Quality Assurance at Lund University

Guidelines for the period 2006-2008
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1. Quality assurance in a European perspective

The guidelines describe the system for quality assurance of education at Lund University. It should be possible to vary and adapt the guidelines with regard to conditions in different programmes.

The outcomes of studies at Lund University shall have high international standard on undergraduate level as well as on advanced and postgraduate levels. Quality efforts shall be oriented towards assuring and developing this standard. This focus on the outcomes of the studies is a further development of the systematic quality work which has been developed since the early 1990s within the university. It is in agreement with “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”, which were ratified at the Conference of the Ministers in 2005 \(^1\).

The basic driving-force with regard to quality work is the self-control which is characteristic of all true academic. University staff plays a central role with regard to the continuous task of renewing education and teaching. The students’ responsibility for their study-work and their evaluations of it is equally crucial.

> “Quality efforts are a joint matter for staff and students at institutions of higher education.”

Higher Education Act Ch 1 S 4

Quality assurance also presupposes openness to experiences and judgements from the environment. This includes how alumni experience the quality of the education with regard to requirements in working-life. It also includes understanding and insight into societal development from regional, national and international perspectives.

The university’s system for quality assurance and its application will be subject to external assessment, which the National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for.

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[http://www.enqa.net/Bologna.lasso](http://www.enqa.net/Bologna.lasso)
The guidelines include quality assurance of:

- **new study programmes**, i.e. an inquiry into the relevance of educational goals and the prerequisites for realizing the goals. Guidelines have been approved by the Vice-chancellor.\(^2\) (section 2)

- **courses**, i.e. assessment of how course-targets have been realized, and an analysis of how teaching and learning procedures may explain the outcomes, as well as suggesting measures (section 3).

- **degrees**, i.e. assessment of how programme goals have been realized, analysis of how the prerequisites for the programme and process of study may explain the outcomes, as well as suggestions of measures (section 4).

- **internationalization**, i.e. evaluation of exchange programme for quality improvement and benchmarking the educational procedures and outcomes in comparison (section 5)

Specific guidelines for validation of new programmes and quality assurance of courses have been ratified in 2006. The standards for quality assurance of degrees and internationalization are outlined in this report be will be further elaborated in 2007.

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\(^2\) Validation of new study programmes. Guidelines for the period 2006-2008. Lund University ratified by the Vice-chancellor April 18, 2006
2. Validation of new study programmes

2:I. Validation of new study programmes on basic and advanced levels

The guidelines concerning the validation of new study programmes have been developed based on studies of the Dutch\(^3\) and the British\(^4\) systems. A follow up of the experiences from applying them at Lund University will be made during 2008.

The Vice Chancellor makes the decision to establish a new study programme. The application is submitted to the Vice Chancellor by the faculty boards. This guideline describes the validation of the study programmes, which should be available in advance of this decision. The validation will apply to study programmes which are concluded with degrees on basic and advanced levels. It also applies to existing educations which are extended or shortened involving considerable redesign of the contents and orientation of the study programme.

The validation is performed according to a procedure which is outlined in section 2:II. It should include a documentation and evaluation of the pre-requisites for carrying out the study programme with regard to the following seven aspects:

1. The need for the programme
2. The goals
3. The structure of the programme
4. The contents
5. Academic and teaching staff
6. Resources
7. Follow-up and evaluation.

The documentation which must be included in the application for establishing a new programme is described in section 2:III. The evaluation takes its point of departure from criteria described in section 2:IV. The quality requirements which are specified in this section must be satisfactorily fulfilled with regard to all seven prerequisites before the study programme can be approved.

\(^3\) Accreditation framework for new degree courses in higher education. Feb 2003, NVAO http://www.nvao.net
\(^4\) Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review. May 2000, QAA http://www.qaa.ac.uk
2:II. Procedure

The validation is performed as part of the faculty’s planning of the new study programme. It is reported in the application to the Vice chancellor, about establishing the new study programme. The submission should include two parts

- Documentation of the study programme
- Quality assessment.

The documentation will provide the basis for assessing the prerequisites for realizing the programme. Instructions for the documentation are given in section III and apply to validation of all new study programmes. The forms for quality assessment which are given below and the criteria which should be applied in the examination of the seven prerequisites may, however, vary (section 2:IV). In these respects the guideline is designed with regard to programmes which are oriented towards new knowledge fields and/or changes in working life. New study programmes which mostly involve a further development of existing educations, can use a less ambitious assessment procedure.

Based on the submitted documentation the faculty boards should therefore decide on the specific forms for evaluation. It can be made by an expert examiner or by an examination committee, which may include:

- experts with academic and educational competence.
- students or research students pursuing studies in the faculties concerned.
- professional experts with experience from the relevant working life.

