

**Principles and framework for the degree programme quality assurance processes at Aarhus BSS:**

The principles and framework for the annual status review on quality assurance as well as the degree programme evaluation both take point of departure in the shared principles and framework for Aarhus University. The common set of values for quality assurance - and degree programme development - is found in *Aarhus University's policy for quality assurance in education*. The policy is implemented through the on-going quality assurance carried out on the boards of studies. This is supplemented by an annual status review on the quality assurance and a degree programme evaluation every five years.

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The framework for these processes is illustrated here:

Annual status review



Degree programme evaluation



## **1 Objective**

The degree programme quality assurance processes aim to:

- view the overall degree programme from a holistic perspective - from recruitment via learning processes to the labour market
- identify the strengths, challenges and development opportunities of the degree programmes
- analyse the underlying causes of the degree programme's status with a view to defining actions to improve and maintain a high level of quality on the degree programmes in question
- contribute to a shared understanding and approach to the degree programme quality assurance

## **2 Process**

The annual status review and degree programme evaluation are conducted on all degree programmes - either individually or in connection with related degree programmes.

New programmes are not evaluated until after the first generation of graduates have completed the programme.

The degree programme quality assurance processes are conducted with the involvement of relevant managers, employees and students before, during and after the status reviews and evaluation meetings. This is to ensure that the processes are anchored in the management as well as in the boards.

The processes are structured around the five sub-policies that together constitute *Aarhus University's policy for quality assurance in education*.

- Recruitment and commencement of studies
- Structure and process
- Development of degree programmes, teaching and learning environment
- Study environment
- Relation between the degree programmes and the labour market

The structure of the annual status review as well as that of the degree programme evaluation consist of three elements:

- *Data*  
Developing the basis on which to review the degree programme
- *Dialogue*  
The core of the process is the central parties' discussion about quality
- *Follow-up*  
In continuation of the dialogue, the discussions are put into action.

The process is unfolded below.

## **2.1. Data - Preparation**

Qualitative and quantitative data constitute the starting point for the annual status review of the degree programme quality assurance and the degree programme evaluation.

A *data package* is developed for the relevant degree programme(s) with a status review of the joint indicators that are updated regularly. However, as of 2017, they cover the following:

- 1a: Drop-out rates on the bachelor degree programmes (*determined by the programme board of studies*)
- 1b: Drop-out rates on the Master's degree programmes (*determined at university level*)
- 2: ECTS credits earned (*determined at university level*)
- 3: Classes planned (*determined at school level*)
- 4: Teaching evaluation (*determined at university level*)
- 5a: Academic well-being (*determined at school level*)
- 6a: Research-based degree programmes (member of academic staff/part-time academic staff) (*determined by the programme board of studies*)
- 6c: Member of academic staff coverage of minimum number of hours (*determined at university level*)
- 7: Employment (*determined at university level*)

For each indicator, fixed threshold values determine when the indicator is green, yellow or red:

- Green indicates satisfactory quality
- Yellow indicates a need for attention and discussion of possible measures
- Red indicates a critical value requiring concrete measures to improve the conditions that can be monitored and changed

The indicators are supplemented by staffing plans with an indication of the coherence between the teaching and the researcher's area of expertise and the director of studies' report on the status of the action plan from the previous year's meeting. The indicators are also supplemented by additional relevant key figures as well as other relevant data, e.g. academic regulations and supplementary studies.

### **2.1.1 Concerning the degree programme evaluation**

As a basis for the degree programme evaluation, a self-evaluation report is developed. Among other things, the report considers the systematic data. The director of studies is responsible for developing the report.

The head(s) of department will also prepare a report intended to clarify the relationship between the management team and the degree programmes in the degree programme quality assurance processes. The report contains:

- A reflection on the indicators (Data: Member of academic staff/part-time academic staff, member of academic staff coverage of the minimum number of teaching hours and lessons)
- An account of the connection between research and teaching topics (Documentation: Staffing plans indicating the relationship between teaching and the researcher's area of expertise)
- An explanation of changes in the employee group for the past and coming years – and their importance for the teaching (Documentation: Description of appointments, staff departures and recruitment plans)

The collected material is submitted to the internal parties as well as to the external experts, the student representative and an internal expert. These parties may point out other focus areas to be discussed at the dialogue meeting.

## ***2.2 Dialogue***

The status review and the development of the degree programme are discussed at a meeting with point of departure in the collected data material. The participants at the meeting and other involved parties are listed in the illustration on page 1.<sup>1</sup> The self-evaluation report or the data package is discussed with the employer panel. In connection with the degree programme evaluation, the chair of co-examiners may also comment on specific development efforts.

All five sub-policies must be discussed at the meeting, and a question guide is prepared to facilitate this. There must also be a follow-up on former development efforts, including the previous year's status review or evaluation.

