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## Systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment

### Decision

The Vice-Chancellor decides:

**to** introduce systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment (EMA) at SLU from 1 July 2022;

**to** establish governing documents for quality assurance work in the form of the Framework for quality assurance and quality development in SLU's research and EMA (Annex 1) and the Instructions for systematic quality assurance of research and EMA at SLU (Annex 2 to this decision);

**to** instruct the deans and heads of department to stand responsible for the implementation of quality assurance in accordance with instructions in Annex 2;

**to** instruct the university director to stand responsible for ensuring that the quality assurance work is given the necessary administrative support;

**to** include quality assurance in existing assignments; and

**to** monitor and adjust the quality assurance process as necessary for each new four-year cycle.

### Description of the case

In order to enable high quality research and EMA, a number of conditions need to be met in respect of the working environment, skills development opportunities, access to infrastructure and adequate operational support, etc. The aim of systematic quality assurance is to create a process for continuously identifying the need for improvements as regards the pre-requisites for high quality operations.

The goal is for SLU to have a clear, transparent process in which both staff and students are involved. The quality assurance system must provide opportunities for the organisation to propose development measures and lead to regular dialogue on quality issues on all levels.

The Framework (Annex 1) provides a comprehensive, overall description of how SLU will work systematically to provide conditions for high quality in research and EMA, and to monitor the quality of operations. The Framework describes the principles for quality work and quality assurance. It also defines a number of quality areas and standards that need to be achieved in order to meet the requirements for high quality.

SLU conducted an evaluation of the quality and impact of research (Q&I, or “KoN”) through external peer review in 2009 and 2018. This evaluation covered all research and, to varying degrees, EMA as well. The systematic quality assurance model that is now being introduced involves conducting Q&I evaluations at eight-year intervals, supplemented by periodic internal analyses of prerequisites for high quality. Evaluations and analyses are used to identify development needs and proposals for development measures. These actions are followed up at annual quality dialogues (see Instructions, Annex 2).

Since 2017, SLU has had a quality assurance system for first, second and third-cycle education, which was approved by the Swedish Higher Education Authority’s 2019 review. The quality assurance of research and EMA is based on similar principles and uses the same concepts. The systems are thus similar. There are some differences, however, mainly due to differences in organisational responsibilities. There are clear interfaces between the two quality systems, for example in terms of the link between research and education (research links in education, doctoral students’ thesis work). In the long term, it is desirable to integrate the different quality assurance systems into a single system.

One guiding principle in the development of the quality assurance system has been to build on existing processes and design the quality assurance process so that it is perceived as relevant and involves a reasonable amount of work from departments and faculties. The development phase has included consultation in the form of individual dialogues with all heads of department and deans, as well as with heads of administration and research officers at the faculties, and with representatives of SLUSS and SLUSS DN. The trade unions have been informed of the development of the system during the course of the work.

## Grounds

Quality assurance and quality work within SLU’s research and EMA are largely carried out independently within the various parts of the university in a trust-based manner. The implementation of the Q&I evaluations represented a comprehensive approach, but otherwise the work has not been coordinated. In future reviews

conducted by the Swedish Higher Education Authority, SLU should be able to demonstrate that a functioning, coherent quality assurance system is in place.

## Content and likely consequences

This decision means that SLU will introduce a coherent quality assurance system that builds on and integrates processes that are already in place. The guidelines and processes included in the decision will allow quality monitoring and quality development work to be carried out more systematically. In the long term, this will promote the quality and relevance of SLU's research and EMA.

Quality assurance will form an integral part of operational monitoring and planning at different organisational levels within the university. It will thus be linked to the development work based on the SLU strategy.

Experiences from the first year of systematic quality assurance (2022-2023) will be monitored and used as a basis for possible adjustments for future rounds.

The current governing documents (Annexes 1 and 2) do not contain a detailed description of future Q&I evaluations. The Vice-Chancellor will decide on specific guidelines for each such evaluation, including organisation and allocation of resources.

This decision has been taken by Vice-Chancellor Maria Knutson Wedel after a presentation by Head of Unit Boel Åström and in the presence of Chief Operating Officer Martin Melkersson. Deputy Vice-Chancellor Ylva Hillbur, EMA Secretary Ann-Sofie Morén, Research Officer Niklas Nordquist and Research Officer Sofia Wretblad also contributed to the preparation of the case.

Maria Knutson Wedel

Boel Åström

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Annex

1. Framework for quality assurance and quality development in SLU's research and environmental monitoring and assessment
2. Instructions for systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment at SLU