

Quality assurance and quality enhancement 2019

Report to the Government



Quality assurance and quality enhancement 2019 – Report to the Government

Published by the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2020

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Reference number: 412-00562-19

Translation: Accent Språkservice

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Conclusions

This report shows how the reviews, evaluations and follow-ups that the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) carried out in 2019 have contributed to quality enhancement and to high quality in the operations of Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs). This is an annual report from UKÄ to the Government.

The material used to produce this report indicates the following:

- A majority of respondents to the follow-up surveys sent to HEI contacts note that UKÄ's reviews and evaluations have contributed to improving quality at the HEI and in its programmes. They highlight the self-evaluation and the assessors' report as drivers of quality enhancement.
- The follow-ups of the programmes with the overall assessment *under review* drive the HEIs and programmes to double down on their quality assurance work. The follow-ups of the third-cycle programmes show that some of the most common measures are to increase teacher resources, admit more doctoral students, offer more third-cycle courses, integrate gender equality into the programmes and work in a more structured way with the individual study plan.
- UKÄ will follow up nine HEIs with reviewed quality assurance processes. These follow-ups will be in the form of the HEIs submitting reports on taken measures within a specific timeframe. In eight of the cases, the quality systems are not developed enough or have not been tested enough to allow the assessors to judge whether the HEI can ensure the quality of the courses and programmes.
- Almost half of the programmes for preschool and primary education degrees will be followed up because of quality deficiencies. These deficiencies apply primarily to the achievement of parts of the national qualitative targets chosen for the evaluation. Knowledge about research methods and critical thinking ability have the most significant deficiencies.
- The third-cycle programmes evaluated during 2019 generally maintain high quality. Of the programmes given the assessment *under review* in 2018 and 2019, however, HEIs decided to terminate programmes in several cases.
- The feedback conferences organised by UKÄ after completed evaluations have offered a platform for HEI representatives and

the chairperson of the assessment panels. Together, they have had the opportunity to exchange thoughts and share experience from the evaluation processes and have in-depth discussions about assessor observations in the reports.

Introduction

This report presents how the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has contributed to quality enhancement and to high quality at higher education institutions (HEIs) through its reviews and evaluations. The report is produced annually on assignment from the Government of Sweden, in accordance with UKÄ's instructions from the Government¹.

UKÄ has developed the current national system for quality assurance of higher education and research in close cooperation with Swedish HEIs. It will be used during the period 2017–2022. Quality assurance comprises four components: review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes (institutional reviews), programme evaluations, appraisals for degree-awarding powers and thematic evaluations.

UKÄ and the HEIs have a shared responsibility for quality assurance of higher education, and this is of central importance for the quality assurance system. The reviews are based on the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), and the principles for quality assurance of higher education in Europe, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG, 2015)². The method is based on peer review with assessors appointed by UKÄ but nominated by the HEIs, the Swedish National Union of Students and stakeholders from the labour market. As with UKÄ's previous system, it looks at whether the HEIs ensure that students have achieved the national qualitative targets upon graduation.

The report begins with a method section that includes a description of the type of material that the report's conclusions are based on. This is followed by a presentation of our analysis of the material, then a summary and finally our concluding comments.

Method and material

As noted above, the purpose of this report is to present how UKÄ has contributed to quality enhancement and to high quality in the operations of HEIs. We have interpreted this as UKÄ is to present the impact of its reviews.

¹ According to Section 2, paragraph 2 of Ordinance (2012:810) with instructions for the Swedish Higher Education Authority, the Authority is to report how quality assurance has contributed to improving quality and to high quality in the operations of higher education institutions.

² See also UKÄ's Swedish translation, *Standarder och riktlinjer för kvalitetssäkring inom det europeiska området för högre utbildning* (ESG, 2015).

In this report, we use the word “impact” in accordance with the Swedish National Financial Management Authority’s definition in which an impact is “a change caused as a result of a taken measure and that otherwise would not have occurred”³.

In this report, the word “measures” refers to measures that the HEIs take in preparation for or as a result of UKÄ’s reviews. The changes are impacts of the measures that HEIs take in preparation for or as a result of the reviews. Since the current quality assurance system is relatively new, the amount of material is still too limited to speak with confidence about these impacts. The measures, however, can point to whether the HEIs have listened to the results of UKÄ’s reviews and in what ways. They can also give an indication on what impacts the reviews can have in the longer term.

The material for studying this consists of the outcome of the evaluations of the teacher training programmes, third-cycle programmes, follow-ups of third-cycle programme evaluations, and the institutional reviews. The results of these evaluations and follow-ups are supplemented with a presentation of what assessment areas have been assessed as *satisfactory* and *not satisfactory* and a report of the measures taken that the HEIs have reported in the follow-ups.

Results from surveys that UKÄ sent to contact persons at the reviewed HEIs also provide supporting material. UKÄ’s quality assurance system includes following up the evaluations through surveys. This also applies to programmes or HEIs that have been approved in the evaluations. The surveys included in the material were sent to the contact persons for the institutional reviews in round 1 and 2, and for the programme evaluations that UKÄ carried out in 2019, i.e. the preschool and primary school teacher programme evaluations and the third-cycle programme evaluations.

The below question was asked only to the contacts for the programme evaluations.

- 1) *Do the evaluations contribute to checking actual conditions and outcomes, e.g. that the programmes/third-cycle programmes meet the requirements of applicable laws and ordinances?*

The following question was asked of contacts for institutional reviews and for programme evaluations.

- 2) *Does the evaluation contribute to enhancing the quality of the programme/third-cycle programme?*⁴

³ Kajsa Nilsson. *Effektivvärdering: att välja upplägg*. [Impact evaluation: choosing a method] Swedish National Financial Management Authority, 2006, p. 9.

