Quality Assurance Procedures in Education[1]

These guidelines were finalised by the Vice-Chancellor on 16-06-2020
and take effect on the same date

Registration number HS 2021/27

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[1] This is a translation of the Swedish version (Riktlinjer för kvalitetsarbete inom utbildning, registration number HS 2020/543). In the event of any discrepancy, the Swedish version of this document shall prevail.

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1   Introduction

The University of Skövde (the University) is active in its quality assurance procedures in education. The procedures form part of the University's quality system, which applies to all operations. The quality system is outlined in "Quality Policy for the University of Skövde" (the quality policy).

In terms of structure, there are three levels to the quality system (figure 1). Level 1 is the collective system, which is outlined in the quality policy. On level 2, the quality system is implemented in different parts of the operations: education, research, support and management services and university-wide management and governance. Specific guidelines apply to quality assurance procedures in these areas. Activities to ensure and develop quality are performed in each area (level 3).

This document outlines quality assurance procedures in education.

Figure 1: Structure of the quality assurance system at the University of Skövde

On a general level, the term quality is defined in the quality policy. Translated to the education area, quality is defined as all collective qualities of the education (subjects, study programmes and courses) that provide its ability to satisfy various parties' explicit requirements or expectations, to a high enough degree. The to a high enough degree part means that the degree of goals and requirements being met can vary, as not all parts of education can be prioritised at the same time. All parts of education should, however, be of high quality. Very high quality, or excellence, is something that is strived for, as is clear from the development plan for the University of Skövde "Our Vision: 2017 – 2022" [Utvecklingsplan för Högskolan i Skövde 2017-2022].

2   Quality Assurance Procedures in Education

Quality assurance procedures in education cover all education at the University, i.e. first-, second-, and third-cycle education, and contract education and access programmes.

The purpose of quality assurance procedures is to ensure and develop quality. Quality is ensured through adequate conditions for providing education, and education follow-up. Quality assurance forms the foundation of quality development. With a starting point in the performed follow-up, it is defined what development is required to maintain and develop the quality of education.

As is clear from the above, quality assurance procedures in education include a number of activities for quality assurance and quality development of education (see part 2.4). Quality assurance procedures in education and quality assurance procedures in research are closely connected in issues concerning education's connection to research, and the connection of research to education.

2.1 Conditions

The conditions for reaching high quality or very high quality in education are made up of the following parts:

– **Requirements and Goals for the Design, Implementation and Quality of Education**
Some requirements can be found in the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance, and in the European framework for quality assurance of higher education[2]. Other requirements are locally formulated. Goals for the University's education are formulated in the University's development plan.

– **Basic Conditions**
Ensuring good basic conditions for education is the foundation for reaching high quality. Among them are financial resources, the competence of teaching staff (scientific/artistic/pedagogical/vocational), and other conditions for work performance, as well as infrastructure, learning resources and student support.

– **Responsibilities**
The division of responsibilities is regulated in the University's Rules of Procedure, the Vice-Chancellor's Delegation of Authority, and supplementary organisation and delegation documents. A description of the division of responsibilities for quality assurance procedures in education is provided in part 3.

– **Standardised Processes and Routines**
To ensure that activities that concern education are performed in accordance with the set requirements, standardised and documented processes, routines and schedules are needed. These also provide support for the operations.
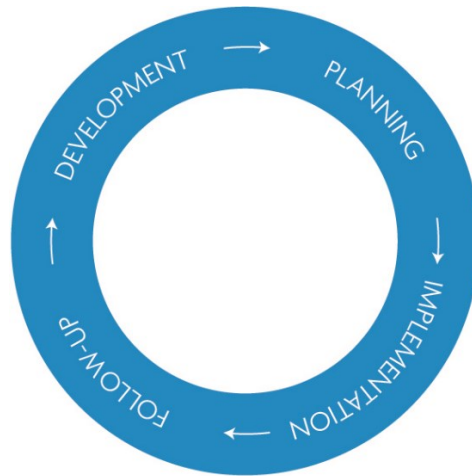
2.2 Improvement Cycles

The work with quality assurance and quality development of education (subjects, study programmes and courses) takes place within the framework of improvement cycles. The University works according to a model of four clear and connected phases, namely planning, implementation, follow-up and development (see figure 2). The improvement cycles always have operational development as their purpose.

Work in the improvement cycles often takes place in collaboration between the Vice-Chancellor, the Faculty board, School management, teachers/researchers (including officeholders with specific academic tasks), support and management services, and students and doctoral students.

