



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet  
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

**Faculty of Natural Resources and  
Agricultural Sciences**  
Course evaluation guide workgroup

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## Course evaluation guide – responsibilities and recommendation for implementation and follow-up

## Content

1. Guide’s purpose and target group.....	3
2. The purpose of the course evaluations and responsibility for their implementation and follow-up.....	3
3. Advice and recommendations for course coordinators.....	5
A summary of advice and recommendations for course coordinators.....	5
Plan the course evaluation.....	5
Conduct course evaluation.....	7
Once the course has ended.....	9
Work with course development.....	10
4. Advice and recommendations for departmental directors of studies.....	11

## 1. Guide's purpose and target group

Each year, the Programme Board for Education in Natural Resources and Agriculture follows up on the previous year's course evaluation results included in their area of responsibility. The departments are requested to present steps to increase response frequency, the grade for overall course impression and the number of teacher comments. It is worth mentioning that many of the experiences shared by the departments can be applicable to all course coordinators and departmental directors of studies. Therefore, on 17 November 2016, the programme board decided that a guide for course evaluations was to be established that builds upon positive experiences and that has a supportive function for course coordinators and departmental directors of studies. The decision to establish the guide was made by the programme board on 25 April 2017.

The workgroup who designed the guide comprised Bengt Olsson, Department of Ecology, David Ljungberg, Department of Energy and Technology, Annie Roos, Department of Economics, and student representative Hugo Hultin. Administrative support was provided by Johanna Nilsson, Education Officer.

This course evaluation guide is aimed primarily at course coordinators and departmental directors of studies. It describes the responsibilities assigned to the course coordinators and departmental directors of studies and their role in the work with course evaluations. Well-tested methods that have proven successful have provided good advice and recommendations.

The guide has been based on the various elements included in the work with course evaluations – planning, implementation, follow-up after the course, and course development.

## 2. The purpose of the course evaluations and responsibility for their implementation and follow-up

All universities and higher education institutions must provide course participants, or students who have completed a course, with the opportunity to express their experiences of and views on the course via a course evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

The higher education institutions are also required to compile the course evaluations and provide information about the results and any measures that arise from the course evaluations. The results must be made available to the students.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 1 Section 14, Paragraph 1

<sup>2</sup>Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 1 Section 14, Paragraph 2

The purpose of a course evaluation is to create a tool for monitoring and developing courses. For the tool to be successful, it needs a high response frequency and to be filled with constructive criticism and suggestions from the students. The course evaluation also needs to be actively used by the course coordinators and others, in order to follow-up and develop courses and programmes. Clearly formulated course evaluations that are used systematically for course development show that we take student opinions seriously, and we aim to create the best possible programmes and courses.

SLU presents the results and conclusions from the course evaluations in a joint electronic course evaluation system (Evald), which is available to the students via the student web. A student representative has the right to participate in the compilation of the course evaluation (in Evald). The results presented include the numeric responses to the general questions for all courses, and the summary of student and teacher opinions. The results from previous course evaluations are to be presented at the start of the course, as are any changes that have been implemented as a result of the course evaluation. As student participation in the course evaluations is voluntary, it is important that the department coordinating the course provides information about the course evaluation and organises it in a way that results in a high response frequency.<sup>3</sup>

### **Responsibility for course development and conducting course evaluations**

Several functionaries at SLU are responsible for the follow-up and development of course and programme quality, and course evaluations are one of the tools we use.

It is the responsibility of the head of the department running the courses to ensure that they meet the highest quality within the framework for the allocated resources. A programme director of studies will develop the quality of the programme.<sup>4</sup> The programme boards will ensure that programmes and freestanding courses maintain a high quality. Therefore, they must be proactive and be responsible for regular evaluations of the programmes and courses. The results of the evaluations must be sent to the Board of Education and the applicable faculty boards.<sup>5</sup>

The course coordinator must ensure that course evaluations are conducted. The department running the course is expected to compile and follow up on each course evaluation, unless the presiding faculty has decided otherwise.<sup>6</sup> It is the duty of the course coordinator to suggest changes and develop the course with these course evaluation results in mind.