⁴ UKÄ has also conducted surveys with the assessors, primarily about method questions.

In addition to surveys, UKÄ has organised feedback conferences, where it has invited representatives from the HEIs and teacher training programmes that have been evaluated. Some surveys aimed at determining if the HEI representatives think the conferences have contributed to quality enhancement have not been conducted, but the opinions expressed at the conferences have been documented. This documentation also serves as supporting material in the report for how UKÄ's quality assurance system contributes to improving HEI operations.

UKÄ's quality assurance system consists of two additional components beyond the institutional reviews and programme evaluations, namely, appraisals for degree-awarding powers and thematic evaluations. Thematic evaluations were not conducted or followed up in 2019. It can be noted, however, that the HEIs have been tasked in their public service agreement for 2020 to present how they have followed up the recommendations from UKÄ's thematic evaluation from 2017 on sustainable development⁵.

UKÄ has received several applications for degree-awarding powers. There is however insufficient basis to evaluate whether the applications have been drivers of quality enhancements, since the surveys to HEI contacts did not include questions about this. We have therefore chosen not to include this component in this report of the quality assurance system's impact as quality enhancing. It is, however, worth noting that all public HEIs now have degree awarding powers to offer third-cycle programmes within at least one research domain⁶. This means that the HEIs have worked hard to build up sufficiently strong environments to apply for and be granted by UKÄ third-cycle degree awarding powers within one or more domains.

Difficulties measuring impacts

Internationally, there is a significant benefit to society in ensuring that higher education maintains high quality. In *Impact of Quality Assurance on Higher Education Institutions: A Literature Review*, the authors begin⁷ by describing the background to the major trend in evaluating the field of higher education that began in the early 1980s. The driving factors behind the growing interest for quality in higher education was the combination of fast growth in the number of students, decreasing public financing together with a general ambition for better public

⁵ Public Service Agreement for budget year 2020 for universities and university colleges U2019/00809/UH U2019/04337/BS.

⁶ www.uka.se/om-oss/aktuellt/nyheter/2019-12-11-samtliga-statliga-hogskolor-far-bedriva-forskarutbildning.html.

⁷ Shuiyun Liu, Minda Tan & Zhaorui Meng. "Impact of Quality Assurance on Higher Education Institutions" in *Higher Education Evaluation and Development* 9:2 (2015), 17–34. HEE ACT, APQN & Airiti Inc.

service, and increasingly diverse student populations, range of courses and programmes offered and higher education institutions.

The Bologna Process, which began in 1999, has been a driving force in the development of quality assurance within European higher education because of the need for mutual recognition of qualifications. Sandberg & Faugert⁸ write that interest in evaluation in Sweden increased significantly in the 1990s. They also note membership in the EU as a contributing factor. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education's *Hur har det gått?* [How did it work out?] from 2007 states "the EU's regulations, particularly the general directives for mutual recognition of qualifications, is based on a mutual respect and confidence in the quality of the member countries' educational systems. The need for regular recurring evaluations can be viewed from this background" (p. 47).

From the question of whether the programmes maintain high quality, it is not a major jump to the question of whether the evaluations have the desired effect and how to measure this. The article "Impact of Quality Assurance on Higher Education Institutions: A Literature Review" refers to several studies. In one study by Stensaker (2003) and one by Harvey & Newton (2004), the researchers address the methodological problems with earlier impact studies within the field of higher education.

To comment on what impacts a measure has, you may need to ask what other factors could explain the impacts and other questions. To know whether a certain measure really has caused a certain impact, it is good to measure in multiple ways. In this study, we noted in particular the following starting point: "In practice, a combination of different methods and approaches, known as method triangulation, is needed to produce a reliable picture in an impact analysis"⁹. For this reason, we have chosen to study different forms of supporting material to answer the question of how UKÄ's reviews have contributed to improving quality at the HEIs.

⁸ Bo Sandberg, Sven Faugert. *Perspektiv på utvärdering* [Perspective on evaluation]. 3rd edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur; 2016. p. 16.

⁹ Ibid. p. 107.

Review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes

Reviews and outcomes

The institutional reviews have both a control and an enhancement function. They should both confirm that the HEIs' quality assurance processes ensure the courses and programmes are of high quality and contribute to the HEIs' enhancement of quality.

In 2019, the following HEIs were reviewed: Malmö University, Jönköping University Foundation, University of Borås, Mälardalen University, Swedish Red Cross University College, Swedish National Defence College, Sophiahemmet University, Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, and Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College. Six of these received the overall assessment of *approved with reservations* and three received the overall assessment of *quality assurance processes under review*. This means that all of the HEIs will be followed up in the assessment areas determined as not satisfactory. Those that were *approved with reservations* will report the measures they take within two years. For an HEI that received the overall assessment *quality assurance processes under review*, the HEI and UKÄ come to agreement on an appropriate date to submit the report on taken measures.

Within institutional reviews, the following six assessment areas are reviewed:

- governance and organisation
- preconditions
- design, implementation and outcomes
- gender equality
- student and doctoral student perspective
- working life and collaboration

To be able to judge these assessment areas, each area has one or more assessment criteria that largely have to be met for an assessment area to be judged as satisfactory.

Assessment areas with deficiencies

One way of studying what impacts UKÄ's reviews will have is to study in which assessment areas the HEIs have received the overall assessment *not satisfactory*. The assessment areas will be followed up and the HEIs will have to report on implemented measures.

Table 1. The number of HEIs of the 9 reviewed assessed as *not satisfactory* for each assessment area.

Assessment areas	Number of HEIs assessed as <i>not satisfactory</i> per assessment area
Governance and organisation	8
Preconditions	1
Design, implementation and outcomes	5
Gender equality	3
Student and doctoral student perspective	1
Working life and collaboration	0

The first assessment area, governance and organisation, had the most HEIs (8 of 9) with the overall assessment *not satisfactory*. This was primarily caused by the quality systems not being developed enough or not having been tested enough for the assessors to be able to judge whether the HEI can ensure the quality of the courses and programmes.