Complementary information may be requested. The experts may also make site visits at the departments/units which are planned to take part in the study programme. They should then have opportunities to interview the educational management, academic staff and students. They should also have an opportunity to visit the premises for teaching, laboratories and library as well as equipment.

The validation of the seven variables, which indicate the prerequisites for carrying out the study programme, is expressed in two categories:

- Acceptable
- Unacceptable.

The validation constitutes a weighing together of how the study programme is judged to satisfy the quality requirements indicated in the list of criteria in section 2:IV. In the experts’ statement a justification is given on how the weighing together has been accomplished. It should also include a conclusion.
about how the planned study programme will be able to satisfy the require-
ments for good national and international standards.

When the study programme will be carried out under various forms, particular
attention should be given to the prerequisites for part time studies or distance
learning.

2:III. Documentation

The application about establishing a new study programme must include the
following information:

- Designation (name and degree title)
- Scope, shown as credits and ECTS
- A description of the orientation and goals of the study programme.

The application must also include information

- whether there are similar study programmes in other HE institutions or
  whether there are equivalent study programmes within or outside the
country.
- whether the study programme will be carried out full time or part time.
- where the study programme will be located and whether it will be
carried out as distance learning.
- about the resources estimated for development and validation of the
study programme.

The following factual information must be provided as a basis for assessing the
prerequisites for running the study programme:

- A description of the research or artistic development work within Lund
  University the study programme is linked to.
- An account of working life demand as well as the contacts with working
  life and/or information which the assessment of this demand is based
  on.
- Specification of the learning outcomes and/or competencies, which the
  students should have achieved when they have concluded the educa-
tion. This description shall take its departure in the Degree Ordinance
  of the Higher Education Ordinance.
- A statement of the admission and eligibility qualifications required as
  well as the selection criteria.
- A plan of the structure of the educational process, the main contents and didactics of the courses, as well as the methods for student assessment, follow-up and evaluation.
- Review of the teacher group which is available for the study programme with information about their scientific, artistic, pedagogical, in particular competence in learning and teaching in higher education, as well as their professional competence.
- A budget summary for carrying out the study programme.
- An account of the study programmes’ resources for information and supervision.
- Review of available teaching premises, equipment, textbooks and teaching aids, library and ICT resources as well as planned investments.
- Information about phasing out time, when decisions are made about more extensive modifications or discontinuation of the programme.

2:IV. Validation criteria
An examination should be made of the prerequisites for realizing the new study programme. These are described within the following seven areas of criteria. The criteria for assessment are given as bullet point statements. The faculty board decides which of these points within each area of criteria must be applied with regard to assessment of the specific programme. The faculty boards may then also add programme specific criteria.

1. The need for the study programme
- The new study programme has high relevance within the framework of the educational profile of the university regionally, nationally and/or internationally.
- The study programme is linked to knowledge fields within which the university conducts active research or alternatively artistic development work.
- The graduated students are employable on a specified labour market and/or may contribute to quality development in working life.
- The designation and description of the study programme with regard to orientation and learning outcomes provides relevant information about its correspondence with, respectively demarcation from other Swedish and European study programmes within the area.
2. **The goals**

- There is an account of the learning outcomes and/or competencies that the students should have achieved when they conclude the programme. This is formulated in such a way that it will provide foundation for student assessment, follow up of outcomes and evaluation, as well as provide information to students and employers.
- The description is in agreement with the Degree Ordinance of the Higher Education Ordinance.
- The stated goals for the study programme correspond with good national and international standards within the knowledge and professional fields.

3. **The structure of the programme**

- There is a plan for how the goals of the study programme will be achieved during the educational process. Progression over time is clear from the plan.
- The plan for how the educational process is structured refers both to generic goals and to specific goals in the knowledge field. Goals according to the Higher Education Act and the Degree Ordinance as well as locally determined goals have been considered.
- With regard to education on a basic level it should be specified how the educational process is linked to upper secondary school. Entry requirements are specified.
- With regard to education on an advanced level it should be specified which outcomes the students shall have achieved at the basic level and how these are further developed during the continued educational process.
- The educational process is designed in such a way that it offers realistic possibilities for the students to conclude the programme within the stated study time.

