

## Evaluation of quality in the University's study programmes<sup>1</sup> – a method and guidance

Since 2008, Lund University is practicing systematic quality assurance of all new study programmes, within the first and second cycle, through the so-called validation process. Subsequently, as part of the 2011/2012 quality assurance work, the University has entrusted the Office of Evaluation with the task of developing a method for evaluating already established study programmes.

The development work was carried out in cooperation with two of the faculties within the university and was guided by two fundamental principles, to a) respond to the need for a university-wide, systematic and comparable platform for quality assurance in higher education and at the same time b) allow adaptation to the character and structure of the study programme/component that is to be evaluated.

The methodology is furthermore based on the recommendations and guidelines in *Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA 2005)* and is developed with the aim of supporting the faculties' internal work with quality assurance. It can be used in its entirety or in a limited form, depending on the purpose of the evaluation. It is therefore essential that the faculty board initially takes a position with regard to what is to be evaluated and, on that basis, establishes the scope and other conditions for the implementation of the work.

In the following there are descriptions of the Criteria and Criteria areas (section 1), Documentation (section 2) and Procedure (section 3). The manual concludes with a few tips to bear in mind when structuring the work (section 4).

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<sup>1</sup> "Study programme" includes all forms of studies at Lund University that lead to a first or second cycle degree.

# 1 Criteria and criteria areas

With the aim of supporting a structured and systematic approach to both assessment and analysis, the method is organised according to four criteria areas, see below. Within each area, a limited number of detailed criteria are presented, which are to be reviewed individually within the process. The faculty board is strongly advised to follow this structure in the application of the method, regardless of the chosen scope.

## *1. Students – recruitment, retention and rate of completion*

- Admitted and registered students within the study programme correspond to the stated target group, including the University's overall goal of even gender distribution (40/60)
- The number of students registered on the study programme is in reasonable proportion to the number of available seats within the programme.
- Registered students in the last semester of the programme correspond to the majority of those admitted.
- The students concerned are informed in an adequate manner on the conditions for obtaining the intended degree, including qualitative targets and scope.
- The number of students, who meet the targets for the relevant degree within the intended time, is reasonable in relation to the number of students admitted.
- Students obtain their degrees/request degree certificates to an extent that correlates with completed studies and other conditions.

## *2. Lecturers and environment – capacity, expertise and cooperation*

- The study programme's active lecturers have relevant qualifications to contribute to the continuous development of the programme.
- The number of lecturers with relevant expertise corresponds to the need for supervision and examination of degree projects at the relevant level.
- The study programme's lecturers are involved in the planning of the programme and understand the individual course's significance for the progression of the programme and the relevant objectives and expected outcomes.
- The lecturers assigned to the programme are offered and take part in continuous professional development in teaching and learning in higher education.

- The lecturers within the programme cooperate with wider society in other ways, e.g. through their own research or relevant professional activity outside academia which is significant to the future development of the study programme.

### *3. Labour market – alumni activities and societal analysis*

- Follow-up of the study programme's alumni is done systematically and includes their assessment of the study programme's relevance to the labour market.
- The programme directors have regular and systematic contact with professionals with the aim of actively developing the programme's relevance to the labour market and wider society.
- The study programme is implemented with clear elements of career-oriented activities, such as internships, visiting lecturers and/or external assignments.

### *4. Quality work – follow-up, feedback and development*

- Relevant data is used systematically as a factual basis for the work on follow-up and development of the study programme's quality.
- There is regular feedback of different evaluation results for the relevant study programme to the lecturers and students concerned.
- Collegial and/or external expertise is used regularly and in a suitable manner for the assessment and development of the study programme's quality.
- The current learning outcomes/qualitative targets are used in an adequate manner for the evaluation of the study programme's results.
- The allocation of responsibilities in and around the study programme is presented clearly and correctly in available information.

## 2 Documentation

The documentation is to be introduced with a contextual description of the study programme and its location, with the aim of providing an overview of the environment and the programme's specific circumstances. In addition, the documentation is to include a compilation of factual information and results as support for the various assessment criteria. The statistics that are produced should be as current as possible. (Much information can be retrieved from LUBAS, LADOK, Kuben and various course evaluation results.)

The documentation should also include complementary and clarifying texts, with the aim of supporting the assessment of the various criteria, see section 1.

### Basic information

Basic information about the study programme and any specialisations can to a large extent be retrieved from the relevant programme syllabus and/or qualification descriptor. The following information is to be included:

- The programme's title with its English translation.
- The relevant degree title(s), including the English translation.
- Information on any main field/s of study for a general degree.
- Information if the programme is provided in cooperation with another higher education institution or faculty and, if so, with whom and in what form the cooperation is set up.
- A brief account of the programme's organisation and allocation of responsibilities, such as programme management, advisory bodies, student influence, forms of cooperation, teaching staff committee, etc.

### Documentation for quality assessment

The documentation for quality assessment is to be structured according to the four criteria areas of the analysis. We recommend the inclusion of the following data and facts:

#### *1. The students – recruitment, retention and rate of completion*

- Information on the main target group of the study programme and the recruitment base, for example whether the aim is to recruit international students or a certain group of professionals. Report current statistics on admissions.
- Information on the number of seats within the programme and the annual number of registered students (fulfillment rate).