Most HEIs (8 of 9), however, pass the preconditions assessment area, which includes the assessment criteria on ensuring the competency of the teaching staff matches the educational operation's needs, student support and infrastructure.

Five of the HEIs were assessed *not satisfactory* in the design, implementation and outcomes assessment area. The assessment criterion that the majority of HEIs (6) did not pass deals with improving the courses and programmes with the help of continual follow-ups and periodic reviews. This criterion is clearly linked to the quality system, the degree to which it is finely tuned to ensure programme quality, and that it has been tested enough to satisfactorily ensure the programmes' quality. An equal number of HEIs have been criticised for their communication of outcomes to stakeholders, such as students.

Three HEIs have been assessed as *not satisfactory* in the gender equality assessment area. This area only has one assessment criterion that asks

whether gender equality is considered in the programmes' design, implementation and outcomes. The HEIs' assignments on gender mainstreaming have often¹⁰ led to many activities within the area, but the programmes have not always considered gender equality systematically.

Of the nine HEIs, all but one was assessed *satisfactory* for the student and doctoral student perspective.

All HEIs received the overall assessment *satisfactory* in the working life and collaboration assessment area. This outcome can be linked to the reviewed HEIs having a special focus or that they are smaller HEIs with an overriding focus on professional qualifications. Three of the HEIs specialise in health science programmes. One of the HEIs is a university with a wide-ranging programme offering but also many health science programmes and teacher training programmes.

Follow-up – surveys

In the survey we asked the contact persons at the reviewed HEIs if they felt that the review had contributed to *the HEI's quality enhancement*.

Table 2. Responses to the survey question about whether the review has contributed to the HEI's quality enhancement.

	Total number of contact persons	Number of contact persons that responded
	9	8
To a very large extent		4
To a large extent		4

Some of the contacts from the first round of reviews responded that the self-evaluation was helpful:

“When writing the self-evaluation, vague aspects in our current quality system were discovered. This forced us to stop and think about these to address them and begin working with them even before the site visit. The observations from UKÄ through the assessment panel's report were in no way unexpected. Instead, they largely touched on the areas we had identified in the self-evaluation as weaknesses. The work we have now begun gives us an opportunity to correct these.”

“The knowledge about and enthusiasm for our quality system increased measurably through working with the evaluation.”

¹⁰ Budget Bill for 2016, Bill 2015/16:1, Allocation 16, www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2015/09/prop.-2015161/.

Several contacts felt that the external review and the assessors' report contributed to improvements:

"UKÄ's review has pressured the organisation to more clearly document and systematise the quality assurance work."

"The assessment panel's report clearly points to systematic deficiencies. General suggestions for improvements were also highlighted, which is good."

"The review has placed the quality assurance work in focus. And the evaluation has provided useful input for additional improvements to the recently reworked quality system."

"The assessment panel's report was factual and instructive in the need for continued quality enhancement."

"It has contributed to creating a more developed quality culture at the HEI."

While a majority of the open-ended responses provides clear examples of how the reviews have driven quality work forward, criticisms were also directed at the review taking too much time:

"In many ways, yes. The evaluation has contributed to improving quality within the disciplinary domain at the HEI. Internally, it has been a good process to be externally reviewed and to confirm what we identified internally were deficiencies in our quality system and the areas where we think that the quality assurance procedures work well. But it has taken a lot of work time and, in some respects, taken perhaps too much time from other processes that drive quality, which have been given a lower priority during the review period."

Overall, the surveys to the contact persons at the HEIs included in the first and second round of reviews clearly point to UKÄ's reviews contributing positively to the HEIs' quality enhancement. The respondents feel that both the self-evaluation and the assessors' reviews have contributed to improving the quality system at their own HEI and to developing the quality culture.

Follow-up – feedback conferences

The feedback conference for the first round of reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes took place in May 2019.¹¹ At that time, UKÄ

¹¹ The feedback conference for the second round of reviews took place in February 2020. For this reason, it is not presented in this report, which is limited to presenting UKÄ's evaluation work in 2019.

asked the HEIs to reflect on one or more of the following challenges from their perspectives:

- systematic follow-up, development and feedback
- internal learning
- link between research and education.

A summary has been published and translated into English¹². The summary includes both reflections from the feedback conference and UKÄ's study of the reports from the round. It shows that systematic follow-up that leads to relevant measures to improve and develop the programmes is a challenge for the HEIs included in the round. While there are many good examples of improvement work at the reviewed HEIs, it is also a challenge to achieve systematic dissemination of knowledge and learning throughout the entire organisation. The link between research and education is another challenge and an important question for the HEIs.

The reports show that the HEIs need to review their policy documents to ensure they are clear and uniform. One question discussed at the conference is the amount of documentation. Finding a balance between reasonable and sufficiently comprehensive documentation is a challenge. It is also important to monitor that the quality systems do not become too cumbersome, and that they are well adapted to their purpose and effective.

Another area the assessors highlighted and that is identified in the summary is the need for clear quality criteria for what is high quality for the internal organisation. This is important for ensuring the quality system is designed to capture the right things.

¹² *Några reflektioner och erfarenheter efter lärosätessgranskningarna i omgång ett* [Some reflections and lessons following the first round of institutional reviews], Carin Dänsel and Anna Rudebeck, UKÄ 2019.

Programme evaluations

Reviews and outcomes: preschool and primary education degrees

The purpose of the programme evaluations is to monitor the programmes' outcomes and to contribute to the HEIs' own quality enhancements for the reviewed programmes. The focus is on how the programmes ensure that students are given good opportunities to achieve the objectives of the System of Qualifications, and how the HEI ensures that students have achieved the qualitative targets upon graduation.

