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GOVERNING DOCUMENT

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Annex to: Vice-chancellor’s decision on Plan for systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment, SLU.ua.2025.1.1-1688

Plan for systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment

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.

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 quality assurance and follow-up
- Roles and responsibilities
- Quality areas and standards

Processes for systematic quality assurance and follow-up

Overview of the system

The key elements of the quality assurance system for research and environmental monitoring and assessment are baseline analyses and quality dialogues at all levels within SLU – department, faculty and university-wide. 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 five quality areas, which describe the prerequisites for high-quality research and environmental assessment, and which are detailed at the end of this document.

Baseline analyses and quality dialogues aim to identify development needs in the various quality areas. The process results in measures at different organisational levels. In the intervening years of the four-year cycle, the focus is on follow-up. The quality assurance process 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. For the Quality and Impact Assessment, external assessors are involved.
- **Identify** improvement/development measures.
- **Implement** approved measures.
- **Monitor** the implementation of agreed measures and results on an annual basis.

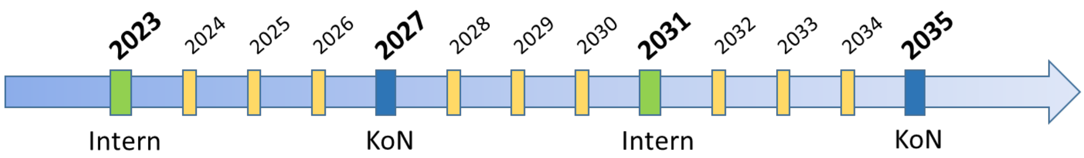

Figure 1. The timeline shows the four-year cycle for systematic quality assurance. Green (intern=internal) and blue boxes refer to the years when the baseline analysis is carried out. Blue boxes labelled KoN (Quality and Impact) refer to years when the quality assurance process also includes external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

Process at the department level

Baseline analysis

The four-year cycle starts with the department carrying out a baseline analysis covering the five 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.

The baseline analysis requires the department to reflect on whether existing processes, procedures, division of responsibilities and operational support etc. function in a way that ensures that the standard for each quality area is met. When the Quality and Impact Assessment takes place, the results of the external assessment are also included. In cases where the standard is not met, development measures are described and the department plans the implementation of these. The department may also identify issues and challenges that it wishes to raise for dialogue with the faculty management.

The department adapts its approach to conditions and established procedures at the department. For the baseline analysis to contribute to the department's quality efforts, staff must be involved. To support the baseline analysis, a dialogue tool is available on the staff web.

When the external peer review, Quality nad Impact, is carried out (every eight years), additional guidance on supporting documents will be provided.

Quality report

The result of the baseline analysis is presented in a quality report. The report forms the basis for the quality dialogue between department and faculty management (see below). The quality report provides a brief summary of the baseline analysis, along with a description of the measures that the department plans to implement based on the needs identified within that analysis. Issues and challenges to be raised for dialogue with the faculty management are also described.

The quality report also includes a brief description of how the baseline analysis was carried out at the department. A template for the quality report is provided on the staff web.

In the subsequent years, the quality report is updated annually with concise information regarding the progress of the measures being implemented by the department.

Quality dialogue between department and faculty management

The quality dialogue takes place as part of the regular, annual operations dialogue. The purpose is to use the baseline analysis as a basis for holding an open and forward-looking discussion on quality issues and the need for development. The quality dialogue includes a review of the measures that the department plans to implement. In the intervening years (when no new baseline analysis is carried out), the focus of the quality dialogues is on the follow-up of approved measures, any need for adjustments to these, and any new measures.

Process at the faculty level

Baseline analysis

Based on the departments' quality reports, quality dialogues and other relevant evaluations and data, an analysis and synthesis of the current situation at the faculty as a whole is made. An important part of the analysis is to identify recurring themes or challenges in the departments' quality reports, as well as development needs. Those years when the Quality and Impact Assessment takes place, the results of the external assessment are also included.

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 how the implementation of measures is progressing at the faculty.

Quality dialogue between faculty management and the vice-chancellor

The quality dialogue is conducted in connection with the annual operational dialogues (‘faculty dialogues’) between the vice-chancellor and each dean/faculty management. The purpose is to use the quality reports as a basis for holding a forward-looking discussion on quality issues and development needs. The faculty informs about the development measures it plans to implement based on the baseline analysis and the quality dialogue with the departments. There is also a discussion on challenges at the university-wide level.

In the intervening years, the focus of the quality dialogues is on the follow-up of approved measures, any need for adjustments to these, and any new measures.

Process at the university-wide level

Quality dialogues and baseline analysis

A quality dialogue is conducted with the management of each faculty based on the respective quality report (see above). Based on the quality dialogues, discussions within the vice-chancellor’s management group, and any relevant evaluations or surveys, an analysis and synthesis of the current state of the university as a whole is conducted. When the Quality and Impact Assessment takes place, the results of the external assessment are also included. An important part of the analysis is to identify recurring themes, or common denominators, in the faculties' quality reports and the need for university-wide measures.

Quality report

The conclusions of the baseline analysis are summarised. The report also describes development measures planned at university-wide level.

In the intervening years, the quality report is updated with concise information on the status of implementation of activities and measures.

Annual report to the university board

The vice-chancellor informs the SLU Board about the year's quality assurance process annually, and the results from the implementation of the measures are discussed.

Feedback and dissemination of results

A key element of the quality assurance process 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, as well as the results of external evaluation, are made available online. 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 assurance process.

