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Idea bank – review questions based on the aspects

Model for programme reviews

Contents

Introduction	3
Continuous quality assurance and enhancement	4
Goal attainment, teaching and assessment	5
Teaching expertise	9
Student participation and student perspective	10
Working life and social relevance	11
Inclusion, international outlook and sustainability	12

Introduction

Each programme review should cover eleven aspects. The eleven aspects are general in nature and can be operationalised in different ways in different programmes. According to the guidelines for the University's programme review model, different emphasis can be placed on the aspects depending on development needs and relevance. Disciplinary domain boards and faculty boards provide additional guidance.

Following the revision of the guidelines (2022), the aspects have been grouped into five areas to allow for more coherent accounts and thus reduce overlap. The five areas are:

- Goal attainment, teaching and assessment
- Teaching expertise
- Student participation and student perspective
- Working life and social relevance
- Inclusion, international outlook and sustainability

This document sets out *suggestions* for review questions based on the five areas and the eleven aspects to inspire your own question formulations. It can be seen as a “buffet” of questions to support the self-evaluation process. The questions have been developed from the first version of the document *Advice and tips when planning and implementing reviews of study programmes* (in Swedish 2017). Frequently occurring feedback from assessors is addressed in the review questions. Inspiration can also be drawn from the Teaching and Learning Programme at Uppsala University.

Each programme can formulate questions that are of particular importance for assessing and developing the quality of the specific programme. Keep in mind that students¹ can provide ideas for relevant areas of enquiry.

What is important to know about the programme in question to ensure it is maintaining good quality in all aspects – and to inspire further development?

One piece of advice is to start by freely formulating review questions based solely on your own knowledge of the programme and its learning outcomes. This can be done through teacher collaboration, during formal planning days or within other collegial forums together with students/doctoral students. In the next step, you can cross-reference your own questions with the aspects to ensure they are all covered. Otherwise, there is a risk of being so driven by the aspects and suggestions below that your own questions risk being lost.

Each review must include an overall assessment of the quality of the programme – its strengths, weaknesses and areas for development. Formulated as questions, it could read as follows:

- What is the overall quality of the programme? How does the programme compare nationally and internationally?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are the main challenges and development needs for the future? How can the programme be further improved?

¹ In this text, the term ‘student’ refers to any person admitted to and undertaking Bachelor’s, Master’s or PhD studies.

Continuous quality assurance and enhancement

The guidelines state that there should be a description of the continuous quality assurance and enhancement in each area. Example questions:

- How are quality assurance and enhancement carried out in the programme? What formal and informal procedures exist in the educational environment and how can these be further developed?
- Based on the previous programme review, what measures have been implemented and how do you assess the impact of these measures?
- How do teachers interact during the planning, implementation and development of the programme? Are there formal forums for teaching discussions and exchanging experiences?
- How is the programme monitored? How is it ensured that the necessary measures are taken when shortcomings are identified? How are course reports used in continuous quality assurance and enhancement at the faculty and in giving feedback to students?
- What are the procedures for revising syllabi? Are syllabi systematically followed up? How is the range of courses analysed?
- How are various key figures followed up in the programme (e.g. completion rates, drop-outs, any gender differences, no. of applications) and how does this underpin development work?
- How is the Teaching and Learning Programme used in work with quality assurance and enhancement? How are its learning outcomes and division of responsibilities integrated into continuous quality assurance and enhancement work?

Goal attainment, teaching and assessment

Goal attainment

That the programme achieves the objectives of the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance (System of Qualifications) and programme-specific objectives, i.e., that actual learning outcomes correspond to intended learning outcomes.

For general degrees and degrees leading to professional qualifications, the outcomes of the System of Qualifications in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), annex 2, which each programme must ultimately meet. For individual freestanding courses (including contract education), it is ultimately the outcomes in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) Chapter 1, Section 8 and Section 9, that are applicable². The programme-specific outcomes are set out in programme syllabi, course syllabi and general study plans. Uppsala University Mission, Goals and Strategies and the Teaching and Learning Programme also specify general learning outcomes for the programmes. Examples of review questions:

- How do you work to ensure that students achieve the learning outcomes of the programme?
- Do the actual results of the students correspond to the expected learning outcomes? Do students with passing grades achieve the outcomes? How do you know?
- What are the links between degree outcomes, course outcomes, teaching activities and assessments? How do you ensure a strong constructive alignment between outcomes, teaching and assessment?
- How do you know that the degree outcomes are being met? How do teachers collaborate to ensure progression in the programme? Do you use degree outcome matrices, and in what manner?
- Do the syllabi and course literature create the necessary conditions for students to achieve the degree outcomes?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen your ability to assess whether students' knowledge and skills correspond to the learning outcomes?