The table below shows how many teacher training programmes were evaluated in 2019 and the percentage of programmes judged to have deficiencies in their education, and which therefore received the overall assessment of *under review*. Within the evaluated teacher training programmes, the evaluations will likely impact the quality of the programmes as a result of the large number of measures taken, which the HEIs will report on in the follow-up one year after the evaluation.

Table 3. Number of reviewed teacher education programmes and outcomes 2019 (number)

Degree	Number of programmes	High quality	Under review
Pre-School Education Degree	19	11	8
Primary Education Degree, with specialisation in after-school care centres	12	8	4
Primary Education Degree, with specialisation in preschool class and grades 1–3	18	7	11
Primary Education Degree, with specialisation in grades 4–6	18	9	9
	67	35	32

Within the programme evaluations, the assessment areas are

- preconditions
- design, implementation and outcomes (including gender equality and follow-up, measures and feedback)
- student perspective
- working life and collaboration.

Just as with institutional reviews, each assessment area includes one or more assessment criteria.

Assessment areas with deficiencies

The table below shows which assessment areas have deficiencies for the programmes that will be followed up since they received the overall assessment *under review*.

Table 4. Number of programmes assessed *not satisfactory* per assessment area (BO)

BO	Preschool degree (19)	Primary education degree, after-school centres (12)	Primary education degree, Preschool–3 grade (18)	Primary education degree, 4–6 (18)
Preconditions	2	3	2	2
Design, implementation and outcomes ¹³	8	4	11	9
Student perspective	0	0	0	0
Working life and collaboration	0	0	0	0

The above table shows that the assessment area where most teacher training programmes demonstrate deficiencies is design, implementation and outcomes. These deficiencies apply primarily to the achievement of parts of the national qualitative targets chosen for the evaluation. The parts with the most significant deficiencies are knowledge about research methods and critical thinking ability, something that is in part linked to the lack of staff with PhDs that teach on certain programmes, particularly when there is a large number of students. All HEIs pass the assessment criteria gender equality, follow-up, measures and feedback. The same applies for the student perspective and the working life and collaboration assessment areas.

Follow-up – surveys

The response rate for the teacher training programme evaluations was 50 per cent. The table below shows how the contact persons responded to the question of whether the teacher training programme evaluation contributed to quality enhancement.

¹³ Includes selection of qualitative targets, gender equality and follow-up, measures and feedback. For a more detailed description of the principles for selection of qualitative targets, see *Guidelines for programme evaluations at the first- and second-cycle levels*, UKÄ, 2018.

Table 5. The contact persons' responses to the question of whether the teacher training programme evaluation contributed to the improvement of the programme's quality.

	Number of contact persons	Number of responding contacts
	26	13
To a very large extent		3
To a large extent		5
To a certain extent		3
Cannot or do not want to answer		2

Multiple respondents chose to leave a comment to this question. Below is a selection of these responses. The external review is seen as helping to improve quality.

"Working to continually improve the programmes always results in identifying aspects that need to be corrected. In connection with the evaluations and threat of losing degree-awarding powers, this work will have high priority. This is naturally good and will lead to the programmes becoming even better, which is positive."

"Work to improve quality had already begun but picked up in pace in connection with the UKÄ review."

"Our participation and the feedback we received were immediately useful in addressing weaknesses."

"In the same way that the university's own evaluations contributed to improving quality. By reviewing and thoroughly examining a programme based on different assessment criteria, both strengths and areas for improvement are identified."

But several comments also highlighted the self-evaluations as a process for improving quality:

"The work with the self-evaluation involved the entire teaching team and gave us a better opportunity to analyse and reflect over our programmes together. How the work actually is expressed depends of course a lot on local decisions, but I feel that we had a process that strengthened our quality assurance work and our collegial learning. My conclusion is that the evaluation's design creates good opportunities for collegial work that improves quality but that these opportunities naturally have to be leveraged by each HEI to be successful."

The contacts for the teacher training programme evaluations were also asked about whether the evaluation contributed to checking *actual conditions and outcomes*. About 60 per cent of the respondents said that the evaluation achieved this.

Table 6. The contact persons’ responses to the question of whether the teacher evaluation has contributed to checking actual conditions and outcomes.

	Number of contact persons	Number of responding contacts
	26	13
To a very large extent		3
To a large extent		5
To a certain extent		4
Cannot or do not want to answer		1

Only two contacts for the teacher training programmes commented on how the evaluation contributed to checking actual conditions and results:

“It was clear that it wasn’t policies that were to be evaluated, but rather how we actually act.”

“The evaluation checked examples of actual conditions and outcomes. Having removed the ability to include links in the self-evaluation was problematic, however, since that eliminated the ability to provide supporting documentation to what is stated in the self-evaluation.”

Overall, the teacher training programme evaluations have a lower response rate than the institutional reviews and, as we will see, the evaluations of third-cycle programmes. Of the 50 per cent that responded, however, over 60 per cent felt that the evaluations contributed to improved quality. An equal number felt that the evaluations contributed to checking actual conditions and outcomes. Those who were positive to the evaluations note both the self-evaluation and the assessors’ reviews as helping to improve quality.

Follow-up – feedback conferences

In September 2019, UKÄ held a feedback conference for the HEIs with preschool and primary education programmes that had been evaluated. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the process, the overall

outcome of the evaluations and the areas important for improving the preschool and primary education programmes.

After the introduction by UKÄ's director general, the following topics were discussed:

- a review of the process and the evaluations' overall outcomes
- reflections on the evaluations from the assessment panels' chairpersons
- information about the follow-up process
- two workshops.