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<sup>3</sup>Overall guidelines for the administration of education at SLU, SLU ua Fe.2011.3.0-2317

<sup>4</sup>Vice-chancellor's delegation of authority, SLU ID.ua 2016.1.1.1-1309

<sup>5</sup>the SLU Board's delegation of authority, SLU ID.ua 2016.1.1.1-4148

<sup>6</sup>Overall guidelines for the administration of education at SLU 2013-08-26

### 3. Advice and recommendations for course coordinators

#### A summary of advice and recommendations for course coordinators

- Allocate time for planning the course evaluation
- Consider which questions will provide relevant information for course development
- Carefully consider and pilot the questions
- Include a maximum of 15 questions
  
- Ideally, allocate time for both a written and oral course evaluation
- Present the results from previous years and show what steps were taken for the students prior to the start of the course
- Allocating time for the course evaluation in the timetable increases response frequency
- The course structure influences response frequency
  
- Inform the students that the course evaluation has concluded, and that they can also submit suggestions for improvement
- Submit your compulsory comments on the results within four weeks
- Analyse the results and enlist help from teaching colleagues and department directors of studies, and where possible, from programme director of studies and advisory boards
- Ideally, discuss the results and suggested changes with the student representative

#### Plan the course evaluation

##### Overall recommendations

- Allocate time for planning
- Consider which questions will provide relevant information for course development
- Carefully consider and pilot the questions
- Include a maximum of 15 questions

Course evaluations are to be conducted digitally via Evald ([Evald instruction manual](#), only available in Swedish). As course coordinator, you decide when the evaluation will be opened for responses.

Make sure that you (or the teaching team) allocate time to evaluate the questions and their formation before implementing the course evaluation. It is not possible to change the questions once the course evaluation has been published.

Also allocate time in your planning to ensure that you are able to provide comment on the results and consider possible changes. If, as course coordinator, you expect that the students to participate in the course evaluation and provide their opinions, it is of course essential for you to show that you value their opinions, by commenting on how these will be addressed in the continued course development. One idea may be to compile a simple log book during the course, containing reflections made by you or other teachers. This will provide more time for commenting and create a good basis for your comments.

Experience shows that the quality of a course evaluation is dependent on the way the questions are formulated, and the response frequency. Several recommendations and tips are provided below to enable effective questions and a high response frequency.

### **Course-specific questions**

In addition to the compulsory standard questions, you should also add questions specific to the course aims, content and implementation. When compared to the compulsory questions, these questions have great potential to provide a basis for the course development.

Carefully consider what you want to find out from the course-specific questions. Reflect on what answers the course-specific questions are to provide and how detailed they need to be. It may not be necessary to ask questions about each course component, or ask the same questions – for example one question per lecture. The responses are to be a basis for teachers and departments to receive the relevant information for course development work.

Formulate the questions based on what the students will learn throughout the course, and if the course components provided them with this knowledge. For example, “to what extent did component X provide you with the knowledge of how Y works in Sweden today?” Always provide the students with the possibility to comment on the questions, as the free text responses can provide more detailed and useful information than set responses.

If major changes have been made to the course, these should undergo a follow-up, by including question/s about this in the course evaluation. For example, this applies when a new learning outcome has been introduced into the syllabus, or if an entirely new component has been included. Conducting a follow-up of new pedagogical components or examination forms can also be relevant. To the greatest extent possible, use the new question to replace an old one in order to keep the number of questions minimal.

Carefully consider question formulation and, ideally, pilot them on your colleagues as they have experience of questions that have worked well for them. It is important that careful consideration has been placed on formulating the questions, so they are able to provide answers to what will be followed-up on. Sometimes,

you will need to follow-up on a certain aspect of the course several times. If a question has been thoroughly formulated, it is possible to use it for many years.

Too many questions may result in the students being less inclined to provide comprehensive, well thought through answers, so try to limit the number of course-specific questions. One recommendation is to limit the number of questions to a maximum of 15 – with the standard questions included.

If you need to follow up on individual course components, such as lectures, one advantage is to do this whilst the course is on-going, for example by using an audience response device. Several apps are available for this.<sup>7</sup> If you need to follow up on processes, such as how course communication is working, one suggestion is to do this via a mid-way evaluation. Fronter has a tool for this.