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[2] Standards, guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education area (ESG), Swedish Higher Education Authority 2015

**The Improvement Cycle of the Quality Assurance System
at the University of Skövde – Use in Education**

The University's model of four clear and connected phases in the improvement cycle, namely planning, implementation, follow-up and development, is used in quality assurance procedures in education. The different phases are outlined below:

- **Planning**
  In this phase, planning for the provision of education in all cycles of the University's subjects is done, based on the current situation. An important starting point of the planning is what has come up in performed follow-up. Experiences and results from follow-up should be utilised in the shape of improvements to the education and/or its conditions. Planning also includes finalising the courses and programmes to be offered at the University in the coming academic year.

- **Implementation**
  In this phase, education is provided as planned. The implementation takes place according to set processes and routines.

- **Follow-up**
  In the follow-up phase, education is followed up in different ways, both in terms of results and implementation. Reflection concerning various aspects is included, such as whether the conditions were sufficient, whether the implementation took place in a way that was appropriate and efficient, etc. For follow-up of subjects and study programmes, quality criteria on which their establishment are based are used. The follow-up shall be fed back to the relevant parties, and their perception of the results shall be taken into consideration. The results of the follow-up shall constitute a base for the development of the education's conditions, implementation and quality, as well as for operational planning in relevant parts and levels of the University.

- **Development**
  In the development phase, it's decided which measures are to be taken, based on the follow-up and reflection that has taken place. It may mean that new subjects, study programmes and courses are developed and established, or that existing ones are developed further or phased out. Changes to conditions and modi operandi may also be needed. Planned measures are to be communicated to the relevant parties.

Figure 2: The improvement cycle of the quality assurance system at the University of Skövde – use in research

Improvement Cycles in Day-to-Day Work

Improvement cycles are also used in day-to-day work, i.e. in the work that forms part- or sub processes of overarching education processes. Making improvement cycles visible on different levels, and in different units and offices, stimulates a culture of quality in the University's operations.

2.3   Activities for Quality Assurance and Quality Development

Activities for quality assurance and quality development in education are those that entail special review (establishment and phasing out of courses and study programmes) and follow-up (such as annual follow-up of study programmes). The activities are performed continuously or periodically, and are part of the improvement cycles for education. There is an overview of the activities in table 1.

Table 1: Overview of Activities for Quality Assurance and Quality Development of Education
Establishment of education
Annual follow-up of study programmes
Six-year follow-up of first- and second-cycle subjects and related study programmes
Six-year follow-up of third-cycle subjects
Collection of students', doctoral students', and alumni's views on the education and learning environment
Follow-up conversations and revision of doctoral students' individual study plans
Entering into and following up international collaboration agreements
Closing of Education

2.3.1   Establishment of Education

The purpose of the activity is to ensure that the education offered (study programmes and courses) at the University meet the existing requirements of high quality and research connection, and that the courses and study programmes respond to student demand and the needs of the labour market. Subjects (main fields of study, resource subjects and subjects in third-cycle education), study programmes and courses are to be established according to specific processes.

Policy documents: "Guidelines for the Establishment of Education", "Guidelines for the Design of Course Syllabus", "Guidelines for the Design of Programme Syllabus"

2.3.2   Annual Follow-Up of Study Programmes

The purpose of the activity is to develop all study programmes at the University continuously. Systematically analysing the programmes and annually addressing problems that have arisen creates an improvement cycle for the whole University on a programme level, based on the requirement and goal formulation found in national and local policy documents. Follow-up is documented and made available in an IT system developed especially for this purpose, KUpp (quality follow-up system).

Policy document: "Guidelines for Annual Follow-Up of Study Programmes"

2.3.3 Six-Year Follow-Up of First- and Second-Cycle Subject and Related Study Programmes

The purpose of the activity is to ensure that joint follow-up of all education in main fields of study, and resource subjects in the first and second cycles takes place regularly. Follow-up is performed according to a rolling six-year schedule with some support from external inspectors.

The follow-up includes follow-up of certain parts of support and management services' work, mainly infrastructure for first- and second-cycle education.

Policy document: "Guidelines for Six-Year Follow-Up of First- and Second-Cycle Subjects and Related Study Programmes"

2.3.4 Six-Year Follow-Up of Third-Cycle Subjects

The purpose of the activity is to follow up third-cycle education that is run independently. Follow-up takes place with support from external inspectors.

Policy document: "Guidelines for Six-Year Follow-Up of Third-Cycle Subjects"

2.3.5 Collection of Students', Doctoral Students' and Alumni's Views of the Education and Learning Environment

The purpose of the activity is to ensure that students, doctoral students and alumni get the opportunity to talk about their experiences and views of the education and the learning environment. This takes place through course evaluations, programme evaluations, the local Mirror for Doctoral Students, Student Barometer, questionnaires for international students, follow-up of student support services, follow-up of the Student Union's Report[3], and alumni questionnaires. Clear processes for dealing with student complaints are also relevant in this context. The views constitute an important base for the development of the education and the learning environment.