To prepare for the conference, UKÄ's project group listed the eight most common deficiencies that the assessors highlighted in the reports, and the HEIs were able to choose two deficiencies to discuss at the two workshops. Staffing and research/education were by far the alternatives most selected by the HEIs.

The purpose of the workshops was to give the HEIs the opportunity to meet and discuss improvement efforts within the deficiency areas at the HEI level and national level and, in this way, to inspire each other. This was a new approach for UKÄ and an opportunity for the Authority to enable discussion and learning among the HEIs providing a platform (venue, invitation, collaborative methods and meta analyses).

The discussions at the conference showed that an internal review at the HEI is an important measure for handling the challenges with staffing competency and composition. The HEIs should find out how they use teachers and existing competencies, how they can create a core group of teachers in the programme, and what are the requirements for teaching hours and opportunities for continuing professional development.

At the national level, there was a desire for targeted initiatives that raise the status of teachers and encourages structural collaboration between the country's HEIs, such as that teaching and employment can occur across multiple HEIs. A national research school for teacher training was also discussed.

The gap between science and practice at the HEI level could be addressed by creating discussion forums about the link between theory/research and practice, and by allowing the students to use different theories in practice to raise awareness and understanding for the importance of this link.

At the national level, there was a call for initiatives for different collaboration projects between municipalities and HEIs, research projects supported by municipalities and research schools, and

clarification in the System of Qualifications about the importance of teaching placement.

Reviews and outcomes: third-cycle programmes

The third-cycle subject areas evaluated 2018–2019 and which UKÄ concluded during 2019 are included in the research subjects¹⁴ listed in Table 7.

Table 7. Number of third-cycle programme evaluations that UKÄ concluded in 2019, and outcomes.

Research subjects	Number of evaluated programmes	Number assessed as under review
Design	5	1
Comparative literature	9	0
Music	2	0
Production engineering, human work science and ergonomics	12	3
Total	28	4

A high percentage of the evaluated third-cycle programmes were assessed as *high quality*. Only 14 per cent (4 of 28) received the overall assessment *under review*. One HEI with a programme that received the overall assessment *under review* has applied for a re-assessment of the decision. Two of the *under review* programmes have submitted termination decisions. In both cases, they were very small third-cycle programme environments.

¹⁴ When planning for third-cycle programme evaluations in the 2017–2022 six-year cycle, UKÄ based the selection process on the research subject fields, fields of application and research fields defined in Swedish Standard Classification of Research Subjects (*Standard för svensk indelning av forskningsämnen 2011, updated by UKÄ and Statistics Sweden 2016*). The HEIs name and describe their third-cycle subject areas themselves in each general study plan, but they have to link the third-cycle subject area to a national research subject when registering it in the Ladok study documentation system.

Assessment areas with deficiencies

Table 8. Number of programmes assessed as *not satisfactory* in each assessment area.

The assessment areas assessed as <i>not satisfactory</i>	Number of programmes music	Number of programmes design	Number of programmes comparative literature	Number of programmes production engineering
Preconditions	0	1	0	3
Design, implementation and outcomes	0	1	0	3
Doctoral student perspective	0	0	0	1
Working life and collaboration	0	0	0	1

The table shows that all programmes receiving the overall assessment *under review* had deficiencies within the preconditions assessment area. The same applies to the design, implementation and outcomes area.

In one case, there were no teaching staff with adequate competency for supervising and the third-cycle programme environment was non-existent. In another case, the preconditions were assessed as not satisfactory because the environment was too small both in terms of staff and doctoral students and the extent of the research. Two of the forms of proficiency were assessed as not satisfactory because there were too few courses and the joint scientific basis for the environment was insufficient. In the third case, there was no sustainable structure or long-term strategy for the third-cycle education, with only one half-time doctoral student in the environment. In the fourth case, it was judged that the third-cycle subject area was too vaguely defined in the general study plan, which made planning and follow-up of the third-cycle programme difficult.

Followed up third-cycle programmes

In 2019, follow-ups were conducted of third-cycle programmes that had the overall assessment *under review* in the evaluations conducted in 2018 and, in one case, in 2017. A total of 83 programmes were evaluated in 2018 within the research subjects: ethics, history of religions, psychology, applied psychology, architecture, economics, pedagogy, computer science and history. Of these, 29 per cent (24 programmes) received the overall assessment *under review*.

The economics evaluation will be followed up in 2020 and, therefore, is not included in this report. Two programmes from 2017 were included in the evaluation of the third-cycle programmes in the research subject textile, rubber and polymeric materials. Of these two programmes, one received the overall assessment *under review*.

Table 9. Number of followed up third-cycle programmes and outcomes 2019.

Research subject	Number of followed up programmes	Of which High quality	Of which under review	The programme terminated by the HEI
Pedagogy	4	1	0	3
Psychology and applied psychology	2	1	0	1
Architecture	1	0	0	1
Textile, rubber and polymeric materials	1	1	0	
History	6	5	0	1
Computer science	5	5	0	

A total of 19 research programmes were followed up. Of these, six were terminated. In one case, the third-cycle subject area (history) was terminated, but a new third-cycle subject area was established where history is included as one of several specialisations. The assessment panel was informed of the taken measures though the programme was terminated, and could conclude that the measures in the form of new recruitment of professor and docents and the employment of a couple of

new doctoral students were sufficient to ensure the quality of the programme. Even when excluding this programme, 26 per cent of the programmes given the assessment *under review* were terminated. It can be concluded that HEIs sometimes terminate programmes that have been given the assessment *under review*. Sometimes a programme is restarted when the HEI secures the resources to offer the programme with high quality.

Table 10 shows the measures that the HEIs have taken. It also indicates which assessment areas were given the assessment *not satisfactory*.