The importance of assessment

Assessment has a unique status as a particularly results-orientated process. If the assessment is designed in a way that makes it likely that each student with a passing grade has successfully achieved the learning outcomes, this helps to ensure that the objectives are met. See further under *Progression and assessment*.

Analysis of completion rates

An analysis of completion rates, i.e. the proportion of students who achieve the outcomes, as well as an analysis of what the programme is doing to better equip students to achieve the outcomes, can contribute to the overall picture of the programme's quality. Completion rate data is not a quality measure in itself, but it can be valuable as one of several bases for analysis and reflection.

- Are the completion rates high because students have achieved their learning outcomes, or because the bar has been lowered?

² See also section 3. *Considerations when reviewing contract education and freestanding courses*, in the document *Stöd och råd vid utbildningsutvärderingar* (Support and advice on programme reviews) (2024), see Staff Gateway, Teaching – Quality and Evaluation.

- Are completion rates low because students have insufficient prior knowledge, because teaching is poorly designed or because requirement levels are maintained?
- Do completion rates differ according to gender or other characteristics across the student group? If so, what could be the reason?
- What measures can be taken to better equip students to achieve the programme's learning outcomes?

Alumni studies and employer studies

Alumni studies (the views and experiences of former students) and employer studies (the views of employers) can also provide a basis for assessing the attainment of the programme's goals. Alumni studies can provide information on how former students (alumni) view their programme a few years after graduation in light of their work experience. They can also provide a picture of the working life of alumni after graduation.

Research basis

That the content and teaching methods are founded on a research basis and proven experience.

- How does the teachers collegium work to develop the quality of the research basis in the programme?
- How do you know that your programme's research basis is maintaining good quality?
- How do you ensure that the content of the programme is based on current research? How are new research results integrated into the programme?
- How do students develop a scientific approach during the programme?
- How is the programme organised to provide a progression in methodological knowledge (quantitative and qualitative, if relevant to the programme)?
- How do students participate in activities with a research basis? Are students involved in ongoing research? Does the research basis provide progression?
- What procedures do you have for updating reading lists based on current research?
- How do you collaborate with the library to further develop students' skills in searching for and evaluating information?
- How do you work to integrate ethical aspects and research ethics into the programme?
- Is the research basis of the programme discussed with students, as well as how knowledge is developed? Are the benefits of the research basis discussed in relation to the programme's links to the world of work?
- How do you ensure that teaching methods are founded on a scientific basis and proven experience?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to develop the research basis in the programme?³

The *Guidelines for approving, monitoring and phasing out degree programmes* (UFV 2019/2302) state that the decision-making data must include a description of the participation of teachers who are active researchers in the programme, as well as a description of how the programme conveys the scientific basis of the subject, how the students participate in research-based activities and how they develop a scientific approach.

³ For some of the questions in the idea bank, inspiration is taken from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences' report "*Research basis – a key factor for quality in higher education*" (2023), www.kva.se/forskningsanknytning.

Student learning

That the teaching focuses on student-centred learning

- How do you work to ensure that research findings in teaching and subject didactics underpin the design of the programme? How does the choice of teaching methods support student learning?
- How do you know that teaching focuses on student-centred learning?
- How do you attempt to vary teaching methods and assessment?
- How does the teaching encourage active participation from students?
- How do you provide feedback on students' performance? How do you work to develop feedback?
- How do you involve students in assessing their own and their peers' performance through feedback?
- How do you work to provide students with intellectual challenges?
- How do you work to create positive collaboration between teachers and students?
- How do you create conditions for students to take responsibility for and reflect on their own learning and their learning process? How do you communicate students' responsibilities and their own efforts in terms of time and activity for learning?
- How do you collaborate with the library to support student learning?
- How are the learning environment, technology and infrastructure designed to support student learning?
- How do you work to ensure that all students with different conditions, motivations and learning styles are given equal opportunities to learn?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen your ability to contribute to student learning?