4. **The contents**

- The contents of the programme have a clear linking to the current scientific alternatively artistic development within the field.
- The contents of the programme are clearly linked to current developments in working life.
- The goals of the programme are reflected in the main contents, didactics and examination methods.
5. **Academic and teaching staff**
   - There are teachers available who have relevant competence within the various fields of the programme. These teacher resources are sufficient for starting and realizing the programme as a whole.
   - The number of teachers with PhD degrees matches the needs for supervisors of bachelor and master theses for the number of students admitted to the study programme.
   - There are teachers with pedagogical competence in learning and teaching in higher education, who can be in charge of the continuous pedagogical development work within the various fields of the programme.

6. **Resources**
   - The resources for information and supervision are appropriate with regard to the intended target group.
   - The programme will have access to suitable premises and equipment, which matches established norms for good standard within the educational field.
   - The programme will have access to textbooks and teaching aids, library and ICT facilities, which are adequate with regard to the number of students admitted to the programme.
   - There is a realistic budget plan for carrying out the programme in its entirety.

7. **Follow up and evaluation**
   - The forms and methods for course evaluation have been described. They are in agreement with the instructions of the Higher Education Ordinance.
   - Methods for external participation and/or other methods for independent quality assurance of student assessment have been described.
   - Appropriate performance indicators for follow up of the study programme have been specified.
3. Quality assurance of courses

Students’ course evaluations can be carried out using simple methods. Sometimes it is possible to make considerable progress through conversations and discussions. Some time at the end of the course students should be given an opportunity to report their experiences of the course in writing in order to safeguard that points of view may be expressed anonymously. This does not have to be complicated. The teacher can ask the students to write down what has been the best about the course and what needs to be changed. A complication arises, however, when the results must be compiled and reported back to the students according to the Higher Education Ordinance (chap 1 §14):

“Institutions of Higher Education must provide students who take part in or have concluded a course an opportunity of expressing their experiences from and viewpoints on the course through a students’ course evaluation organized by the institution. The institution must compile the student evaluations and inform about the results and possible decisions with regard to actions which will be taken due to the student-evaluations. The results must be made available to the students.”

A methodology for systematic quality assurance of courses will be tried out during 2006/07. This is a web-based system, called VETA, which in Swedish language means KNOWING and can also be interpreted as Virtual Evaluation Tool for Academia. With this tool data processing and compiling results is automated using electronic facilities.

A work procedure just with simple student evaluations does not provide foundations for long-term quality development. The results can rarely be generalized beyond the course group of immediate interest. Quality assurance is associated with a higher level of ambition. In other words the educational organization needs to become prepared to tackle the changes normally occurring in organization and financing, in students’ pre-knowledge and study conditions etc.
A prerequisite of quality assurance is that it may be verified how the intended learning outcomes are realized. If one wants to proceed in order to find explanations to the variations in the results an activity analysis needs to be performed (cf figure 1). This means that the conditions for the course are examined as well as teaching and learning. It is only then possibilities are created for a more deep-going evaluation in order to identify what works well and what needs to be improved in a course. This becomes easier to accomplish if the work can be performed using the support of electronic facilities. The manual work is then replaced by a series of decisions. Teachers and students may then by themselves decide how far it is necessary to proceed in order to assure course quality.

- The goals for the learning-processes in the course must be stated in the curriculum. The intended learning outcomes should therefore be documented in the educational database, in order to be able to include them automatically in a questionnaire.

The first step in quality-assurance is to decide on
1. which intended learning outcomes should be followed-up and evaluated, and
2. when this should be made.

These decisions are facilitated if students’ evaluations are made with the support of conversations and discussions during the course among teachers and students. By focusing defined intended learning outcomes several courses may
be followed-up and evaluated simultaneously, provided that this is otherwise considered appropriate. An advantage is that in this way a comprehensive picture can be obtained of teaching and learning during a semester. Administration of questionnaires is reduced, benefiting the analyses of results and measures.

- **Follow-up of results** is based on three types of data
  - the students’ descriptions of course content and their self-evaluation
  - the teachers’ judgement of students’ performances,
  - examination data related to intended learning outcomes.

Also other types of data may be required to add to the follow-up of results. Courses in a study programme often have the aim of developing knowledge and skills which are the prerequisites for studies on a later course. Data from the later course may then indicate how well the preparatory teaching effort has worked. In the same way follow-ups in working-life may indicate strengths and weaknesses in the educational outcomes, which need to be fed back to quality assurance of particular courses.

The next step thus concerns decisions whether to use
3. student questionnaire
4. teacher and examiner questionnaire
5. data from later courses and from alumni studies

The questionnaire data are processed and compiled automatically.

