

## 2023 Quality report on research and environmental monitoring and assessment

This quality report is based on the situational analysis conducted by university management, drawing on the faculty quality reports and quality dialogues between the faculties and university management. The vice-chancellor's quality report is one element of the quality assurance work documentation. It comprises two sections:

### A. The situational analysis (completed 2023)

This is where university management:

- summarises how the situational analysis was performed (A 1);
- provides an overarching analysis of the current situation (A2);
- describes the most important issues and development measures at university level that were noted during the quality assurance process.

### B. Follow-up of development measures (to be completed during 2024, 2025 and 2026)

The quality report will be updated with information about how the implementation of the measures is progressing.

### C. Any supplementary information from the situational analysis (as of 2024)

#### A. Situational analysis (completed 2023)

##### A 1. Presentation of how the university is involved in quality assurance

In 2023, the first situational analysis and quality dialogues were implemented within the framework of SLU's quality assurance systems for research and environmental monitoring and assessment. The vice-chancellor's report is based on the faculties' quality assurance reports and dialogues with faculty management. These, in turn, draw on situational analyses from the departments and faculty dialogues with the departments. Detailed information about the quality assurance process can be found in the *Quality assurance and development framework for research and environmental monitoring and assessment at SLU* (SLU.ua.2022.1.1.1-2209) (in Swedish only) and the *Instructions for systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment* (SLU.ua.2022.1.1.1-2210) (in Swedish only).

The quality dialogues between the vice-chancellor and faculties took place in conjunction with the annual operations dialogues. The operations dialogues are based on data about the faculties' finances, staff, skills provision and education. This data has also provided a good background for quality dialogues and partly addresses the same issues. The results of quality dialogues regarding education and third-cycle courses and study programmes were discussed simultaneously, thus bringing the various quality assurance systems together. Some areas, such as skills provision, overlap and affect research, environmental monitoring and assessment, education and third-cycle courses and study programmes.

Faculties and departments have partly followed different processes for implementing self-evaluations and compiling quality reports. However, combined experience is believed to be beneficial to the organisation. Having the opportunity to reflect upon questions of quality assurance was appreciated, as were the conditions for ensuring high-quality research and environmental monitoring and assessment.

Most of the conditions for research and environmental monitoring and assessment are managed where the core activities take place, i.e. at departmental level. Thus, the departments' self-evaluations and development measures form the basis of the system. The faculties' reports focus on the issues or development measures raised by several departments and where the faculties have a responsibility. The vice-chancellor's report forms a further level of aggregation focusing on particular issues raised by several faculties where responsibility lies at the central level. The vice-chancellor's quality report is therefore very comprehensive.

The faculties' quality reports have been appended to the vice-chancellor's report in order to provide a clearer complete picture of the current situation for each of the five quality assurance areas. A report addressing the needs that emerged from the quality dialogues and reports related to operational support have also been included.

The majority of problems and development measures at central level listed in the vice-chancellor's quality report are known, have been discussed in other contexts and in certain cases decisions have been taken on initiatives or measures. The fact that these have been raised with the vice-chancellor in the quality assurance work creates a way to check whether the system catches important development areas, and that the questions are systematically followed up on as part of the framework of the quality assurance system.

## **A 2. Comprehensive situational analysis**

*Quality area 1. Skills provision and continuing professional development*

***Quality area standard:***

***Skills provision is based on the needs in research, environmental monitoring and assessment and education. Recruitment is through open competition. Staff have access to continuing professional development.***

*Skills provision and continuing professional development*

Work with skills provision is generally seen as being systematic with a long-term focus. The recruitment process is open, transparent and merit-based. Skills provision is based on the needs in research, environmental monitoring and assessment and education, however, the high degree of external funding complicates strategic skills planning. Long-term development within a specific subject field risks becoming dependent on the priorities and resources of external research funding bodies.

Some subject fields experience difficulties recruiting skilled staff, especially to higher academic positions, and the reasons for this may vary. In certain instances, it may be the product of historical issues, such as a lack of external funding in a particular field, which led to a shortage of researchers with the right profile. Long recruitment periods are also a possible cause, as there is a risk that candidates drop out along the way. Work is always ongoing to develop an efficient process and shorten lead times<sup>1</sup>. There is also a need to raise awareness of SLU's activities and status as an attractive employer to encourage more people to apply for the positions we offer. Various faculty-level recruitment efforts are made, depending on the relevant needs. Strengthening the link between research and education is a vital overarching aim. To achieve this, there will be an increase in the proportion of academic staff working in both lines of activity.

