



Framework for External Research Evaluations at Umeå University

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Introduction

The quality of research is continuously maintained and strengthened through a range of internal and external quality assurance processes at all stages of the research process. An important addition to these processes is to regularly have external experts evaluate research quality and its conditions within a given



environment or process, as a basis for measures and decisions aimed at strengthening research quality.

Therefore, the Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research at Umeå University (FS 1.2.3-1121-23) includes the commitment to ensure external peer review assessments of research and research environments from national and international perspectives. This also corresponds to one of the fundamental components of the framework of the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions.

To test and evaluate formats for such reviews, a pilot project was carried out during 2023–2025. Based on that pilot project, this document constitutes the framework for research evaluations at Umeå University from 2026 onwards.

Purpose

In line with the university's vision, strategic goals, and the Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research, Umeå University's recurring external peer evaluations are intended to strengthen research quality and its impact in academia and society, as well as the development and renewal of research environments.

The evaluations are intended to provide insight into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges as a basis for measures and decisions to strengthen the quality of research. This will be achieved through:

- processes of critical self-reflection within the units concerned
- external experts' assessment of results, conditions, and strategies for promoting high-quality research, as well as insightful and useful feedback to the evaluated units
- the use of the evaluations as support for continued quality development of research, both within the units concerned and at the university as a whole.

Levels of Evaluations

Recurring evaluations under this framework will take place at two levels:

- 1) The level at which research is conducted, that is, the department or equivalent.
- 2) University-wide evaluations with themes that are of importance for research quality across the entire university.

In addition, external evaluations at various levels may be initiated for various specific reasons. Such evaluations should, as far as possible, be coordinated with the evaluations planned under this framework and carried out with a similar purpose to strengthen research quality.



Level 1 – Where Research Is Conducted

Overall order and Process

All units at Umeå University where research is conducted (departments or equivalent) are to undergo external peer review at least once every eight years.

The faculty boards decide the order in which the faculty's departments or equivalent units are to be evaluated in a long-term schedule and the appropriate size of each evaluation panel. The long-term schedule should also include other external and internal evaluations concerning research within the faculty, insofar as they are known. Before the boards make their decisions, all plans are to be discussed by the Strategic Council for Research and Doctoral Education (FOSTRA) to identify any opportunities for synergies or the need for coordination across faculty boundaries.

The School of Education proposes how research in the educational sciences should be evaluated, after consultation with the relevant faculties.

If a research unit or research area is to undergo an external evaluation initiated by another party, for example the Swedish Research Council, this may replace a self-initiated external evaluation. In such cases, however, the evaluation must substantially correspond to the components covered by the Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research at Umeå University or be supplemented with elements missing from the external party's evaluation. Similar adjustment and coordination may be made in relation to self-initiated external evaluations carried out in another form, such as evaluation of a centre. The faculty board decides on such adjustments in consultation with FOSTRA.

Evaluation Panels

Composition and Competence Profile

- The size of the panels depends on the size of the evaluated unit and the range of disciplines it covers. The panels should consist of at least three experts, one of whom serves as chair.
- The experts should be professors or have equivalent expertise in areas relevant to the evaluation unit and have experience of academic leadership or other research-strategic work. The panel must include one or more experts who are active in and have their main experience from another country.
- The chair of the panel should have good knowledge of the Swedish research system and experience of academic leadership or other research-strategic work at least at departmental level or equivalent.



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- Each panel must include both women and men and, if possible, have an even gender balance. Any exceptions must be justified.
- There must be no conflict of interest between the experts and the evaluation unit that could call into question confidence in the impartiality of the evaluation.

Assignment

Under the leadership of the chair, the evaluation panel is expected to:

- identify the evaluated unit's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities with regard to research strategies, conditions, and results
- formulate observations and recommendations as a basis for the continued quality enhancement of research.

The evaluation panel carries out its assignment by reviewing the compiled material, conducting a site visit with interviews, and writing a report. If the evaluated unit or the faculty board have identified an area where there is a particularly strong need for feedback, the evaluation panel should take this into account.

Basis for Assessment

- A descriptive and reflective self-evaluation addressing the components of the Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research at Umeå University, including descriptions of the societal impact of research. The evaluation units or faculty boards may identify areas for which feedback is particularly sought.
- Site visit
- Data and, where applicable, other supporting material providing a picture of the evaluated unit's profile, conditions, and results over time.

Responsibilities and Roles

Responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor:

- Establish the overall framework for recurring external peer evaluations
- Follow up the evaluations annually within the framework of other operational follow-up activities
- Where relevant, use the results and recommendations as a basis for broader quality development within the university

Responsibilities of FOSTRA:



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- Coordinate the faculty boards' and the School of Education's long-term schedules for external peer evaluation, taking into account other evaluations with external elements that are conducted at the university
- Regularly discuss the results of the evaluations and resulting actions in order to promote learning across faculty boundaries and identify needs for university-wide development work
- Systematically follow up the format and timelines for the evaluations and, where necessary, propose adjustments.