Table 10. Measures taken within the framework for the follow-ups of third-cycle programmes that UKÄ concluded in 2019.

	Preconditions	Design, implementation and outcomes	Doctoral student perspective	Working life and collaboration
Expanded teacher resources	6 ¹⁵			
A supervisor group has been established.		1		
Compulsory supervisor training/gender equality in supervisor training		5		
Director of studies for third-cycle programme		1		
Research council at the faculty level		1		
More doctoral students	5			
General study plan revised		3 ¹⁶		
Improved publication frequency		1		
Infrastructure (the doctoral students have their own workplaces at the HEI)	2			

¹⁵ One of the HEIs included here has reported additional teacher resources under the design, implementation and outcomes assessment area.

¹⁶ One of the HEIs reported this measure under the preconditions assessment area.

Seminars	4 ¹⁷	
Additional courses	5	
Gender equality in education	5	
Doctoral students take responsibility for lab equipment		1 ¹⁸
Better follow-up of continuing professional development	1 ¹⁹	
ISP ²⁰ and follow-up of third-cycle programmes (e.g. through course evaluations)	7	
Improved cooperation nationally and internationally	4 ²¹	
Establishment of a doctoral student council		1
Researcher handbook/student handbook		1
Gender equality coordinator employed	1	
Equality in representation	5	
Gender equality in systematic work environment efforts	2	
The recruitment process includes a gender equality perspective	2	

¹⁷ One of the HEIs included here reported seminars as a taken measure under the preconditions assessment area.

¹⁸ The same HEI also reported this under the design, implementation and outcomes assessment area.

¹⁹ The same HEI also reported this under the preconditions assessment area.

²⁰ Measures that involve more structured work with the individual study plan (ISP).

²¹ One HEI reported the measure under the working life and collaboration assessment area.

The design, implementation and outcomes assessment area has the most measures, followed by preconditions. The measures related to gender equality and follow-up, measures and feedback are sorted under the design, implementation and outcomes assessment area, even though at the time of the evaluation they were their own aspect area (previous term for assessment area). Gender equality and design, measures and feedback are now assessment criteria within the design, implementation and outcomes assessment area.

The preconditions assessment area has several of the measures related to teacher resources. Of the thirteen programmes with the overall assessment *high quality* in the follow-up (i.e. all the programmes followed up, not including the history programme), about half had taken measures to improve teacher resources. In some cases, this involved new recruitment of teachers. In a couple of cases, this meant switching to internal instead of external supervisors and that the supervisors had relevant subject backgrounds. In one case, the subject's visiting professor received an increase in resources. Five of 13 HEIs increased the number of doctoral students. Almost a third of the HEIs improved cooperation or collaboration (one HEI reported this measure under the working life and collaboration assessment area).

Within the design, implementation and outcomes assessment area, nearly half of the HEIs developed new third-cycle courses. Five HEIs integrated gender equality into required courses. Several HEIs revised their general study plans. Four HEIs improved their seminars. Supervisor training became mandatory at one HEI and gender equality is now included in specific modules at some HEIs. Just over half improved follow-up of the third-cycle programme and, with this, the individual study plan.

It is also possible to identify certain tendencies in terms of which measures were taken within a specific third-cycle subject area. Measures related to gender equality dominated within computer science. Five followed up computer science programmes also received the overall assessment *not satisfactory* within what previously was the gender equality aspect area. In addition to including gender equality as an aspect in required courses, they also reviewed the guidelines for promoting equal representation in drafting and decision-making bodies and created a recruitment process with a greater focus on gender equality.

Only one programme was followed up within the doctoral student perspective assessment area. Measures taken by the programme include improving follow-up of third-cycle programmes, establishing a doctoral student council and producing a researcher handbook with guidelines for the supervisor relationship and practical information about programme content and doctoral student rights.

Only one programme was followed up within the working life and collaboration assessment area, where measures were to improve collaboration with industry and letting doctoral students be responsible for laboratory equipment.

Follow-up – surveys

The survey of contact persons for the evaluations of the different third-cycle programmes in 2019 had a response rate of 64 per cent – 30 of 47 responded. The contacts were asked whether the evaluation contributed to *enhancing the quality of the programme*. Over half of respondents said that the evaluation did so to a large extent or very large extent.

Table 11. Responses by contact to the question of whether the evaluation contributed to the enhancement of the programme’s quality.

	Number of contact persons	Number of responding contacts
	47	30
To a very large extent		12
To a large extent		4
To a certain extent		8
To a small extent		3
Not at all		1
Cannot or do not want to answer		1

Many people (22) chose to comment on this question. Several mention the self-evaluation as an important part of the process:

“Even if, at the moment, you think that parts feel like an unnecessary process, it was very useful for us to systematically go through what we do and how we do it. It was also important that the doctoral students had to write their part and that we received important and good information about how they experienced their doctoral programme.”

“The self-evaluation ensures a thorough review takes place of all aspects related to the third-cycle programme. This allows us to capture things that otherwise risk being missed in the regular organisational follow-up.”

“A self-evaluation is to provide the basis for continued improvement of the organisation and not give the panel the answers they are expecting for a positive report.”

“The self-evaluation ensures that a thorough review takes place of all aspects related to the third-cycle programme. This allows us to capture things that otherwise risk being missed in the regular organisational follow-up.”

A couple mention that knowledge of the coming evaluation drive improvements:

“The evaluation forces us to reflect on a number of aspects in the programme, which otherwise can be taken for granted or which we could ignore. Just knowledge of the evaluation influenced work indirectly even if you weren’t involved in the evaluation directly.”

“If we believe the existing rules are meant to improve quality in the third-cycle programme, a better understanding of the rules and better adherence should lead to improved quality. The programmes being evaluated have a greater tendency to find out about both the external and internal requirements and orient themselves to these. This also increases understanding of the internal requirements that exist.”

