

Department
Department of Quality Assurance

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CoARA action plan

Swedish Higher Education Authority

Quality assurance

Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) is a public quality assurance agency. Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Sweden are responsible for ensuring that their education and research is of high quality. UKÄ's role is to ensure that HEIs fulfil their responsibility for quality assurance and therefore we conduct various types of reviews. The overall goal of UKÄ's reviews is to help to ensure that the education and research conducted at HEIs in Sweden maintains a high quality.

UKÄ conducts the following reviews:

- appraisals of applications for degree-awarding powers
- reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes
- programme evaluations
- thematic evaluations.

UKÄ's evaluation methods have a solid base in peer review. We commonly use self-evaluation reports and interviews as the main information source for the assessment panel. Additional information varies between the different reviews.

Responsibility for statistics and legal supervision

We also monitor efficiency, perform follow-ups and horizon scannings and are responsible for statistics in the higher education sector in Sweden. Legal supervision of higher education is our third mission.

Our assessment processes for research

Institutional reviews

In UKÄ's institutional reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research we assess how well the HEIs' processes help ensure and enhance the quality of research. We do not assess the research quality of the institutions but rather focus on the preconditions for high research quality. The HEI's responsibility for the quality of their research as well as for developing methods to enhance and safeguard such quality is key in these reviews.

Appraisals of degree-awarding powers for third-cycle programmes and evaluations of third-cycle programmes

In the appraisals of degree-awarding powers for third-cycle programmes and evaluations of third-cycle programmes, assessment of research quality is integral but limited. The main purpose of these activities is to appraise the preconditions for high quality education or the actual quality in education. The assessment criteria for the degree-awarding powers reads as follows: *The research within the subject area is of such quality and scale that third-cycle programmes can be offered at high level of scientific excellence within the entire subject area.* Similarly, the assessment criteria for evaluation of third-cycle programmes reads: *Research of the HEI has sufficient quality and scale for third-cycle education to be carried out at a high scholarly level and within a good educational framework. Relevant collaboration occurs with the surrounding society, both nationally and internationally.*

In addition to the assessment criteria targeting research quality, both evaluations include assessment of staff's combined expertise (scholarly/artistic/professional and pedagogical).

With regards to staff expertise, the HEI is asked to describe and analyse how the combined expertise is sufficient for the program. The HEI is also asked to present the CVs and publication lists for all supervisors, teachers and researchers at the department. The CVs are not standardised and thus allow for diverse outputs, qualifications and activities as long as they are relevant for a good educational environment. Different kinds of publication and research output can be referenced. Hence, in these types of evaluations assessment of research quality have no intrinsic value outside of the perspective of the educational environment.

In the guidelines, within certain limits, freedom is given for the assessors to assess the quality of the research. For example, in the guidelines for evaluation of third-cycle programmes, the instructions state that the publication lists and lists of accepted works may be used to verify the quality and scope of the research. A quick analysis of some samples from our evaluations show that some HEIs and panels focus their descriptions of research quality by focusing rather on conditions for high quality research than results. Such conditions include for example recruiting in international competition, academic ranks in staff (for example number of professors and associate professors), and the staff's international networks. Other HEIs and panels describe in detail the number of publications,

the percentage of publications in high profile journals, citations (sometimes also h-index), and placements in national and international rankings. The differences on approaches to the assessment criteria seems to be connected to what discipline is being evaluated. After a recently held workshop with UKÄ staff we concluded that UKÄ rely quite heavily on peers to uphold established ways of assessing quality within their discipline. This makes the method responsive and flexible in regards to differences according to disciplines.

Actions for 2024-2027

During 2023 we have analysed and discussed our assessment processes in the light of the agreement. We have identified some key areas for actions.

Share knowledge from institutional reviews and other activities

Of special relevance to our organisation is the supporting commitment No. 8 *Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.*

In our institutional reviews of the HEI's quality assurance processes for research we do not have a mandate to push for specific ways of assessing the quality of their research in the HEI internal quality assurance processes. The autonomy and responsibility lie within the HEI to develop quality assurance methods – including evaluations – that target quality. However, through our institutional reviews of the HEI's quality assurance processes for research, we access information on their internal research evaluations and the methods they use to collect information with a bearing on the quality and relevance of research.

- For the CoARA initiative we have decided to commit to analyse any information from these reviews that are relevant in regards to the agreement on reforming research assessment.

Report on HEIs internal systems for resource allocation

During the year 2023 UKÄ has started a survey of the HEI's internal systems for resource allocation. The survey will also give us information for example on to what degree Swedish HEI allocate resources based on quantitative journal and publication-based metrics as well as the extent to which other methods are used.

- In the spring of 2024 UKÄ will publish a report about the HEIs internal systems for resource allocation in Sweden.

As well as for the institutional reviews mentioned above we will share any such aggregated information with other Swedish signatories of the agreement and other interested stakeholders and through our reference groups.

In the long run we see dissemination of our analyses regarding these topics as a way to contribute to the development of guidance and common approaches in order to minimise

contradictions or incompatibilities between the assessment practices used by different organisations.

Raise awareness of research assessment in appraisals of degree-awarding powers for third-cycle programmes and evaluations of third-cycle programmes

Actions for 2024 will also focus on our program evaluations and appraisals of applications for degree-awarding powers. We will take actions regarding the commitment No 7 *Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use*. Connected to this we see the following action as appropriate for our organization:

- We will start to inform the assessors in our training programs for assessors that our organization is connected to CoARA, and in this context the coalitions related commitments.

The purpose is to raise the assessor’s awareness of the importance of transparency when assessing the quality of research. The expected outcomes are complete and transparent assessments of the quality of the research in our evaluations. The assessors will certainly sometimes be recruited from HEIs already committed to the coalition. In those circumstances, our assessor training sessions can accommodate reflections on CoARA's goals.

We will also alongside with presenting our own analyses on our digital platforms participate in various meetings with other signatories in Sweden of the action plan but also in international contexts. The purpose is to follow the developments within CoARA.

Finally, our organisation will have the role of observer in the development of the Swedish National Chapter.

Summary

Supporting commitment	Planned action/activity	Year/time
No. 8 Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.	UKÄ will publish a report about the HEIs internal systems for resource allocation in Sweden.	2024
No 7 Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria	Start to inform the assessors in our training programs for assessors that our organization is connected to CoARA, and in this context	2024

and processes as well as their use.	the coalitions related commitments.	
No. 8 Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.	Analyse any information from institutional reviews that are relevant in regards to the agreement on reforming research assessment.	2025-2027