Responsibilities of the Faculty Boards:

- Ensure that all departments and units where research is conducted within the faculty are included in recurring external peer evaluations in accordance with this framework, the Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research at Umeå University, and the university-wide guidance provided.
- Ensure that the observations and recommendations arising from external evaluations are systematically analysed and used as a basis for quality development and strategic decisions, and that the resulting actions are documented and monitored.

Responsibilities of the School of Education:

- Propose how the evaluation of educational research is to be covered by external peer review during the eight-year period, after consultation with the relevant faculties.
- Ensure that the observations and recommendations arising from evaluations relevant to the educational sciences are systematically analysed and used as a basis for the development and strategic decisions, and that the resulting actions are documented and monitored.

Responsibilities of the Planning Office:

- Develop and provide university-wide guidance and methodological support in consultation with FOSTRA
- In collaboration with the faculty offices, arrange regular feedback conferences once a sufficient critical mass of evaluations has been completed.

Responsibilities at All Levels:

- Systematically capture and address the observations and recommendations arising from the evaluations



- Make information about the evaluations available to internal and external target groups.

Allocation of Costs:

- Fees for the experts on the panels are financed at the university-wide level
- Travel, accommodation, and other costs are financed at the faculty level

Level 2 – University-wide Thematic Evaluations

Frequency

University-wide evaluations with themes that are of importance for the research quality across the entire university will be carried out on a recurring basis as needed. The recommended frequency is every four years.

Choice of Theme

Themes for evaluation are decided by the Vice-Chancellor following a collegial process in FOSTRA and the University Management Council. Themes should cover aspects of the conditions for research across the whole university and be linked to the university's vision.

The design and implementation of the evaluations depend on the theme selected. For each thematic evaluation, a project group with competence relevant to the theme will be appointed and made responsible for planning, implementation, and follow-up of the thematic evaluation.

Evaluation Panel

Composition and Competence Profile

A panel of experts is to be appointed with expertise relevant to the theme as defined by the project group. Regardless of theme, the following applies:

- The evaluation panel should consist of at least three experts, one of whom serves as chair.
- Each panel must include both women and men and, if possible, have an even gender balance. Any exceptions must be justified.
- There must be no conflict of interest between the experts and Umeå University; that is, the experts must not have an affiliation with Umeå University that could call into question confidence in the impartiality of the evaluation.



Assignment

Under the leadership of the chair, the panel is tasked with:

- identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges at Umeå University in relation to the selected theme
- formulating observations and recommendations to support continued quality development and the promotion of high-quality research at Umeå University in relation to the selected theme.

The evaluation panel carries out its assignment by reviewing the supporting material, conducting a site visit with interviews, and writing a report.

Basis for Assessment

- One or more descriptive and reflective self-evaluations addressing the theme.
- Site visit
- Data and other supporting material providing a picture of the theme, its conditions, and its outcomes.

Responsibilities and Roles

Responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor

- Establish the theme and the overall framework for the evaluation
- Establish the budget framework and decide on financing
- Provide a descriptive and reflective self-evaluation from the perspective of university management and otherwise coordinate the self-evaluation work
- Within the framework of other operational follow-up activities, annually follow up the work related to completed thematic evaluations
- Use the results and recommendations as a basis for quality development of research within the university

Responsibilities of FOSTRA

- Participate in the preparatory processes prior to decisions on thematic evaluations and serve as a reference group during evaluations
- Systematically follow up the format of the thematic evaluations and, where necessary, propose adjustments.



Responsibilities of the Faculty Boards

- Ensure that the faculty contributes to the self-evaluation work and that the required supporting material is produced
- Ensure that analysis and follow-up actions based on the evaluation's recommendations are carried out
- Follow up the analysis and resulting actions within the framework of other operational follow-up activities

Responsibilities of the University Director

- Appoint a project group and task it with planning and carrying out the evaluation in consultation with FOSTRA and the university management
- Task the relevant administrative units with contributing to the self-evaluation work and producing any other required supporting material
- Ensure that analysis and resulting actions based on the evaluation's recommendations are carried out
- Follow up the analysis and resulting actions within the framework of other operational follow-up activities

Responsibilities of the Planning Office

- Consult with FOSTRA and otherwise prepare the proposed theme overall framework, budget framework and financing for decision by the Vice-Chancellor
- Develop and provide university-wide guidance and methodological support in consultation with FOSTRA
- In collaboration with the faculty offices, arrange regular feedback conferences once a sufficient critical mass of evaluations has been completed.

Responsibilities at All Levels

- Systematically capture and address the recommendations arising from the thematic evaluations
- Make information about the reviews available to relevant stakeholders.