Roles and responsibilities

The Division of Planning and Research Support holds the overall responsibility for supporting, coordinating, and documenting the systematic quality assurance.

Responsibility for quality in research and environmental monitoring and assessment

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 authority and, under the SLU Board, holds the overall responsibility for the management of the operation.

The faculty boards, which are subordinate to the SLU Board, are responsible for ensuring that activities are organised to achieve high quality in research and environmental monitoring and assessment.

The heads of department are responsible for ensuring that the highest standards of research and environmental monitoring and assessment are carried out in their respective departments, within the limits of the resources allocated.

Responsibilities and roles

Heads of department are expected to:

- carry out a baseline analysis at the department and summarise it in a quality report that is updated annually;
- at department level, implement and follow up the activities and measures identified in the quality report;
- participate in the annual quality dialogue with the dean;
- share results and experiences from the quality assurance process in appropriate contexts.

Deans are expected to:

- familiarise themselves with the departments' quality reports;
- conduct annual quality dialogues with heads of department and summarise findings in a faculty quality report;
- at faculty level, implement and follow up the activities and measures identified in the quality report;
- participate in the annual quality dialogue with the vice-chancellor;
- share results and experiences from the quality assurance process in appropriate contexts.

The vice-chancellor is expected to:

- review the faculties’ quality reports;
- conduct annual quality dialogues with deans and summarise findings in a university-wide quality report;
- at the university level, implement and follow up the activities and measures identified in the quality report;
- report annually on quality performance to the SLU Board;
- share results and experiences from the quality assurance process in appropriate contexts.

The chief operating officer is expected to:

- participate in the vice-chancellor's quality dialogue with the deans, identifying the need for measures for which the university administration is responsible;
- implement and follow up identified activities and measures within the university administration.

Sluss and/or Sluss-DN representatives are expected to:

- participate in the annual quality dialogues between faculty management and the vice-chancellor;
- participate in baseline analyses as employees of the departments (applies to doctoral students).

External reviewers (taking part in the Quality and Impact Assessment) are expected to:

- bring an external perspective to the review of SLU's research and environmental monitoring and assessment.

Quality areas and standards

The systematic quality assurance of research and environmental monitoring and assessment at SLU is based on five quality areas, which describe the *prerequisites for high-quality operations*. For each quality area, a standard, i.e. an internal target, has been defined. Each standard is broken down into a number of sub-standards, which highlight different aspects.

NB: The term *operations* here refers to both research and environmental monitoring and assessment. Some standards and sub-standards are more relevant to one or the other type of activity, but most are applicable to both.

1. Skills provision and continuing professional development

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

Sub-standards:

1.1 Work on skills supply planning is systematic and long-term, and includes gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives.

1.2 The recruitment process is open, transparent and merit-based.

1.3 Employees are offered the opportunity to develop their skills, on equal terms and regardless of gender.

1.4 The establishment and development of early-career researchers is specifically supported.

2. Development and renewal

Standard:
The organisation is characterised by positive leadership and employeeship together with a sustainable work environment and equal opportunities. Conditions for developing and renewing the organisation exist.

Sub-standards:

2.1 The organisation works systematically to promote equal opportunities, gender equality and a good working environment free from discrimination.

2.2 The organisation provides good opportunities for creative and open scientific discussion, making use of the expertise of its staff.

2.3 There is an ongoing strategic discussion on the prioritisation and need for action for development and renewal.

2.4 Operations are developed and renewed through internal, national and international co-operation, including mobility.

2.5 Doctoral studies are an integral part of the organisation and contribute to development and innovation.

2.6 Operations are developed and renewed through participation in courses and programmes at first- and second-cycle level.

3. Infrastructure

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

Sub-standards:

3.1 Employees have knowledge of and access to the necessary infrastructure within SLU and externally.

3.2 Resources for infrastructure are allocated and prioritised based on the needs of research, environmental assessment and education.

3.3 Infrastructure is developing in line with scientific and technological progress.

4. Collaboration and mutual learning

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

Sub-standards:

4.1 Operations are developed through collaboration with stakeholders outside academia.

4.2 Collaboration with the surrounding community is developed and planned strategically, where expertise and experience linked to collaboration are utilised.

4.3 Open science in the form of publications, decision support and making data available develops the organisation and its interaction with the surrounding society.

4.4 Participation in government inquiries, consultations, policy work and other types of expert assignments develops the organisation and its interaction with the surrounding society.

4.5 Channels and tools for communicating new knowledge are available and utilised within the organisation.

4.6 Opportunities to develop results into innovations are recognised and exploited.

5. Good research practice

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

Sub-standards:

5.1 Ethical guidelines and the principles of good research practice are well-known and adhered to across the organisation.

5.2 Within the organisation, there is a continual discussion on scientific integrity and the independence of research.

5.3 Suspicions of misconduct, i.e. deviations from good research practice, are followed up and action taken if necessary in accordance with SLU's internal guidelines.

The standards are based on the following legislation and policy documents:

References:
HL = Higher Education Act, SFS 1992:1432
HF = Higher Education Ordinance, SFS 1993:100
FSLU = Ordinance for the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SFS 1993:221
FL = Administrative Procedure Act, SFS 1986:223
Systematiskt arbetsmiljöarbete (AFS 2001:1) (Systematic work environment management)
Act (2019:504) on responsibility for good research practice and the examination of research misconduct
ECR = European Charter for Researchers
CRR = Code for Recruitment of Researchers
SUHF = Joint framework for the quality assurance and quality development at higher education institutions (SUHF 2019).