One difficulty raised in recruitment context are the differences in how senior posts are funded at each faculty within the joint-faculty departments (FGIs), as are differences in the recruitment processes at each faculty<sup>2</sup>. The faculties also raise difficulties linked to international recruitment, particularly due to problems with the Swedish Migration Agency concerning residence permits.

One challenge some faculties face is an even gender distribution when recruiting to higher academic positions. A need for support in formulating gender-neutral language in recruitment texts has been noted, as well as texts that highlight the general benefits of working in Sweden and at SLU.

*Continuing professional development and career guidance*

The consensus is that staff are offered continuing professional development on equal terms and regardless of gender. However, many employees do not feel they are able to allocate the necessary time to continuing professional development. There are also requests for improved systems for following up on employees' continuing professional development.

Several faculties have identified a need for more career guidance for young or international researchers that need help navigating the Swedish academic system. SLU's work as part of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) is an important tool and should be more visible<sup>3</sup>. Career development could also be

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<sup>1</sup> Activity 4 under A3

<sup>2</sup> Activity 7 under A3

<sup>3</sup> Activity 6 under A3

included more clearly in staff development reviews for doctoral students and junior researchers.

*Quality area 2. Development and renewal*

***Quality area standard:***

***The organisation is characterised by positive leadership and employeeship together with a sustainable work environment and equal opportunities. The forms and scope for developing and renewing the organisation exist.***

The overall picture is that strategic discussions are regularly conducted at both departmental and faculty level, and generally, the work with development and renewal is conducted systematically. This primarily applies to the organised work with gender equality and equal opportunities which is believed to be working well at both faculty and departmental level. There is great awareness of the importance of continual efforts to create a positive work environment.

Following dialogues with departments, some faculties have identified the need for greater academic discussion and debate. Some also raise difficulties directing teaching staff's participation in teaching and that the issue raises friction both within the departments and between departments that participate in joint courses. This is largely a matter of explaining the expectations placed on professors and senior lecturers and supporting managers with this leadership form.

Administration tasks, such as those linked to programmes, are considered to be time and energy consuming and create stress. Better coordination of administrative processes at SLU, simplified reporting etc. are being sought.

*Quality area 3. Infrastructure*

***Quality area standard:***

***The infrastructure for research and environmental monitoring and assessment reflects the organisation's needs and development. Furthermore, these areas are characterised by accessibility and efficient use of resources.***

Generally, access to infrastructure is deemed to meet the organisation's requirements. SLU has a wide range of research infrastructure relating to its tasks. Many employees are aware of what is available, however this could be improved in order to make it more accessible both within and outside the university. Much of the existing infrastructure could be pooled more efficiently.

Overall, the procedures for continually upgrade and develop this infrastructure are good. High levels of digitisation within research and environmental monitoring and assessment have led to an increased need for data processing, with several faculties believing that storage needs are not covered by existing infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> Support with areas such as data management plans is also required, as is access to data<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Activity 2 under A3

<sup>5</sup> Activity 3 under A3

Several faculties express difficulties in financing research infrastructure and are planning measures to increase collaboration and sharing around infrastructure. However, it was noted that a lack of funding may be related to a belief among institutions that all the means for acquiring and establishing an infrastructure need to be in place from the start. Nevertheless, the depreciation periods are long and user fees or co-financing from other stakeholders are a useful resource.

*Quality area 4. Collaboration and mutual learning*

***Quality area standard:***

***External collaborations lead to mutual learning and the development of new knowledge and skills.***

External collaborations and mutual learning are generally believed to be comprehensive, multifaceted and an integral part of developing activities at a department. In addition, several departments make significant contributions to collaborations with other public authorities on environmental monitoring and assessment.

Generally, the forms of collaboration and mutual learning are considered to work well and the existing needs differ between faculties. One faculty emphasises the need for improved organisation regarding support for research communication, clearer demarcations in terms of collaboration responsibility and research communication<sup>6</sup>. They also ask for a discussion on how the fundraising function could support collaboration through means such as research infrastructure. Another faculty sees a need to develop collaboration and collaborative inputs in areas of the organisation, as the distribution appears to be uneven between different research areas. An additional faculty raised the need to discuss and clarify SLU's mission, particularly in terms of what the SLU Ordinance means for the university as a whole, beyond what is stated in the Higher Education Act and Ordinance.

*Quality area 5. Good research practice*

***Quality area standard:***

***The university is characterised by scientific integrity as per good research practice.***

The overall assessment is that the organisation is run by scientific integrity, that ethical guidelines and principles regarding good research practice are known within the organisation and that any deviations from good research practice are followed up. There are a number of fixed checkpoints built in to the scientific system such as peer-reviews, ethical reviews, external assessments when appointing new staff and applying for project funding as well as thesis defences.