- **Activity analysis** in the third step has the aim of finding explanations to variations in the results, which the follow-up has identified. The course evaluating dialogue among students and teachers should be able to suggest hints about the causes. Is there anything in the conditions for realizing the course which may explain good results as well as shortcomings? It may refer to students’ pre-knowledge, teachers’ competence, teaching-resources, equipment etc. Is there anything in the educational process which may explain strengths and weaknesses in the results? This may concern students’ study efforts, goal orientation of teaching, feedback etc.

The hypotheses which come up through such discussions facilitate the activity analysis creating interest and readiness with regard to the conclusions. These hypotheses are systematically tested by using data about the state of things and obtaining judgements through the evaluation questionnaire. Teachers and
students frame their own questions they or use available question modules, formulated and tested in advance. The modules may be chosen if they are relevant for the hypotheses testing. After these choices have been made, the questionnaire responses may be processed and the results compiled automatically.

The decisions in the third step concern which hypotheses will be tested and therefore which questions need to be asked about the conditions for and the procedures of the course:

6. which own questions that needs to be framed,
7. which among the standardized question modules will be selected,
8. whether open questions will be used where the students may express themselves openly.

- **The evaluation** is based on data from the follow-up of results and the activity analysis. The automatic processing examines the relationships between result-judgements and the activity-analysis. For each intended learning outcome the automatic presentation suggest in which respects the course has worked well and good practice has been established. The account also gives hints with regard to weaknesses, i.e. in what respects measures need to be taken in order to improve the results. The evaluation may also be studied in more detail using available matrices.

The results of the evaluation are commented upon by teachers as well as student representatives. The stakeholders’ prioritization of measures as well as proposed time-plan should be clear from their reports. In the event that changes to the educational activities are not considered possible to carry out, suggestions about reduced goals should be made. The results from the evaluation and the measures which have been taken are reported to the educational board. There may also be measures, which require decisions by the board.

Two important decisions thus remain:

9. student representatives’ and teachers’ prioritization of the suggested measures which have emerged in the evaluation,
10. decisions about measures by the educational board, which should be made once each academic year.
4. Quality assurance of degrees

Quality assurance of degrees includes follow-up whether intended learning outcomes have been achieved. It also requires a more detailed analysis of study programmes, in order to make it possible to explain variations in the outcomes in relation to the various educational goals. The aim is to identify best practice as well as needs for improvement. The evaluation involves supervision by independent national or international expertise.

The basis for detailed analysis of educational activities is data on the conditions applicable to the study programme as well as data on the process of education, including experiences from both teachers and students. The commitment of various stakeholders in the evaluation is crucial in order to establish support for performing continuous quality work. Not least previous students with experiences from working life may contribute towards an evaluation of the education with regard to requirements in working life. The same model as in section sums up the process of programme evaluation (figure 1).

The faculty boards are responsible for performing evaluations of all their study programmes. Collecting the basic data for the evaluations, investigations with regard to students’ and teachers’ quality judgements as well as alumni and employer investigations are supported by the Office of Evaluation.

4.1. Verification of learning outcomes

The independent work in terms of essays and degree-projects is an expression for several of the intended learning outcomes stated for degrees on basic and advanced levels. Härnqvist stated in a study on ranking of bachelor theses that “writing an essay integrates a number of subject-related knowledge and methodological skills with such skills which belong to the general goals of Higher Education with regard to independent work, critical ability and effective communication”\(^5\) (p 23). In Härnqvist’s study of theses in history and political science experts first examined the following aspects and then made a final and integrated assessment:
- the relation of the thesis to previous research,
- whether the problem-statement leads to a productive research idea,

- the author’s understanding of theoretical aspects,
- selecting and using methodology,
- performing the study and drawing conclusions,
- language use and formal aspects.

The final assessment of the bachelor theses revealed considerable quality differences between similar educations at different HE institutions. There are thus good reasons to focus the final year projects in connection with quality assurance of degrees. The reliability with regard to evaluating specific aspects was, however, fairly weak. This may have been due to, among other things, that the experts interpreted the evaluation aspects differently. Quality assurance of courses presupposes that the various skills building up the competences can be defined in order to identify potential measures.

In a number of later peer reviews Härnqvist’s quality aspects were transformed in terms of intended learning outcomes. As an example the first aspect above was described in this way: “The students must independently be able to identify, make an overview of and evaluate published research in relation to the problem they choose to study.” This intended learning outcome, which is expected to be reflected in the degree-project course, thus consists of three different skills:
- to search for and identify scientific articles,
- to take stock of and summarize these articles in writing, and
- to evaluate them in relation to a selected problem formulation.

These experiments have been carried out using a broad selection of educational programmes: material science, physics, biology, political science, languages, music and nursing.

The experts’ follow-up of the outcomes of degree-projects now showed improved reliability. The method has been described elsewhere.

