that the HEIs have been asked to make their own recommendations. Programmes that the assessors considered had failed to attain their targets were reviewed after one year while the others have had to decide for themselves to make

⁷⁷ These observations were in fact mainly prompted by the selection of the assessors' recommendations to the HEIs published in the introductory sections of their reports by the National Agency, which according to the critics turned them into admonitions or something similar. The recommendations were only binding, however, when follow-up reviews were made of shortcomings that had led to programmes being notified that their entitlement to award a qualification could be withdrawn..

their own use of the evaluations for any enhancements they have wished to make. They also seem to have done so, according to the material used for this study, above all the interviews and CFA's study indicate that this was the case.

Finally, does the mandate to withdraw entitlement to award a qualification impede development? This power is based on the wording of the legislation stipulating the requirements for a programme to be given degree-awarding powers. If these are not fulfilled by an existing programme that leads to the award of a qualification this entitlement can therefore be withdrawn, if the HEI fails to remedy the shortcomings within a specific period even though it has been notified of them.

Control is therefore part of the task of the supervisory agency. This is not a new state of affairs. Applications for degree-awarding powers have been subject to appraisal since the early 1990s (new legislation in 1992) and evaluations of programmes with the power to withdraw entitlement to award qualifications have been undertaken since the beginning of this century (Govt. Bill 2000/01:1). The background can be found in the decentralisation of higher education following the 1992 Higher Education Act while at the same time the uniformity of the system was retained, with, for instance, national qualifications descriptors and accompanying requirements for the equivalency of programmes and the consequent possibility for students to move from one programme to another at another HEI.

Abolition of UKÄ's mandate to withdraw entitlement to award qualifications would require amendment of the provisions of the Higher Education Act. At the same time, however, some form of appraisal would still be needed – at least for as long as programme funding come mainly from the state and it constituted a fundamental social benefit. It is, of course, possible to envisage continued control by UKÄ or its counterpart without the power to invoke a sanction such as withdrawal of entitlement to award qualifications, i.e. evaluations in which criticism could be expressed and not merely improvements recommended. Control of this kind could then be described as purely developmental, at least as long as the HEIs did not discontinue programmes because of them.

External control could also be replaced by reliance on internal appraisals or self-regulation. This reliance would be based on the knowledge that self-regulation, in other words evaluation by the provider, functioned well. Here the terms self-evaluation or internal development could also be used, if control were considered an inappropriate term. Which term is used is not, in actual fact, of any great importance. What is central is that in this context evaluation involves per definition control, but evaluation without the mandate to impose sanctions or on the basis of totally internal appraisal presupposes a great degree of trust. A system of this kind would almost certainly give rise to discussion about which sectors of society it could reasonably be applied to.

Reflections on the future

The ways in which the public sector is regulated vary and therefore so do the methods used for evaluation. This is recognised but still worth repeating, particularly when a new evaluation system is to be developed. This is when all the stakeholders have great expectations that their own particular issues will now be taken into account, moreover in a way that corresponds to their wishes. Perspectives focus on the future. Ideally the new system will be one that is totally new. Agreement prevails about the shortcomings of the previous system and these can indeed overshadow any strengths or positive

features it may have had. Even so, in this situation it may well be valuable to look back and summarise both the positive and negative experiences that have been acquired – if for no other reason than the knowledge that evaluation methods vary and that what belongs to the past may one day in the future be new and in demand again.

Experiences may therefore have value in the future. It is of course worth endeavouring to develop an evaluation system with which no stakeholder can find fault, but criticism will still be expressed no matter what system is adopted. A system that did not arouse criticism would mark the end of development.

Having pointed this out, it is difficult to offer concrete proposals about future systems, nor does this report intend to do so. It is instead one element in UKÄ's ongoing reflection on its own operations and a contribution to the ongoing discussion about what the evaluation of higher education should look like and how it should be designed. A few reflections based on the arguments and findings in this report are offered below which may be of value for discussion of future evaluation systems.

- **Dividing the focus of evaluations and appraisals on the basis of control or enhancement is an oversimplification.**⁷⁸

Strict control may have an inhibiting effect but appraisals that lack control may also lack impact. A system that is perceived as focusing on control may have explicit quality-enhancing and developmental effects.

- **Control requires transparency, in which there is a risk of focusing on quantitative data while with increased focus on qualitative data there is a risk of reduced transparency and comparability.**

It is reasonable to enable those evaluated to demand that they should be able to know the grounds on which evaluation is based so that they can understand the results. This may be particularly important when similar activities undergo parallel or concurrent appraisals. Quantitative data then appears to offer material that is easier to appraise than qualitative data. This applies not least when there are different panels of experts carrying out the appraisals. Difficulties in comparing outcomes can jeopardise confidence. On the other hand appraisals based on quantitative data risk giving rise to effects that those evaluated may perceive as one-sided and therefore negative, which in its turn can also lead to loss of confidence. Awareness of these opposing factors is desirable.

- **Follow-up of the effects that evaluations may have should be systematic and undertaken both by the evaluators, their subjects and third parties, and should include both positive and negative effects (general conclusions about the evaluations).**

This study is one element in UKÄ's reflections about its own operations and the quality evaluation system that has been applied up until now. Before developing any new quality assurance methods for higher education it is important to capitalise on the expertise and experience generated by the differences in focus and

⁷⁸ See also Professor Jon Haakstad's paper for the European Quality Assurance Forum in November 2014, Barcelona. www.eua.be/Libraries/EQAF_2014/IVa_1_Haakstad.sflb.ashx

orientation of the evaluation systems. For this reason it is also important for the HEIs to undertake their own follow-up analysis of the effects of the evaluations.

- **Mutual confidence between UKÄ and the HEIs is important, but it is even more important for higher education in Sweden to inspire confidence.**
The long-term intention of UKÄ's evaluations is to enhance higher education in Sweden. In the international context collaboration and exchanges within higher education depend on a great level of confidence in the higher education offered in Sweden. In its operations UKÄ has to take into account both national and international circumstances in order to ensure this.
- **Approach and aims are important, but perhaps even more important are what is appraised, how and by whom (their qualifications).**
Its approach and aims are fundamental for the legitimacy of an evaluation system. Focusing on a specific kind of material may, however, lead to particularly significant effects on the aspects that it makes easiest to evaluate, irrespective of the stated aims of the evaluation. The methods used to evaluate the material and the access to the expertise required to review specific aspects in it may also impact on the results.
- **Covering and doing everything may reduce the impact of specific elements.**
Extending the material used and spreading the weight ascribed to its different components evenly with the intention of providing stronger grounds for the evaluation may mean that the effects of its individual elements are reduced. This can lead to results that are less clear. The same probably applies to the approaches adopted in the system, where broadening them may reduce the possibility of assessing elements and therefore the impact of their evaluation.
- **When evaluations are repeated retaining continuity has to be balanced against the importance of variation.**
Those evaluated adapt to the evaluation system used, so that the effects of using the same system twice in a row may reduce its impact. In consequence, every evaluation system should differ from its predecessor, although this may be considered to collide with the desire for continuity and long-term viability. Part of the solution may be to adopt a flexible evaluation system which can provide the process with both predictability and continuity. The emphasis and focus in a flexible system can vary over time, which stimulates change in quality assurance procedures, while long-term considerations can apply for the different components of the system and their relationships to each other.

The mission of the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) is to contribute to the enhancement of higher education in Sweden and Sweden as a knowledge society. We evaluate the quality of higher education programmes, we analyse and monitor developments in higher education and we uphold the legal rights of students.

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