Critical indicators ("red and yellow flags") must be addressed. As a minimum, the outcome of the discussion of the "red flags" must be documented. However, it is also important to build on the well-functioning elements as well as address the numerical development of the indicators, even if they do not "change colour." Action plans must include clear indications of *what* should be acted upon, *how* to act, by *whom* and within which *time frame*.

The dialogue at the status review and evaluation meeting must be recorded in the minutes and in an action plan which can be used in connection with the subsequent follow-up.

### ***2.2.1 Concerning the degree programme evaluation***

The dialogue aims to identify focus areas on the basis of a holistic and societal perspective on the degree programme(s). The degree programme evaluation differs from the annual status review, as it is more in-depth, requires more work and partici-

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<sup>1</sup>It is preferable that a student representative attends the annual status review at FE. However, this is not a requirement due to the fact that the students are often part-time students and work alongside their studies.

pants, is more evaluative and views the degree programmes from an even more societal perspective than the annual status review.

To ensure that the degree programme evaluation includes both a societal and an academic perspective of the degree programme, two to three external experts are involved in the evaluation. One of the external experts must be a research expert within the academic field, while the second must be an employer representative. The third expert may be e.g. an industry specialist. Other guidelines for the selection of external experts are determined on the basis of the guidelines found in appendix 1. The evaluation also involves an internal expert appointed by the vice-dean, such as a director of studies from Aarhus BSS or similar from another educational institution.

The perspectives of employers and external examiners are included by providing the employer panel and the relevant chair of co-examiners with an opportunity to comment.

After the evaluation meeting, the vice-dean decides on the final action plan in collaboration with the director of studies, the head(s) of department and relevant employees.

### ***2.3 Follow-up***

The action plans form the basis of the follow-up processes at degree programme level. The person responsible for an element in the action plan is also responsible for including relevant parties and bodies with the aim of reaching a shared understanding and an effectuation of the agreed actions and development efforts.

Degree programmes with three or more red indicators during the year in question or two or more indicators that have been red for three years in a row are handled as follows:

- A follow-up meeting is held between the dean, the vice-dean, the head of department and the director of studies. At the meeting, the participants will discuss the action plan and the steps determined by the management to consolidate the quality assurance, and minutes are taken.
- The degree programme will be subject to an evaluation no later than two years after a status review with three or more red indicators. This means that the degree programme evaluation process will be speeded up if the scheduled degree programme evaluation is more than two years away according to the rotation plan.

On the basis of status review and evaluation meetings, a degree programme report is developed at school level and submitted to the faculty management team. The faculty management team discusses the status review of the degree programme quality assurance, decides on an action plan for initiatives taken on school level and prepares a statement that goes back to the degree programmes.

The degree programme report forms the basis for the follow-up and subsequent discussions in the education committee, the senior management team and the board.

### 3 Overview

Below, a brief comparison of the two degree programme quality assurance processes is depicted.

	Annual status review	Degree programme evaluation
<b>Assessment</b>	To review the degree programme quality from a holistic perspective with the aim of ensuring a continuous development	To carry out a more in-depth and broader review of the degree programme quality in a holistic and societal perspective with the aim of ensuring a continuous development.
<b>Parties involved</b>	The vice-dean, the head(s) of department, the director(s) of studies, two student representatives, relevant SNUK employees (including the minute-taker), an educational consultant from the dean's office and relevant departmental staff]	The vice-dean, the head(s) of department, the director(s) of studies, two student representatives, an internal expert, two to three external experts, relevant SNUK employees (including the minute-taker), an educational consultant from the dean's office and relevant departmental staff]
<b>Management support</b>	The director of studies, the head of department and the vice-dean participate	The director of studies, the head of department and the vice-dean participate
<b>Temporal perspective</b>	Once a year using data from the last three years	Every five years using data from the last three years
<b>Employee perspective</b>	As necessary	Always
<b>Data</b>	Data packages with indicators Other information such as academic regulations and/or similar	Self-evaluation report (including data package information with indicators) Other information such as academic regulations and/or similar Head of department report
<b>Dialogue</b>	Status review and development needs structured according to the indicators associated with sub-policies listed in <i>Aarhus University's policy for quality assurance in education based on the question guide</i>	Status review and development needs based on a holistic and societal perspective the elements of the sub-policies listed in <i>Aarhus University's policy for quality assurance in education based on the question guide</i>
<b>Follow-up</b>	The follow-up process is documented in action plans that are submitted to the board of studies and the department management team	

as well as in the degree programme report that is submitted to the faculty management team.

On the website, a plan has been published for which degree programmes are evaluated in which years. This plan is reviewed annually.

The process plan for the degree programme quality processes is depicted in appendix 2.

## Appendix 1 Guidelines for the selection of external experts

The prerequisite for becoming an external expert is that the expert in question is not employed at AU and does not have any personal interests in promoting or working against particular aspects of the degree programme quality assurance and development perspectives of a specific programme.