The Teaching and Learning Programme at Uppsala University is based on teachers' and students' experiences of how good quality is produced in the programme, as well as on what research has shown creates good conditions for learning.⁴ By describing in the self-evaluation the steps the programme takes to promote student learning in the subject and by promoting the active role of students in learning (e.g. through student-activating teaching, students assisting each other in learning, students as co-creators of the programme and participating in programme reviews), the efforts are made accessible for analysis, external review and feedback.

⁴ Research on how conditions for learning are created can also be consulted to inform review questions. An example of such a knowledge review is *Ledning för kvalitet i undervisning och lärande på grundnivå och avancerad nivå* (Guide to ensuring quality in teaching and learning at undergraduate and Master's level) (Bolander Laksov, Kettis, Alexandersson, Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions' Expert Group on Quality Issues, 2014).

Progression and assessment

That the achievement of intended learning outcomes is assessed using appropriate and fair methods, and that progression is ensured

- How does your teachers collegium work to ensure a good match between the learning outcomes of the programme, the design of the programme and the way in which knowledge, skills and abilities are assessed?
- How does your teachers collegium work on educational progression, both in a degree programme and between different levels of education?
- How do you know that the learning outcomes are being assessed in an appropriate and fair way?
- How does your teachers collegium work to ensure that assessments maintain high quality?
- How does your teachers collegium manage assessments? Are there grading criteria?
- What steps do you take to combat cheating and plagiarism?
- How do you know that there is good progression in the programme?
- Do you use a degree outcome matrix? Does it also show forms of teaching and examination?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen progression and assessment?

Teaching expertise

That staff involved in teaching and supervision possess adequate expertise in the subject matter, and in teaching and learning in higher education and/or subject didactics, and that there is sufficient teaching capacity

- How is professional development in relation to teaching and subject didactics managed?
- How do you work to ensure that teaching staff have up-to-date expertise in their subject?
- What work do you undertake to develop teaching skills? How do you stimulate professional development in relation to teaching/subject didactics? Are the requirements for teachers to undergo basic teacher training respected? How are equivalence assessments carried out?
- What steps are taken to ensure that supervisors have supervisor training?
- Is teacher capacity sufficient? Why/why not? Which categories of teachers are involved in teaching? How is the long-term availability of skilled staff ensured?
- How do you introduce new teachers (including doctoral students who teach) to the teaching/supervisor role?
- How do you ensure that teaching staff have good conditions for their work regardless of their background?
- How do you work to ensure a clear and effective educational leadership?
- Does the programme have distinguished university teachers? How is their expertise utilised? How are other teachers encouraged to qualify for that distinction?
- How do you work to ensure that teaching merits are expertly evaluated in appointments and promotions?
- Does professional development at the faculty take place in order to broaden and deepen the research basis of the programme?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- What steps do you take to preserve the strengths of the current teaching staff?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen the teaching staff?

Student participation and student perspective

Student participation

That students have influence on the planning, implementation and follow-up of the programme

- What work do you undertake on student participation in the programme?
- How do students participate in the further development of the programme (planning, implementation and development)?
- How do you know that students have influence on the planning, implementation and follow-up of the programme?
- How are students encouraged to participate in quality assurance and enhancement? How are new student representatives introduced to this task?
- How do you know that students are aware of opportunities for student influence?
- How do you process the results of course evaluations and other student surveys? How do you relay the results of course evaluations and potential measures to the students? How do you use course reports⁵ in continuous quality assurance and enhancement work and for giving feedback to students?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen student participation in the programme?

Accessible and appropriate study environment

That an accessible and appropriate study environment is provided for all students

- How do you work to provide an accessible physical and psychosocial study and learning environment for *all* students?
- How do you know that the students' study environment is accessible and appropriate?
- What student support is available in the programme? Do students know where to find this support?
- Do you have some kind of system for follow-up of study results (“early warning”) through which you actively contact the students concerned?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen the study and learning environment?

⁵ According to the *Guidelines for Course Evaluations* (UFV 2020/2340), a course report is to be written by the course coordinator, or another person appointed for this purpose, with an evaluation of how the course is conducted based on the views of students and teachers and proposals for possible measures.