The examiner and other experts may as rule with some degree of certainty judge whether the students show these skills in their independent work. They are fundamental in order to develop a scholarly attitude and often show a strong relationship to the final integrated assessment. Some educational pro-

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Programs have explicit strategies for developing these skills with progress over the terms and academic years. Quality assurance may then take place with a step-by-step follow-up and evaluation of several modules and courses. It may in a first course include library training where students learn to use various data bases and search engines. The training of taking stock of and summarizing complex bodies of information may be a crucial part in the learning processes of other courses. To learn to evaluate published research in relation to the problem statement chosen for the degree project often requires support from the supervisor towards the end of the educational process.

The work with defining intended learning outcomes for the learning process makes it possible to carry out such a planned progression the curriculum and the training is presumed to take place above all as an integrated part of the degree project. These differences may explain variations in study outcomes.

In 2009 the National Agency of Higher Education will accomplish an institutional audit at Lund University. The quality assurance of degrees will be a decisive element of the self evaluation. The following methodology has been suggested:

In connection with the self evaluation of the degree programme or subject a list is made of all topics which have been selected for bachelor and master theses during the last academic year. Abstracts are appended to the self evaluation. Furthermore five theses which may represent excellent achievements are selected as well as five theses which may represent the bottom level of acceptable achievements. The theses are distributed among the academic experts. The experts assess the standard of the theses with regard to relevancy of the chosen topics, and the intended outcomes of the degree description.

4.2 Students and Teachers Barometer, Alumni Studies

Student and Teacher Barometers will continue to be an important tool for the self evaluation. These surveys are scheduled in such way that students’ and teachers’ experience of all study programmes and levels of qualification are explored during a period of six years.

Student and Teachers assess the outcomes and progression of the programmes. Students, who are in their final year, evaluate the final outcome, while students on earlier years evaluate the improvement of their knowledge and skills.
Experiences of educational processes may provide explanations with regard to the variations of the educational outcomes. This part of the questionnaire builds on a problem inventory made by focus groups representing study programmes within the faculty. The student group is appointed by the student unions, while the teacher group is appointed by the dean. The groups should include persons with experience of the education at undergraduate, advanced and postgraduate levels. The groups identify those variables which are considered most important for the activity analysis (figure 1 above).

In order to elucidate the students’ experiences from a diversity perspective background data are collected on age, sex, parents’ education, ethnic background, as well as disability. Similarly background data are collected about the teacher’s academic and pedagogical qualifications, position and employment, tasks (research, teaching and administration) and sex.

Every second year Statistics Sweden performs national surveys of the employability among graduates during the four years after graduation. In these surveys alumni are asked to describe their work tasks during a week. Next they evaluate whether they have received training in skills for these tasks during their time at the university and how satisfied they are with the training. Focus is on generic skills, mainly those listed in the Higher Education Act.

There has been a need for more detailed information about the professional competences of the graduates and for feedback to other specific study programmes. Therefore local alumni studies have been carried out, which sometimes have been supplemented with employer investigations. These combinations of general surveys by Statistics Sweden with occasional local alumni and employer investigations should continue to be useful.
5. **Quality assurance of internationalization**

In 2003 the National Agency for Higher Education evaluated internationalization of under- and postgraduate studies. Among the conclusions it was emphasized that the institutions needed to pay more attention to follow-up and evaluation with regard to internationalization efforts in order to improve quality assurance. A development project with this aim was carried out within Lund University in co-operation with Linköping University. As a first step the database STARS (Study Abroad Report system) was designed, in order to document how Lund University students experienced their international exchange studies. The database has proved a valuable source of information for outbound students. Most Swedish universities now use the database for that purpose.

A recent follow-up study indicates that students improve their language proficiency and ability to work in new cultural and social environments. The outcomes of the exchange studies in relation to subject oriented goals seem to be less convincing. A methodology using STARS as part of the quality assurance procedure of internationalization will be developed. The further development work will focus the following questions:

- In what respects is the quality in the students’ degrees affected when part of the education is located to an international university?
- In which ways are quality of education assured at the international universities included in the exchange programmes of Lund University?
- What is the impact of the students’ age, sex and social background on the frequency of exchange?
- Which measures may increase teacher exchange with international universities and which quality improvement may be attained through this exchange?
- Which measures may increase student exchange with international universities?
- In which ways are the students trained so that they in the future are able to work on an international labour market?
- What is the employability of students graduating from Lund University on the international labour market?
- What are the capabilities at Lund University to develop top-quality study programmes with high international competitive power and visibility, either alone or in cooperation with other Swedish or international universities?

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