The external experts are recommended by the head(s) of department and subsequently appointed by the dean. External experts may come from various professional contexts and may contribute to the degree programme quality assurance with different (primary) perspectives on the quality assurance, however, there must be one employer as a minimum. Additional external experts may also be appointed within the following areas:

- Representatives from the chairmanship of co-examiners
- Experts within the academic field of the degree programme
- Development and evaluation employees from the education and research sector
- Employees with an expertise in organisational development and organisational learning

In each degree programme evaluation, a minimum of two external experts are included. One is an internationally recognised researcher, and the other is an employer representative, who can contribute to applying a societal perspective.

The director of studies and the head of department

- Are responsible for presenting proposals to the external experts with the two perspectives (academic and employer).
- Must prepare a brief written explanation of their recommendations.
  - With regard to the academic experts, the brief will give details of the research and educational qualifications on which their expertise at the highest international level is founded.
  - With regard to employer representatives, the brief will describe the qualifications rendering it probable that they can contribute a societal perspective to the degree programme evaluation.
  - Finally, the recommendation presented by the director of studies must confirm that the experts can cover all five sub-policies.
- Must submit the recommendations for approval to the vice-dean. If several experts are recommended, the vice-dean will make the final choice of experts and appoint one or more additional experts if the five sub-policies are not covered.

The following requirements apply to the participation of all external experts regardless of their background and specialist knowledge. The external experts must:

- Meet with students and lecturers before the dialogue meeting and without the faculty management team. This will take place at a one-hour meeting with the board of studies
- Have a prior knowledge of the purpose and process of the degree programme evaluation

- Contribute to an overall evaluation of the degree programme quality within all five quality assurance sub-policies
- Be involved in the selection of issues that are particularly relevant in connection with the evaluation
- Have the opportunity to provide feedback on the evaluation process - including strengths, weaknesses and any future development potentials

## Appendix 2 Process plan for the degree programme quality assurance processes

### Annual status review:

No.	Assignment	Responsible	Deadlines
1	Setting a meeting date (to be held in May/June)	KMK	End of February
2	Appointing two students to participate in the meeting	Director of studies	Mid-March
3	Planning the meeting	KMK	Mid-March
4	Extract from data reports	KMK	Early April
5	Preparing a draft agenda	KMK in collaboration with the board of studies (STN) supporter	Mid-April
6	Approving the agenda	PA/LIFRI	End of April
7	Distributing the agenda one week before the meeting	KMK on behalf of PA	Early May
8	Annual status review meeting	KMK on behalf of PA	May-June
9	Preparing the meeting minutes and action plan, which will be submitted to PA/LIFRI	Board of studies supporter in dialogue with the director of studies - cc. to KMK	Mid-August
10	Approving the meeting minutes and the action plan (possibly at a follow-up meeting)	PA/LIFRI	End of August
11	Distributing the meeting minutes and the action plan to the participants	KMK	End of August
12	Following up on the action plan - must be included in the annual schedule for the boards of studies	Director of studies (with the help of the STN supporter)	

### Degree programme evaluation/dialogue meeting:

No.	Assignment	Responsible	Deadlines
1	Preparing basic data for the self-evaluation report	KMK	January-March
2	Start-up meeting	KMK	February-March
3	Preparing the self-evaluation report	Director of studies	April-September
4	Determining a meeting date (to be held before week 42)	KMK	Early May
5	Recommendations for external experts	Head of department/director of studies	Mid-May
6	Approving external experts	PA/LIFRI	End of May

7	Forwarding an invitation to the external experts	KMK on behalf of PA	Early June
8	Planning the meeting	KMK	Early August
9	Recommendation for internal expert (director of studies)	PA/LIFRI	Early August
10	Appointing two students to participate in the meeting	Director of studies	Mid-August
11	Discussing the self-evaluation report with the employer panel and the external co-examiners	Director of studies	April-September
12	The board of studies approving the self-evaluation report	Director of studies	April-September
13	Preparing a draft agenda	KMK in collaboration with the board of studies (STN) supporter	Early September
14	The vice-dean approving the self-evaluation report	PA/LIFRI	Mid-September
xx	External experts meet with the board of studies	?	Mid-September
15	Approving the agenda	PA/LIFRI	Mid-September
16	Distributing the agenda three weeks before the meeting to get input from external experts	KMK on behalf of PA	Mid-September
17	Dialogue meeting	KMK on behalf of PA	October
18	Handling payment of fees and travel expenses for external experts	KMK (must be approved by PA)	Early November
19	Preparing the meeting minutes and action plan, which will be submitted to PA/LIFRI	Board of studies supporter in dialogue with the director of studies and KMK	Mid-November
20	Approving the meeting minutes and the action plan (possibly at a follow-up meeting)	PA/LIFRI	Early December
21	Distributing the meeting minutes and the action plan to the participants	KMK	Mid-December
22	Following up on the action plan	Director of studies/STN supporter	