The majority of those that felt that the evaluation “did not contribute” or “to a small extent” has contributed to the improvement of quality in the third-cycle programme have also commented on why they felt this way:

“Already high quality.”

“We already work with improving quality (and had done so even without the evaluation). On the other hand, it is always useful to stop and think a bit extra.”

“The evaluation has more of a control character than an improvement character.”

The contacts were also asked in the survey whether the evaluation contributed to **checking actual conditions and outcomes**, e.g. that the third-cycle programme meets the requirements of applicable laws and ordinances. Of the respondents, 21 of 30 said that the evaluation did so to a large extent or very large extent.

Table 12. The contact persons’ responses to whether the evaluation contributed to determining actual conditions and outcomes

	Number of contact persons	Number of responding contacts
	47	30
To a very large extent		7
To a large extent		14

To a certain extent		5
To a small extent		1
Not at all		0
Cannot or do not want to answer		3

In the open-ended question on how the evaluation has contributed to checking actual conditions and outcomes, seven contacts left comments. Several are positive to the internal process that occurs in connection with the self-evaluation:

“The self-evaluation ensures that a thorough review takes place of all aspects related to the third-cycle programme. This allows us to capture things that otherwise risk being missed in the regular organisational follow-up.”

“Forced the evaluated subject to think through its work and its strategies within different areas which otherwise would not have been identified.”

“It forces one to [...] examine the entire programme from different perspective, but there are also aspects that tend to be clichés.”

“By enabling a discussion among the leadership, supervisors and those responsible for the third-cycle programme about the doctoral education.”

The assessors’ review is also seen as valuable:

“The external review conducted by experts is invaluable. The external critique is more highly valued than internal critique when it comes to working with improvements.”

“The outcome of the evaluation matched well with how we work.”

“UKÄ’s evaluations contribute to improving the approach to quality at the faculty.”

The one person who responded *to a small extent*, noted: “The programme already has high quality.”

The response rate is good overall but lower than for the institutional reviews. Of the contact persons who responded to the survey, 53 per cent felt the evaluation contributed to *improving the quality of the third-cycle programme*. Seventy per cent felt that the evaluations contributed to *checking actual conditions and outcomes*, e.g. that the third-cycle programme meets the requirements of applicable laws and ordinances.

Summary and concluding reflections

This report shows how the reviews, evaluations and follow-ups that the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) conducted in 2019 have contributed to quality enhancement and to high quality in the operations of Swedish higher education institutions (HEI). The report is produced annually on assignment from the Government, in accordance with UKÄ's instructions from the Government²².

We have interpreted this as UKÄ is to present the impact of its reviews. In this report, we use the word “impact” in accordance with the Swedish National Financial Management Authority's definition in which an impact is “a change caused as a result of a taken measure and that otherwise would not have occurred”²³. Well aware of the difficulty in measuring impacts, we have chosen to use several forms of supporting material and with varied approaches, to show how the reviews have contributed to quality enhancement and to high quality in the operations of Swedish higher education institutions.

The supporting material consists of surveys to contact persons for the programmes and HEIs included in the evaluations. Additional supporting material is the reports of taken measures that the HEIs have submitted in the follow-ups after the programmes have received the overall assessment *under review*. Since currently, only a limited number of follow-ups of third-cycle programme evaluations have been completed, we have also studied which assessment areas have been assessed as *not satisfactory*. These assessment areas will be followed up and based on the follow-ups completed so far, we can say that the HEIs will likely take the measures required to ensure quality in their operations. Finally, we have also used documentation from the feedback conferences organised by UKÄ after the completed evaluations to show how they can contribute to improving quality in the HEIs' operations.

In UKÄ's impact study of the previous evaluation system 2011–2014²⁴, it was determined that control does not have to be an opposite to enhancement when it comes to evaluations. Evaluations having a control

²² According to Section 2, paragraph 2 of the Ordinance (2012:810) with instructions for the Swedish Higher Education Authority, the Authority is to report how quality assurance has contributed to quality enhancement and to high quality in the operations of higher education institutions.

²³ Kajsa Nilsson. *Effektutvärdering: att välja upplägg*. [Impact evaluation: choosing a method] Swedish National Financial Management Authority, 2006, p. 9.

²⁴ *Utbildningsutvärderingarnas effekter, en genomgång av de nationella utvärderingssystemet 2011–2014* [Impacts of the Programme Evaluations, a review of the national evaluation system 2011–2014], UKÄ, report 2015:21.

function can also help enhance quality. From *Metautvärdering av Högskoleverkets modell för kvalitetsbedömning av högre utbildning* [Meta evaluation of the National Agency for Higher Education's model for quality assessment of higher education]: "As many of the respondents to our surveys noted, control and enhancement are two sides of the same coin and control is an incentive for improvements"²⁵. Or as one contact expressed it in a survey presented in this report: "With the evaluations and the threat of losing degree-awarding powers, this work will have high priority. This is naturally good and will lead to the programmes becoming even better".

Another aspect is that evaluations do not just measure and assess the outcome in the operations that are evaluated. They also shape the operations that are evaluated.²⁶ While reviewing the supporting material for this report, it has become clear that HEIs take advantage of the potential for enhancements identified in the assessors' reports and UKÄ's decision. This is a sign that the quality assurance system by extension has a positive impact on the quality of the HEIs' operations. But there is also a risk that the HEIs design their operations and programmes to perform well in the evaluations first and foremost – they try to create operations that can be "evaluated" – while quality is overshadowed.

It can be assumed that the evaluations have other impacts than what are presented here, in that the assessors' assignment is to both to review and to contribute to the enhancement of quality at the HEIs. They do this primarily through highlighting aspects in their reports that they have identified as strengths and areas for improvement.

