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GOVERNING DOCUMENT

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Annex to: Pro vice-chancellor's decision on a plan for systematic quality assurance of third-cycle programmes, SLU.ua.2025.1.2-1918.

Plan for systematic quality assurance of third-cycle programmes

Introduction

The purpose of systematic quality assurance is to ensure that research, education, and environmental monitoring and assessment at SLU are of high quality and to identify areas for development through structured and systematic work, carried out in a coordinated manner at various levels of the organisation in accordance with established procedures.

The policy for a cohesive quality system and systematic quality assurance at SLU, adopted by the vice-chancellor (SLU.ua.2024.1.1.1-3466), is an overarching governing document that sets out the principles for the systematic quality assurance process. It is intended to ensure that quality assurance and quality development in research, education, and environmental monitoring and assessment at SLU are based on common principles, that roles and responsibilities are clarified, and that the synergies between various activities are capitalised on.

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Systematic quality assurance encompasses both the prerequisites and content of the activities. The quality system is designed to ensure that all of SLU's activities work appropriately and effectively to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, that national and European standards and guidelines are followed, and that the goals of SLU's strategy are achieved. The quality system does not regulate the activities themselves. Instead, it focuses on continuous improvement and quality assurance.

Under the policy, plans must be developed that set out the distribution of responsibilities and operational aspects of systematic quality assurance within the different areas of activity. The plan for systematic quality assurance of first-cycle and second-cycle education describes the following aspects of quality assurance at these levels:

- Processes for systematic quality assurance and follow-up
- Responsibilities and roles
- Quality areas and standards

Processes for systematic quality assurance and follow-up

Overview of the quality system

The key elements of the quality system for third-cycle education are baseline analyses and quality dialogues at different levels within SLU. The baseline analyses are carried out in four-year cycles (see Figure 1.). Every second cycle (that is every eight years), they are complemented by an external assessment (the Quality and Impact Assessment).

The systematic quality assurance process is based on six quality areas that describe the prerequisites for high quality in third-cycle education (see annex).

Baseline analyses and quality dialogues aim to identify development needs in the various quality areas. The process results in development measures at different organisational levels. In the intervening years of the four-year cycle, the main focus is on follow-up. The systematic quality assurance is documented in the form of quality reports.

The systematic nature of the cyclical process thus follows this pattern:

- **Analyse** the current situation in relation to a standard (i.e. an internal target) for each quality area. The Quality and Impact Assessment also includes benchmarking in relation to other higher education institutions.
- **Identify** improvement/development measures.
- **Implement** approved measures.
- **Monitor** the implementation of approved measures and results on an annual basis.

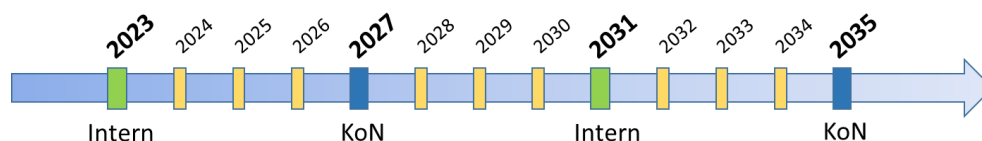


Figure 1. The timeline shows the four-year cycle for systematic quality assurance. Green (intern=internal) and blue boxes refer to the years when the baseline analysis is carried out. Blue boxes labelled KoN (Quality and Impact) refer to years when the quality assurance process also includes an external assessment. The yellow lines indicate the intervening years when the focus is on follow-up.

Baseline analysis

The four-year cycle of systematic quality assurance starts with the faculty carrying out a baseline analysis covering the six quality areas (see end of this document). A new analysis is carried out every four years, and the years inbetween focus on the follow-up of activities and measures.

Quality report

The faculty prepares a quality report, which includes a summary of the baseline analysis and a description of the development measures it plans to implement based on the needs identified in the analysis. Furthermore, it also describes development needs that the faculty wants to raise for discussion at the university-wide level.

The quality report provides documentation and a basis for the quality dialogue with the vice-chancellor. A template for the quality report is available on the staff web.

In the intervening years, the quality report is updated with concise information on the progress of the measures being implemented at the faculty.

Quality dialogues

Programme quality is discussed based on the baseline analysis and the proposed development measures. To promote a good discussion climate, the number of participants is limited, meaning the dialogue is held in a relatively small group. Those attending should therefore involve other stakeholders, such as programme board members and others involved at the respective faculty, in both the preparatory and follow-up work and inform them of the outcome of the dialogue itself.

The functions expected to participate in the dialogues on third-cycle education are listed below:

- Faculty board: chair or deputy chair of the doctoral education committee, director(s) of studies for doctoral programmes, supervisor representative, faculty programme director responsible for doctoral programmes and/or a doctoral programme administrator.
- Doctoral student council: at least one doctoral student representative.
- Council for PhD Education (Fur): chair, secretary.
- External reviewer.

The dialogues are led by the Fur chair. A secretary from Fur takes summary notes which are coordinated with all participants. It is up to the faculties to decide whether the dean participates.

Assessment

Based on the quality dialogues and the baseline analyses, the chair of Fur assesses the audited programmes and proposes quality-enhancing measures where necessary. The preliminary assessment is then agreed with the respective faculty board, which is given the opportunity to provide feedback before the quality reports are discussed in Fur.

Process for monitoring quality-enhancing measures

Council for PhD Education (Fur) and faculty boards

A general review is carried out in connection with the following year's quality dialogues. In the intervening years, the quality report is updated with concise information on the status of implementation of activities and measures.