## Conduct course evaluation

### Overall recommendations

- Ideally, allocate time for both a written and oral course evaluation
- Present the results from previous years and show what steps were taken for the students prior to the start of the course
- Allocating time for the course evaluation in the timetable increases response frequency
- The course structure influences response frequency

As course coordinator, you are responsible for the implementation of course evaluations. [A checklist for course coordinators on the Staff web](#) provides information about the procedure.

A student representative must be given the opportunity to comment on the course evaluation. Sluss has a [checklist](#) (only available in Swedish) with clear instructions for the student representative, please share this checklist with them. Students elect a course representative at the start of the course and they will receive funding from the department. Sometimes it may take a while before a representative has been chosen, particularly on courses for Master's students. Providing clear information about the role of student representative can be beneficial.

An oral course evaluation can be an important complement to the written version, as it enables a discussion in which teachers and students can expand upon and explain the results. Feel free to allocate time for both the written course evaluation and a follow-up discussion. Experience has been positive when students have been able to complete a digital course evaluation first (e.g., in a pre-booked computer room), and then regrouped to discuss the results. In these instances, they have been able to take time for reflection, which usually leads to good discussion. Both digital

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<sup>7</sup>These apps can be found via [mentometer.nu](http://mentometer.nu), [mentimeter.com](http://mentimeter.com) and [ombea.com](http://ombea.com)

and oral course evaluations can be completed in one hour. Increase student motivation by providing refreshments.

### **When must the digital course evaluation be opened?**

Often, students wish to complete the examination before they submit the course evaluation, so it is not always suitable to implement the evaluation early on in the course. The time scheduled for the evaluation affects the response frequency. See below for information.

One recommendation is to keep the evaluation open for around two weeks after the end of the course. Remember to inform the students about when the course evaluation closes.

### **How to achieve high response frequency**

As student participation in the course evaluations is voluntary, it is important to provide information about the course evaluation and organise it in a way that results in a high response frequency.

The course evaluation from the previous year is to be presented at the start of the course, as well as any changes that have been implemented as a result. Showing how feedback from previous course evaluations has led to improvement is an important motivational factor to increase student participation and response frequency.

Some more good suggestions shown to increase response frequency:

- Timetable the course evaluation, ideally in connection with a compulsory component, or allocate time for digital course evaluation in other components.
- Book a computer room, so students who do not have their own computer can easily complete the course evaluation
- Obtain help from the student representative to issue reminders about the course evaluation

Providing verbal reminders to the students asking them to complete the course evaluation can have a certain effect.

Different course structures will influence the potential response frequency. Experience shows that if a project presentation is placed at the end of the course, instead of a written examination, it is easier to obtain a high response frequency. This is because it is possible to include the course evaluation into the timetable. However, if the course will conclude with a written examination, you can open the course evaluation and timetable a meeting for the evaluation and oral evaluation before the examination date. The course evaluation will then be open for a period after the written examination, so the students are able to provide comments on the examination and have the opportunity to change any previous responses.

Certain circumstances reduce response frequency, such as courses that continue until the end of the spring semester. Once the students have left the campus, it is very difficult – despite repeated reminders – to get them to complete the course evaluation. In this case, it is particularly wise to timetable the course evaluation.

## Once the course has ended

### Overall recommendations

- Inform the students that the course evaluation has concluded, and that they can also submit suggestions for improvement
- Submit your compulsory comments on the results within four weeks
- Analyse the results and enlist help from teaching colleagues and department directors of studies, and where possible, from programme director of studies and advisory boards
- Ideally, discuss the results and suggested changes with the student representative

### **Presentation of the results**

The results and conclusions from the course evaluations are to be presented digitally (using Evald) and made available to the students via the student web. Keep in mind that both student and teacher integrity must be upheld; any offensive or derogatory comments are to be removed before publishing the results.<sup>8</sup>

Send a message via the student web that the evaluation is complete. This shows that the course evaluation is important, and provides positive motivation for student participation in future course evaluations. Conclude by informing the students that they are welcome to get in touch if they would like to share ideas about how the course can be improved.

Part of the task of course coordinator is to submit comments on the results of the evaluation. A compilation of the course evaluation is to be discussed with the student representative and published on the course page. Course coordinators and student representatives have an individual responsibility to compile the course evaluation no later than four weeks after its closing date. The written summary must include:

1. comments on the results,
2. justified suggestions for changes within the course syllabus,
3. justified suggestions for changes to the course syllabus.