Many evaluations have an enhancement effect simply through writing the self-evaluation. The representatives from the HEIs attest to this, including in the open-ended responses in the surveys presented in this report. In addition to becoming more aware of their own operation's strengths and weaknesses, some things can even be corrected during this work. One contact wrote in the survey: "When writing the self-evaluation, vague aspects in our current quality system were discovered. This forced us to stop and think about these to address them and begin working with them even before the site visit."

To gain a more accurate picture of whether a system drives quality enhancements, it could be worth finding out what happens to the recommendations provided in the assessors' reports, beyond those things

²⁵ Ove Karlsson, Inger M. Andersson & Anna Lundin. *Metautvärdering av Högskoleverkets modell för kvalitetsbedömning av högre utbildning* [Meta evaluation of the National Agency for Higher Education's model for quality assessment of higher education]. National Agency for Higher Education report series 2002:20 R, p. 9.

²⁶ Evaluations construct the reviewed reality just as much as they review an already existing reality. This has been a well-established fact since Michael Power wrote his classic "The Audit Explosion" in 1994, which was followed by several books and articles on "the audit society" (Power 1994, 1999 and 2000).

that are more or less mandatory. In a previous system, the National Agency for Higher Education had something it called three-year follow-ups, where all recommendations were followed up. This was a way of measuring effectiveness even in a system that was more focused on leading to enhancements than on controlling.

UKÄ's above noted study compared the evaluation system 2011–2014 with the National Agency for Higher Education's older evaluation system 2001–2006. First of all, the different systems had different purposes. The older system was to contribute to the department's or equivalent's own quality enhancement and examine whether the programmes lived up to the goals and regulations in the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance. The system was also to provide students, potential students and other stakeholders with information about the programmes.²⁷ The 2011–2014 system was intended to check the outcome of the programmes, i.e., whether the programmes achieved the targets in the qualification descriptors in the ordinances connected with the Higher Education Act.²⁸

According to the reports above, both systems contributed to general reviews of the programmes and improved quality assurance work. For example, course literature has been changed and method teaching improved. The older system contributed to improving student influence and the importance of the course evaluations, compared to the 2011–2014 system. This probably contributed to a greater degree to the hiring of more teachers. While the older system had a focus on preconditions and processes, the 2011–2014 system focused on outcomes.

The programme evaluations in UKÄ's current system can be said to be a mix of these two systems. There is still a focus on outcomes and degree projects, but they are emphasised less compared to the 2011–2014 system. Previously, preconditions and implementation had only minor roles but are now important in the reviews without losing focus on outcomes. There has been a desire for a better balance that would allow a more holistic quality assurance.

This report shows that a majority of contact persons who responded to the follow-up surveys noted that UKÄ's reviews and evaluations have contributed to improving quality at the HEI and in their programmes. They highlight the self-evaluation and the assessors' reports as drivers of quality improvements. For the HEI audits, there was a high percentage of respondents compared to the programme evaluations. The comments are overall very positive for how much the reviews drive quality enhancements. Even in the programme evaluations, the majority of

²⁷ *Hur har det gått? En slutrapport om Högskoleverkets kvalitetsgranskningar åren 2001–2006*, [How did it go? A final report on the National Agency for Higher Education's quality reviews years 2001–2006], 2007:31 R.

²⁸ *Högskoleverkets system för kvalitetsutvärdering* [National Agency for Higher Education's System for Quality Evaluation] 2011–2014, Report 2010:22 R.

respondents were positive to the evaluations and felt that they have both contributed to enhancing the quality of the programmes and checking to ensure that they meet the requirements of applicable laws and ordinances.

The follow-ups of the programmes that received the overall assessment *under review* in the evaluations during 2018 (and in one case 2017) pressured the HEIs and programmes to work more intensely on quality assurance procedures. The follow-ups of the third-cycle programmes show that some of the most common measures by HEIs are to increase teacher resources, employ more doctoral students, offer more third-cycle courses, integrate gender equality into the programmes and work in a more structured way with the individual study plan. The third-cycle programmes evaluated in 2019 have high quality, but for those given the assessment *under review* in 2018 and 2019, several HEIs decided to terminate programmes in several cases.

UKÄ will follow up all nine HEIs that had their quality assurance processes reviewed in 2019. These follow-ups will be done by the HEIs submitting reports on taken measures. In eight of the cases, the quality systems are not developed enough or have not been tested enough to allow the assessors to judge whether the HEI can ensure the quality of the courses and programmes.

Almost half of the programmes for preschool and primary education degrees will be followed up because of quality deficiencies. These deficiencies apply primarily to achievement of parts of the national qualitative targets chosen for the evaluation. Knowledge about research methods and critical thinking ability have the most significant deficiencies.

The feedback conferences organised by UKÄ after completing evaluations have offered a platform for the HEI representatives, together with the chairpersons from the assessment panels, to exchange thoughts and share experience about the evaluation processes. The participants were able to have a more detailed discussion on the observations made by the assessors and written in the reports. In several cases, HEI representatives discussed possible solutions to the areas for improvement that the assessors identified.

In this report, we have viewed the taken measures reported by the HEIs in UKÄ's follow-ups as *one* measurement of whether the evaluations in the current quality assurance system have led to quality enhancements at the HEIs. We have been able to conclude that the relevant HEIs have taken measures prior to or as a result of UKÄ's reviews. To really be able to study the impacts, we would need to return at a later date and study if the taken measures that we reported here really have led to changes. We have not been able to do this, but we assume and hope that

the measures will lead to changes that have a more lasting and long-term impacts on the operations within the HEIs.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbetet – UKÄ) is to contribute to strengthening Swedish higher education and Sweden as a knowledge society. We review the quality of higher education programmes, we analyse and follow up trends within higher education and we monitor the rights of students.

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