Vice-chancellors's quality dialogues

At the vice-chancellor's annual quality dialogues, which form an integral part of the vice-chancellor's faculty dialogues, the different parts of the quality system – research and environmental monitoring and assessment, third-cycle education, and first- and second-cycle education – are brought together and the faculties comment on the outcome of the previous year's quality assurance; they can also propose general development measures for education or operational support.

Report to the SLU Board

The vice-chancellor reports annually to the SLU Board on the results of the quality assurance and the work on measures in research and environmental assessment and education at first-, second- and third-cycle level.

Monitoring of the quality system

Follow-up of the quality system is done annually when Fur adopts quality reports and action plans, during the vice-chancellor's quality dialogues and in the university administration's management group to ensure that it is functioning effectively and driving quality.

The Division of Planning and Research Support, which coordinates the university's quality work, develops proposals for improving the quality system based on the above follow-up activities, as required. Needs for improvement may emerge during the systematic quality work, or be identified by the vice-chancellor, the Board of Education or the Council for PhD Education.

Feedback and dissemination of results

A key element of the systematic quality assurance is feedback to all levels of the organisation on approved measures, their implementation and results. When the work on baseline analyses, quality reports and quality dialogues has been carried out, results and experiences should be shared and form the basis for continued dialogue, for example at department meetings, heads of department meetings at the faculties, the vice-chancellor's head of department meetings and the vice-chancellor's management group. Furthermore, quality reports from faculty and university-wide level are made available on the staff web. The purpose is to ensure that all members of the organisation can access the conclusions reached by its various parts ahead of future cycles of the systematic quality efforts.

Responsibilities and roles

Division of responsibilities

The responsibility for quality is borne by the whole university, and is distributed within the existing organisation with its decision-making levels and rules of procedure.

The SLU Board is responsible for the overall direction of SLU's operations. The vice-chancellor is the head of the university and has overall responsibility, under the SLU Board, for the management of operations.

Responsibility for third-cycle education

The vice-chancellor has delegated overall responsibility for the quality of third-cycle education to the faculty boards, which are subordinate to the SLU Board. Faculty boards are responsible for ensuring that activities enable high-quality education.

All faculty boards delegate part of the responsibility for implementation and quality to a doctoral education committee (Fun). The mission and duties of these committees are defined in each faculty's delegation of authority.

The chair of a Fun is, on the proposal of the dean, a member of the Council for PhD Education (Fur). Fur's task is to address overall strategic issues related to supporting, coordinating, stimulating and developing third-cycle education.

The heads of department are responsible for ensuring that high quality education is provided in their respective departments, using the resources allocated for this. The head of department is responsible for developing a good spirit and creative environment for staff and doctoral students in the department, including student welfare issues.

Roles

The Division of Planning and Research Support holds the overall responsibility for supporting and coordinating the processes for systematic quality assurance and follow-up. This includes designing templates and drafting instructions and procedures for quality assurance processes, producing key figures and data for the preparation of baseline analyses, organising quality dialogues and taking notes at these, and producing quality reports.

Faculty boards are expected to:

- prepare documentation for the quality dialogues as per the instructions provided;
- ensure that staff involved in the education process are given the opportunity to contribute to supporting documents; the experience and views of supervisors should be captured in an appropriate forum.
- plan work so that doctoral students are given the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the supporting documents;
- based on the given framework, appoint participants to the quality dialogues;
- implement the development measures identified in the baseline analysis in accordance with the decisions of the vice-chancellor and the Board of Education, and report back according to the planned follow-up.

The Sluss PhD Student Council (DN) is expected to:

- appoint doctoral representatives to participate in the quality dialogues;
- contribute to effective communication between the relevant doctoral student representatives and doctoral programme coordinators involved in the evaluation process;
- comment on the baseline analysis submitted by the faculty boards and the quality report and action plan for decision by Fur.

The external reviewer is expected to:

- bring an external perspective to the review of SLU's doctoral programmes;

The chief operating officer is expected to:

- implement and follow up on identified measures within the university administration;
- report back to Fur on the university administration's quality efforts.

Quality areas and standards in third-cycle education

Quality area 1. Recruitment, selection, admission and introduction to studies

Standards:

- 1.1. The department has a functioning recruitment process.
- 1.2. The department provides the conditions for applicants to make informed educational choices.
- 1.3. New doctoral students receive an appropriate induction.

Quality area 2. Study, research and work environment

Standards:

- 2.1 Doctoral students are given the opportunity to take an active part in the development of doctoral programmes.
- 2.2 The department's work and study environment facilitates doctoral students' ability to complete the programme successfully.
- 2.3. Doctoral students are taught and assessed in a research environment with international standards of research quality and integrity.

Quality area 3. Programme design, content and results

Standards:

- 3.1. Doctoral programmes reflect society's need for research expertise.
- 3.2 The doctoral programmes are designed so that all doctoral students have equal opportunities to achieve the degree objectives within the time allocated.
- 3.3. Perspectives on sustainable development are integrated into the programme, as are gender equality and an international perspective.

Quality area 4. Teaching and supervision

Standards:

- 4.1. Programme planning is adapted to the doctoral students' individual circumstances.
- 4.2 Supervision is adapted to the doctoral students' individual circumstances.
- 4.3. Courses are designed to ensure effective learning.
- 4.3 Clear and effective support is available if a conflict arises between doctoral student and supervisor.

Quality area 5: Education administration and support

Standards:

5.1 Administration of doctoral programmes is competent, efficient and transparent.

Quality area 6: Transition to working life and career

Standards:

6.1. Doctoral students educated at SLU are equipped with the skills needed for a successful career.

6.2 SLU's doctoral students have the opportunity to make informed decisions about study and career choices.