If you have forgotten to submit the comments within four weeks of the evaluation's closing date, ask the Evald system administrator (IT support) to unlock the evaluation again.

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<sup>8</sup>If you are subject to offensive or derogatory comments from the students, you should raise this matter with your department director.

## **Follow-up of course evaluation results**

In order for the evaluations to be used as a course development tool, the results must undergo a follow-up and be analysed. Present and discuss experiences from the course with the appropriate teachers and your department's director of studies, for example at teaching or planning meetings. If the programme directors of studies or advisory board so wish, experiences and suggested changes can also be discussed with them.

Use the student comments to assist the analysis. The department is responsible for changes to the syllabus, however student comments can provide suggestions for potential changes.

The results of the course evaluation and the student comments does not always provide a good response about what works – or does not work – on the course. Low response frequency is one element that affects how the evaluation can be used. However, routine responses; comments resulting from misunderstandings or individual events unrelated to the course quality also play a part. A student group can be characterised by individual students who also influence others in an overly negative or positive way. Course evaluations always provide information – but not always the answer – about whether the course was good or not. An oral discussion can sometimes provide completely different responses to those in writing. Teacher comments are an opportunity for the course coordinator to discuss these questions; course coordinators must use their skills and experience to evaluate the results.

One suggestion is to meet the student representative once the course has ended in order to discuss the results – the negative in particular. By conducting a more in-depth discussion and using the help from the student's knowledge of the course participants, the teachers can receive a good insight into how the course can develop. In the discussion, focus on how the course can develop before the next course date.

## **Work with course development**

### Overall recommendations

- Implement changes to the syllabus and/or how the course is implemented based on the analysis of the results and suggestions for alternative measures
- Seek advice from the Educational Development Unit (EPU)

## **New or revised course syllabus – decision from programme director of studies or programme board**

The results of the course evaluations and suggested changes may mean that the syllabus must be altered. The changes that involve new or revised syllabuses can be found in the [instructions for course syllabuses](#).

The work to revise or establish a new course syllabus may take place until 15 October. At this point, the new syllabus must be submitted to the administrator to be included in Slukurs. However, remember that the changes must be approved by the programme director of studies and the programme board well in advance.

### **Changes within the current course syllabus**

Certain suggested changes can be implemented within the course syllabus. Teaching methods may need to be adapted to the course content, students' background and level of maturity. Contact the Educational Development Unit ([EPU](#)) within the Division of Educational Affairs and/or the [SLU library](#) for discussions on teaching methods and the supporting resources needed during the course.

## **4. Advice and recommendations for departmental directors of studies**

An important task of the department director of studies is to display an interest and commitment to the results of the course evaluations and teacher comments, to highlight the efforts of the course coordinator. Facilitate the course coordinator's work with the evaluations by trying to allocate reasonable time, e.g., through efficient procedures at the department.

Remind course coordinators that written comments on the evaluation results are compulsory, for example during teaching meetings. Some suggestions for motivational arguments include:

- The educational value in writing teacher comments, when teachers have both encouraged and expected the students and student representatives to provide their opinions in the course evaluation.
- Explain about what happens with the course evaluations and how they are processed by the programme director of studies, advisory board and programme board.

If the course coordinator has not submitted their comments within the allocated four weeks, as the head of department you should make sure they are submitted promptly. You should write the missing comments and ensure that they are published if the course coordinator is unable to.

### **Follow-up documents – obtain reports from Lins**

Reports concerning the previous semester's courses overseen by the department can be obtained from the [Lins management information system](#).

### **Follow-up and analyse the results**

Conduct an analysis of the courses from the previous semester together with the teachers and collaborate to create suitable steps to rectify the problems in the courses.

If necessary, discuss suggestions for these steps with programme directors of studies and/or advisory board. Seek advice from the Educational Development Unit ([EPU](#)) for advice on course development.

### **Present the analysis and steps to the programme board**

The programme board discusses the results of the course evaluations at its meetings in August–September. Analyses and interventions for courses with an average grade of 3 or below will be presented. Prior to these meetings, you must compile the measures agreed upon at the department and, if applicable, in consultation with the programme director of studies. Instructions for the steps to be taken by the department are received by the faculty office in May.