Policy for quality assurance and quality enhancement at Södertörn University

This policy replaces the Quality Assurance Policy for Södertörn University, reg. no. 340/1.1.1/2016.

The primary functions of Södertörn University are education and research, which include community engagement. Activities must be organised so that high standards are achieved; there must be close links between research and education, and courses and programmes must be based on scholarship and proven experience (Chapter 1, Sections 2-4, of the Higher Education Act). The overall emphasis of university activities is specified in the Development Plan and our vision, ethos and focus areas, validated by the University Board, as well as other strategy documents. Work on quality is founded on the university's defence of core academic values such as academic freedom, collegiality, responsibility and scholarly integrity.

This policy covers research and education at all levels, and third stream activities (community engagement) are an integral part of these activities. It also covers administrative support and infrastructure, both at a university-wide level and in individual areas of activity. This policy is public and aligns with item 1.1 of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).*

The concept of quality

Quality is multidimensional and builds upon evaluation, with a perceived level of quality depending upon factors such as who is performing the evaluation, its purpose and the context. Discussions about and evaluations of quality should therefore use a range of perspectives. This quality assurance policy actualises three dimensions of the concept of quality:

- Scholarly quality, in the sense of a high standard of research and education (academic perspective)
- Quality from the perspective of students and the surrounding community (stakeholder perspective)
- Effective and legally certain procedures (fulfilling the obligations of a public authority).

The concept of quality includes academic integrity and freedom, equality for all and vigilance against cheating and research misconduct.

Overall objective

The objective of the university's work to promote quality is to build and maintain a culture of quality that is characterised by trust and participation, and which provides good conditions for the continual development of education, research and supporting activities, and the maintenance of their quality, both in relation to the abovementioned dimensions and to the university's governing documents for strategy. One pillar of the university's quality culture is that all staff are quality conscious, and that collegial responsibility is implemented at all levels, utilising the competence and commitment of the students and teaching staff. Everyone is encouraged, and given opportunities, to contribute to the university's development and improvement. A culture of quality is characterised by openness, clarity and proactivity.

Guiding principles

The university's work on quality enhancement looks to the future and builds upon shared learning. This includes strategic and operative work and occurs at multiple levels of the organisation. However, the following guiding principles are common to all levels and are the foundation of the university's work on maintaining and enhancing quality.

Participation, integration and transparency

Basic work on quality largely deals with everyday duties – contact with students and colleagues, research, internal and external contacts. Links between education and research, and how they benefit each other, as well as trust in the staff's competence and commitment, are vital to the quality of university activities. Participation and the desire to cooperate and take responsibility are required if work is to promote quality, and teaching staff, students and administrative staff are expected to make active contributions to ongoing improvements in quality. Following up and enhancing the quality of activities is an integral part of the university's normal working processes and organisation, e.g. planning, skills provision and education and research. Work on quality is conducted efficiently and is characterised by transparency, in that responsibilities, systems and routines are formally adopted, unambiguous and communicated internally and externally. Transparency also means that the results of evaluations and follow-up activities are many available to interested parties.

Student influence and active student participation

Student participation in work to improve quality is one of the university's cornerstones. Formally, student influence is regulated in the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance, and conducted via student representation and consultation in preparatory processes and decisions. Student representatives are appointed by the students' union. Student influence in development work also occurs through participation in course evaluations, as well as through continual dialogue with teaching staff and other staff at the

university. Students at the university are expected to take responsibility for their learning and to participate actively in their education. This includes doctoral students.

System

The university's work to enhance quality is conducted systematically, promoting shared learning and the continual development of activities. This means that there are clear paths for decision-making and the allocation of responsibility via fixed tasks and processes for work and delegation, and that there is continual development, follow-up and evaluation, at the level of both the university and the academic schools, as well as in local collegial milieus. Follow-ups and evaluations help enhance quality by providing a basis for development and improvement. To assure quality, the relevant parties are expected to act when problems with quality are discovered and by highlighting good examples. Evaluations of research and education are conducted in periodic cycles and have elements of external collegial review.

Links to international, national and local frameworks and systems

The legislation, regulations and external systems that the university must comply with are fundamental for work on quality. These include the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance, the Swedish Higher Education Authority's national quality assurance system and the Joint framework for HEIs' research quality assurance and enhancement systems (SUHF), the European Charter for Researchers/Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). Additionally, there are other legislative acts and regulations that relate to the university in its role as a public agency and its internally decided objectives, strategies, action plans, routines and delegations of authority, and which provide a framework for ongoing work on quality assurance and enhancement. In research, the university's quality assurance processes are closely aligned with national and international systems for collegial evaluations of quality.

Allocation of responsibility

The formal responsibility for work on quality is distributed across the entire university, both through the management hierarchy and collegial bodies. Ultimately, each member of staff is responsible for contributing to maintaining and enhancing the quality of the university's activities. Students are given the opportunity, and expected, to exercise influence and actively participate in the university's work on quality assurance and enhancement. The formal responsibility for quality is stated in the relevant delegation of authority.

Organisationally, the governing board and vice-chancellor have overarching responsibility for the quality of university activities. The governing board validates the Development Plan and the Policy for Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement, and the vice-chancellor decides on the overarching quality system and delegates the responsibility for quality within the university as an organisation. The vice-chancellor provides the right conditions for high quality in university activities through operational management and the allocation of resources. The vice-chancellor regularly follows up the work of the Faculty Board and academic schools (or equivalent) on evaluating and developing activities.

As a university-wide collegial body, the Faculty Board has overarching responsibility for assuring and enhancing the quality of education and research, including through continual evaluation and follow-ups. University-wide councils and steering committees have a remit for quality assurance in their areas.

At the academic schools and equivalent organisational units, responsibility for quality is divided between the head of school (or equivalent) and subordinate managers and bodies with collegial representation at the level of academic schools, programmes and subjects.

The chief administrative officer and library director are responsible for the quality of their supporting activities.

Primary processes in systematic quality assurance work

Continual processes contribute to assuring and enhancing the quality of the university's operations. In many cases, these are regulated by governing and supporting documents that provide a framework, as well as by action plans/operational plans that state priorities and time frames. Governing documents and processes must be reviewed at regular intervals and whenever necessary.

The following primary processes are the foundation of the university's systematic quality assurance work in education and research:

- Planning activities and allocating resources, centrally and locally
- Following up activities and results, centrally and locally
- University-wide processes for employment, promotion and competence development
- Processes for establishing and discontinuing main fields of study, research areas for doctoral studies and study programmes
- Validation of syllabuses for education at all levels, programme syllabuses, general syllabuses and individual study plans
- Collegial development work at local level relating to education, including the students' course evaluations
- Scholarly collegial assessment of research results and planned research (international, national and local)
- Periodic evaluation of the university's environments for education and research, adapted to national and international requirements and including assessments by external experts Systematic work environment management, including work on equal opportunities