Several faculties emphasise the importance of obtaining knowledge about good research practice and establishing good working methods throughout their education. The compulsory doctoral course in ethics and philosophy of science is essential and it needs to be given on the various SLU campuses. Continuing

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<sup>6</sup> Activity 8 under A3

professional development for supervisors on these topics is essential. The SLU Board for Good Research Practice (GSF) works proactively to provide internal training on good research practice and scientific publication.

No systematic internal reviews are performed on scientific work in order to identify shortcomings in good research practice. Instead, the focus lies on preventive measures. Continual discussions on good research practice are held in various departmental and faculty forums.

### A 3. Challenges and planned activities at university level

The quality assurance process has shown that in most aspects, conditions are positive for conducting high-quality research and environmental monitoring and assessment at SLU. The tables below list the problems and development measures that both the vice-chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor's Management Group have chosen to continue work to further improve conditions over the coming four-year period. We share some challenges with the higher education sector in general.

Table 1. Common challenges for the higher education sector, long-term work.

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Challenges</i>   | <i>Activities</i>  | <i>Status</i>     | <i>Responsible</i> |
|------------|---|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1          | Major administrative work at the departments  | Continuing work to coordinate and simplify processes.  | Initiated/ongoing | The faculties, VS  |
| 2          | Existing infrastructure does not meet the current storage needs for research and environmental monitoring and assessment data.                  | Work ongoing. REB 26 August 2021: <i>Financing strengthened IT infrastructure</i> (SLU.ua.2021.1.1.1-2911).  | Activity approved | VS                 |
| 3          | Need for support with areas such as data management plans and data access as well as support for calculating and processing large data volumes. | Work ongoing. REB 18 March 2022: <i>Development programme for processing and enabling access to research and environmental data aiming to support SLU's strategic digitalisation targets</i> (SLU.ua.2022.1.1.1.-669). | Activity approved | VS, SLU library    |

Table 2. Challenges requiring continual internal development work.

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Challenges</i>  | <i>Activities</i>   | <i>Status</i>     | <i>Responsible</i> |
|------------|--|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| 4          | Long processes can affect the ability to recruit skilled staff into higher academic positions.                     | Continue work with developing the recruitment processes for higher positions with the aim of shortening them – without compromising legal certainty.  | Initiated/ongoing | The faculties, VS  |
| 5a         | In certain subject fields, there are too few applicants meeting the right profile applying for academic positions. | Continue the work to raise awareness of SLU's activities in various ways (in research networks, with research communication, etc.).   | Initiated/ongoing | The faculties, VS  |
| 5b         | In certain subject fields, there are too few applicants meeting the right profile applying for academic positions. | Develop recruitment texts that better highlight the advantages of SLU and Sweden as places to work, and ensure that the language used is gender-neutral in order to open up to more candidates. | Initiated/ongoing | The faculties, VS  |
| 6          | Need for career guidance for young or international researchers.   | Continue the work within HRS4R and use this in career support for young researchers and information about the Swedish academic system.  | Initiated/ongoing | The faculties, VS  |

Table 3. Challenges depend on a well-organised organisational structure or processes at SLU.

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Challenges</i>   | <i>Activities</i>  | <i>Status</i>           | <i>Responsible</i>  |
|------------|---|--|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 7          | Differences in financing and processes between faculties appointing to higher academic positions within FGIs. | Decide whether the faculties' processes are to be different and address the FGIs in a set order, or determine if these processes should be harmonised. | Continue the discussion | Vice-chancellor, LR |

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Challenges</b>                         | <b>Activities</b>  | <b>Status</b>           | <b>Responsible</b>  |
|------------|---|--|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 8          | SLU's visibility varies by subject field. | Reflect on the current model where the visibility of each field depends on research communication initiatives at departmental and faculty level. | Continue the discussion | Vice-chancellor, LR |

#### **A 5. Other comments**

[Any additional proposals or feedback on the quality assurance process or overall reflections not stated above]

#### **B. Follow-up of development measures**

*Prior to the annual quality dialogue with the vice-chancellor (2024, 2025 and 2026), the faculty must describe their progress with the implementation of measures and any consequent changes. Factors that affect the implementation and/or effects of the measures should be described.*

Copy the table below for each measure in table A 3.

|                                 |
|---------------------------------|
| <b>Development measure no.:</b> |
| <b>Heading:</b>                 |
| <b>Action status:</b>           |
| <b>2024:</b>                    |
| <b>2025:</b>                    |
| <b>2026:</b>                    |

#### **C. Any supplementary documentation for the situational analysis (as of 2024)**

*Only complete this section if decisive changes that have led to new measure(s) have been implemented since 2023.*

[Any supplementary documentation from the situational analysis]

[Date supplemented]