- Information on the completion rate of students (e.g. retention statistics and number of degrees obtained per year)
- Description of how students on the programme receive information on the conditions for earning a degree and how students are to go about obtaining a degree certificate.
- For programmes leading to a Master's degree: describe the third-cycle studies (doctorate level) environment(s) with which the programme co-operates or is connected in some other way and the forms of such cooperation.

## *2. Lecturers and environment – capacity, expertise and cooperation*

- Account of active lecturers on the programme including their artistic, research and teaching competences as well as their professional expertise outside higher education. The account is to make it clear to what extent each lecturer is active on the programme.
- Description of how the current teaching team cooperates on the progression within the programme and the qualitative targets.
- Information regarding which lecturers are responsible for supervision and which for examination of degree projects.
- Information on the number of lecturers (full-time equivalents)/number of full-time students.
- Description of the programme's management and support functions (e.g. management group, advisory bodies, reference groups or coordinating functions), including information on the different roles and responsibilities.

## *3. Labour market – alumni activities and intelligence work*

- Where applicable, description of how representatives from the professional world and from wider society are involved in development work on the study programme and the relevance of this for the students' future career opportunities.
- Account of how and when the programme's alumni are followed up and in what way the results of such activities are used in the further development of the programme.

## *4. Quality work – follow-up, feedback and development*

- Summarising description of the systematic work regarding quality enhancement and quality assurance for the particular study programme.
- Description of how the qualitative targets are followed up and secured in the course structure of the programme.

- Description of how the chosen forms of examination relate to the study programme's learning outcomes/qualitative targets.
- Brief description of the research and/or artistic development work which forms the basis of the study programme.
- Description of how independent quality assurance is applied to study results (for example peer review of examination assignments and/or external review of degree projects).
- Summarising account of whether the study programme in its entirety has been evaluated previously and if so, the results of this evaluation.

### **3 Procedure**

The evaluation model has primarily been developed for internal use within the faculty and as part of the systematic quality work. The process consists of four main steps:

- The compilation of data and the production of documentation
- Expert criteria-based review and assessment
- The faculty/ department's analysis and feedback
- Measures, where applicable

#### **Group for expert assessment**

The programme assessment is to be carried out by a group of experts, who collectively meet the necessary requirements for integrity, experience, representativity and professional expertise. For the relevance and legitimacy of the assessment, the group's composition is to take into account any connections to the programme in question. The number of assessors can vary, but should be no less than three. (It is useful to compare the conditions regarding the composition of the group with the equivalent part in the validation work, i.e. ensuring representation of students, lecturers/ researchers and professionals relevant to the area of activity.)

The group should be notified and formed in good time for the assignment.

The assessment is to be based on the results and actual conditions that emerge from the documentation (see section 2) and is to concern the four criteria areas stated in section 1. In order to improve the conditions and results of the analysis, opportunities should be provided for visits on location and interviews with the lecturers and students concerned.

The assessment process should be coordinated in consultation with the study programme management, with the aim of simplifying the transfer of results and avoiding misunderstandings.

The result of the experts' assessment is to be documented in a joint statement to the faculty board and related to the four criteria areas. The statement is to be based on a critical review of the relevant criteria and structured in both a problematising and future-oriented perspective.

The statement is also to include a summarising conclusion on the study programme in its entirety and the overall relation to national and international standards.

### **Examples of procedure and implementation**

- The faculty management decides that an evaluation is to be carried out for main field X and appoints a process coordinator, PC, for the assignment.
- The PC contacts the relevant department and in consultation produces a proposal regarding criteria, expert assessors and other basic conditions for the evaluation, e.g. a time frame, working groups/allocation and required resources.
- The proposal is presented to the faculty management, which subsequently decides on the forms of the evaluation including the composition of the group of expert assessors.
- The PC prepares for and attends to the production of documentation on the data for the evaluation (see section 2).
- Together with the assessors' group, the PC determines the forms and timetable for the group's work, including any visits on location and interviews.
- The assessment results, i.e. the statement from the experts, are managed by the PC and delivered to the faculty management.
- The PC then gathers all those concerned, including student representatives, to go through the assessment results together.
- The faculty management decides in consultation with the representatives of the department concerned and the students on any measures to be taken in view of the assessment results.

## 4 A few tips

- Be careful to formulate the purpose of the evaluation! Why are we doing this?
- A full-scale evaluation according to this model should be carried out at the earliest two years after the first batch of students have completed the programme.
- In order to avoid unnecessary workload on key functions within the University organisation, the work should also be planned and coordinated in relation to other quality assurance systems and processes. This applies in particular to the correlation with the national evaluation system, both with regard to structure and time. Based on experience, this is implemented at intervals of 4–6 years.
- Based on experience, an evaluation often takes longer than planned. Systematising documents and data collection can be one way of saving time.
- Identifying and informing in good time the individuals who will be doing the practical work on the evaluation is of fundamental importance for the process to run smoothly.
- Some expert assessors can be very busy. Contact them in good time!
- Remember that the experts are often unfamiliar with local phenomena and conditions. Don't skip "obvious" details!
- Don't bite off more than you can chew! It is better to be less ambitious but to do a good job!