Working life and social relevance

That the programme meets individuals' and society's needs for learning and professional knowledge and prepares students for future careers

- How do you link the programme with the world of work and different forms of interaction with wider society?
- How do you prepare students for their future working life?
- How do you learn about the needs of society and employers? Is this undertaken systematically?
- How do you know that the programme is relevant to the needs of society and prepares students for their future working life?
- How do you track the views of alumni (former students) of the programme? In what various ways do you learn from alumni in your programme?
- How do you develop students' ability to obtain generic skills (e.g. analytical skills, communication skills, collaboration)?
- How do you manage interprofessional learning, if relevant?
- How do you communicate the social relevance and the relevance of the research basis to working life to students?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen the relevance of the programme to society's needs and in terms of preparing students for their future working life?

Inclusion, international outlook and sustainability

Equal opportunities and gender perspective

That equal opportunities and a gender perspective are integrated in the programme

- How do you incorporate a gender equality and equal opportunities perspective into the programme?
- How do you integrate a gender equality perspective into the programme and how do you follow up on that perspective? How is a gender perspective addressed in the programme?
- In addition to a gender balance, what does a gender equality perspective entail in terms of the content and design of the programme?
- How do you ensure that students are given equally good conditions for learning regardless of their background?⁶
- Have you created clear processes for systematic preventive equal opportunities management for the students?
- In what way are students involved in equal opportunities management?
- How have you checked that the programme is gender equal and characterised by equal opportunities?
(For example, have you investigated the risks of discrimination and obstacles to equal rights and opportunities for all in the selection process, teaching methods and programme organisation, assessment, study environment, options to reconcile studies with parenthood?)
- How do you work to create an inclusive atmosphere and study environment for all students regardless of background? Are concepts, traditions and other aspects that are 'taken as read' explained? Is professional development in inclusive teaching offered?
- Are study guides or similar available to give every student clarity on requirements and expectations?
- How do you ensure that international staff and students are provided with equal opportunities?
- Are there procedures for taking a gender equality perspective into account when choosing a required reading list? Is the choice of reading list discussed with students? Are examples and cases used in teaching examined from a gender equality and equal opportunities perspective?
- Are completion and dropout rates for women and men monitored and how does this underpin development work?
- Is a gender equality and equal opportunities perspective taken into account when revising syllabi?
- How do you incorporate widening participation into the programme? Do you analyse the composition of the student population and does this inform recruitment efforts for specific target groups?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen equal opportunities and the gender equality perspective in the programme?

Chapter 1, Section 5 of the Higher Education Act states: "Equality between women and men shall always be taken into account and promoted in the operations of higher education institutions. Higher education institutions shall also actively promote and widen recruitment to higher education."

⁶ At Uppsala University, the concept of 'equal opportunities' is understood with reference to the seven grounds of discrimination addressed by the Discrimination Act, (SFS 2008:567), e.g., legal sex, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, functional diversity, sexual orientation and age, plus social background.

Internationalisation

That internationalisation and international perspectives are promoted

- What steps do you take to further develop international and global perspectives in the programme?
- Which international and global perspectives are included in the programme?
- How do you manage ‘internationalisation at home’? How do you capitalise on having an international student group in your teaching?
- How do you capitalise on any international experience that students and teachers have to offer?
- How do you work on mobility? How do you encourage students to study abroad?
- What role does the required reading play in this context?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen internationalisation in the programme?

Chapter 1, Section 5 of the Higher Education Act states: “The collected international activities of each higher education institution must enhance the quality of its research and education, and make a national and global contribution to the sustainable development described in paragraph one above.” (See below)

Sustainability perspective

That a sustainability perspective is promoted

- How do you develop a sustainability perspective in the programme?
- In what ways is a sustainability perspective reflected in the programme?
- Does the teaching connect to relevant parts of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in a way that is evident to the students?
- What role does the required reading play in this context?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
- Have you taken/planned to take measures to strengthen the sustainability perspective in the programme?

Chapter 1, Section 5 of the Higher Education Act states: “In the course of their operations, higher education institutions shall promote sustainable development to assure for present and future generations a sound and healthy environment, economic and social welfare, and justice.” The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2030 Agenda) cover the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.