Policy documents[4]: "Guidelines for Course Evaluation", "Guidelines for Programme Evaluation", "Instructions for Questions and Complaints from Students"

2.3.6 Follow-Up Conversations and Revision of Doctoral Students' Individual Study Plans

The purpose of the activity is to follow up individual doctoral students' progression, situation and learning environment. Follow-up takes place at least once per year. Progression and planning of doctoral students' ongoing education are documented in revised individual study plans. Other views of the education are collected and fed back to be dealt with in other relevant processes.

Policy documents: "Guidelines for Supervision and Study Follow-Up of Third-Cycle Education in Informatics at the University of Skövde", "Description of Assignment for Director of PhD studies", "Template for Individual Study Plan"

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[3] Every year, the Student Union at the University of Skövde compiles a Student Union's Report, in which views of the University's educational operations are presented.
[4] In addition to the stated policy documents, policy documents for more processes will be developed.

2.3.7 Entering into and Following up International Collaboration Agreements

The purpose of the activity is to ensure that the University's education collaborations with foreign higher education institutions are run in accordance with the strategic direction found in the development plan and operational plans. Other strategic concerns, such as solidarity, may also need to be considered. Furthermore, a number of quality aspects must be taken into consideration when entering into and following up agreements, such as strong research connections to the education.

Policy document: "Guidelines for International Collaboration Agreements at the University of Skövde"

2.3.8 Closing of Education

Closing of education can take place for strategic reasons or quality reasons. The latter takes place when there are no prerequisites for conducting education that meets the set requirements and goals.

Policy documents: "Guidelines for Closing of Subjects", "Guidelines for Closing of Study Programmes and Cancelling of Programme instances", "Guidelines for Closing of Courses"

3 Division of Responsibilities

The Board of Governors and the Vice-Chancellor have an overall responsibility for the University's quality system, including quality assurance procedures in education. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by a special Quality Council which acts in an advisory capacity in issues concerning quality assurance procedures.

Below the Board of Governors and Vice-Chancellor, the Faculty board has an overall responsibility for quality assurance in education and research. Below that level, Heads of School and Heads of Division have responsibility for the quality assurance procedures in education and research that relate to the School's/division's area of responsibility. Under the Faculty board, Head of School and Head of Division, there are also specific officeholders for quality assurance and quality development of education and research, within the framework of academic remits. Subject Coordinators and Subject Coordinator Teachers, Programme Coordinator Teachers, Course Coordinator Teachers, Examiners and Directors of PhD Studies are some such officeholders.

As per the above, the division of responsibilities for quality assurance procedures in education follows the structure and content stated in Rules of Procedure at the University of Skövde [Arbetsordning vid Högskolan i Skövde], the Vice-Chancellor's Delegation of Authority [Rektors delegationsordning], and supplementary organisation and delegation documents.

Responsibility for an area always includes responsibility for quality assurance procedures in that area. The principle is also that responsibility for the quality assurance procedures in an area also includes responsibility for follow-up of the quality assurance procedures that are performed. Responsibility for follow-up of the whole quality system – which includes quality assurance procedures in education – lies with the Board of Governors and Vice-Chancellor.

There are specific policy documents for the activities stated in part 2.3 that describe the implementation of the activities and the responsibilities that apply.

4   Communication

Quality assurance procedures in education are to be characterised by clarity and transparency. The results of the quality assurance procedures, mainly results from education follow-up, should therefore be communicated and made available to relevant parties in and outside of the organisation in an appropriate way. How communication is to take place is stated in the specific policy documents outlining the activities for quality assurance and quality development in education (see part 2.3).

5   Previous Quality Assurance Procedures in Education

The University of Skövde has employed quality assurance procedures for its education for a long time. Policies and guidelines for quality assurance procedures were finalised in 1995, and specific guidelines for the evaluation of education were added in 2007. The policy documents for quality assurance procedures in education have been revised continuously.

Previous guidelines for quality assurance and quality development of education are the following:

– "Guidelines for Evaluation of First- and Second-Cycle Education" (registration number HS 2007/94)
– "Guidelines for Local Evaluation of First- and Second-Cycle Education" (registration number HS 2011/406-50)
– "Quality Systems for Education – Guidelines for Quality Assurance Procedures in First-, Second-, and Third-Cycle Education" (registration number HS 2017/128)

6   Taking Effect

These guidelines take effect on 16-06-2020 and replace Guidelines for Quality Assurance Procedures in Education [Riktlinjer för kvalitetsarbete inom utbildning] (registration number HS 2019/987).