



INTRODUCTION TO AAU'S QUALITY SYSTEM

MARCH 2021



**AALBORG
UNIVERSITY**

PREFACE

At Aalborg University (AAU), we continuously work on developing our programmes. The quality system is essential for our programmes to meet the many different requirements for education in Denmark.

Every year, around 6,000 new students graduate from AAU. We can be proud that our graduates contribute to solving major and global societal challenges. In addition to having a strong academic background, graduates from AAU are particularly good at interdisciplinary and problem-oriented collaboration.

A crucial point for AAU is to educate for the labour market of the future. It is therefore crucial that we continuously future-proof and develop the programmes so that graduates are necessary for the business community and society as a whole – in the long run as well.

Students at AAU should therefore experience a good study start, teaching with high learning outcomes, problem-based project work and other study activities of high pedagogical and research quality – and not least a study environment that promotes learning.

AN ADJUSTED QUALITY SYSTEM

At AAU, we have worked for many years to ensure and document the quality of our programmes. We have now decided to adjust the quality system so that it follows the students from their choice of education till the graduates get their first job and start their career.

At the same time, the aim has been to create greater coherence and a clearer structure with objectives, standards and indicators that all refer to one of the six quality areas on which the quality system is based. At the same time, version 2021 has been adjusted to incorporate new external requirements for the quality system in connection with the second round of institutional accreditation.

The quality system version 2021 is to a large extent still locally anchored while based on central coordination and framework. Several procedures are defined locally at the departments based on centrally defined frameworks and principles. It is therefore important that all staff members receive specific introduction to the quality work concerning their specific areas.

There is still a high degree of recognisability in the adjusted quality system, as part of the quality work has been transferred in full or adjusted form. However, new quality areas and procedures have been introduced too, so that the quality system meets new external requirements as well as AAU's own requirements and wishes for the quality work – for example, the quality areas "Recruitment and study start" and "Principles for problem-based learning" are new.

During the development of the adjusted quality system, there has also been a focus on increasing the space for quality management. Several qualitative elements have therefore been introduced to strengthen dialogues and assessments of the quality of the programmes.

The system remains to a large extent locally anchored. Several procedures are defined at the departments based on common framework and principles. It is therefore important that everyone involved receives a specific introduction to the quality work. The first short introduction is given in the following pages. Happy reading!



Per Michael Johansen
Rector



Jeppe Emmersen
Acting Pro-Rector

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QUALITY SYSTEM AND ACCREDITATION

AAU was first accredited in 2018 and must be re-accredited every sixth year, i.e. the process will start again in 2023 for the purpose of being re-accredited by 2024. The Danish Accreditation Institution will assess AAU's quality system and how it works in practice.

An institutional accreditation provides an institution with the responsibility and freedom to set its own system for ensuring the quality and relevance of its programmes. When AAU maintains an approved institutional accreditation, we as an institution achieve more options in relation to, among other things, establishing new programmes and adjusting the existing ones.

In order to achieve institutional accreditation, the quality system must meet established standards for quality and relevance as well as:

- be anchored at management level
- have defined policies and procedures to ensure quality and relevance
- support an inclusive quality culture
- work in practice

QUALITY PRINCIPLES – THE BASIS FOR A COMMON QUALITY CULTURE

The following principles apply to quality work at AAU:

- AAU's characteristic features and educational profile together form the basis of the quality work. Problem-based and project-based learning are central to the quality work.
- Quality work is a prerequisite for the implementation of AAU's strategy in the field of education and its ambition to offer programmes at the highest level.
- Quality work is a shared concern, based on common approaches when considered appropriate.
- The quality of the programmes is created in cooperation and dialogue between students, staff members¹, management, prospective employers and other stakeholders.
- Quality work is characterised by an inclusive and instructive quality culture, based on disciplinary expertise, open dialogue and knowledge sharing for stakeholders at all organisational levels as well as across the programmes.
- Quality work is based on a clearly communicated distribution of roles and division of responsibilities between students, teaching staff, management and staff functions (including technical and administrative staff (TAP)).

- The management ensures a clear division of responsibilities and work, the necessary information and resources for the work, and that participants at all levels of the organisation take ownership of and carry out the established procedures in the quality system.
- Quality work is organised to improve the quality of programmes in practice and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.
- The quality work follows the quality circle (Plan, Do, Check, Act), see Figure 1.



Figure 1. The quality work follows the quality circle. The implementation of the quality circle is described in the document "Overall framework and processes for quality work".

¹ Staff members here are both scientific and administrative (e.g. teaching staff, programme secretaries, semester coordinators, etc.)

AALBORG UNIVERSITY'S CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

The individual distinctive features per se do not constitute the AAU hallmark. The combination of these features is what constitutes our strength.

PROBLEM ORIENTATION

AAU's problem-based approach to research and education is strong and well founded. Our researchers, students and graduates are well trained in analytical, holistic as well as problem and solution oriented methods.

COLLABORATION

AAU conducts research in close collaboration between staff, students and partners in the business world and in public institutions. Working with authentic issues implies that the University maintains close contact with external partners.

COMMITMENT

AAU reflects the vigour and zeal of its staff and students. AAU is a university for committed staff and students who assume responsibility and make things happen within the university and in its surrounding society.

CHANGE

AAU creates knowledge that changes the world. Our problem-oriented approach to research, education, knowledge dissemination and collaboration makes a difference and creates change.

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE QUALITY SYSTEM

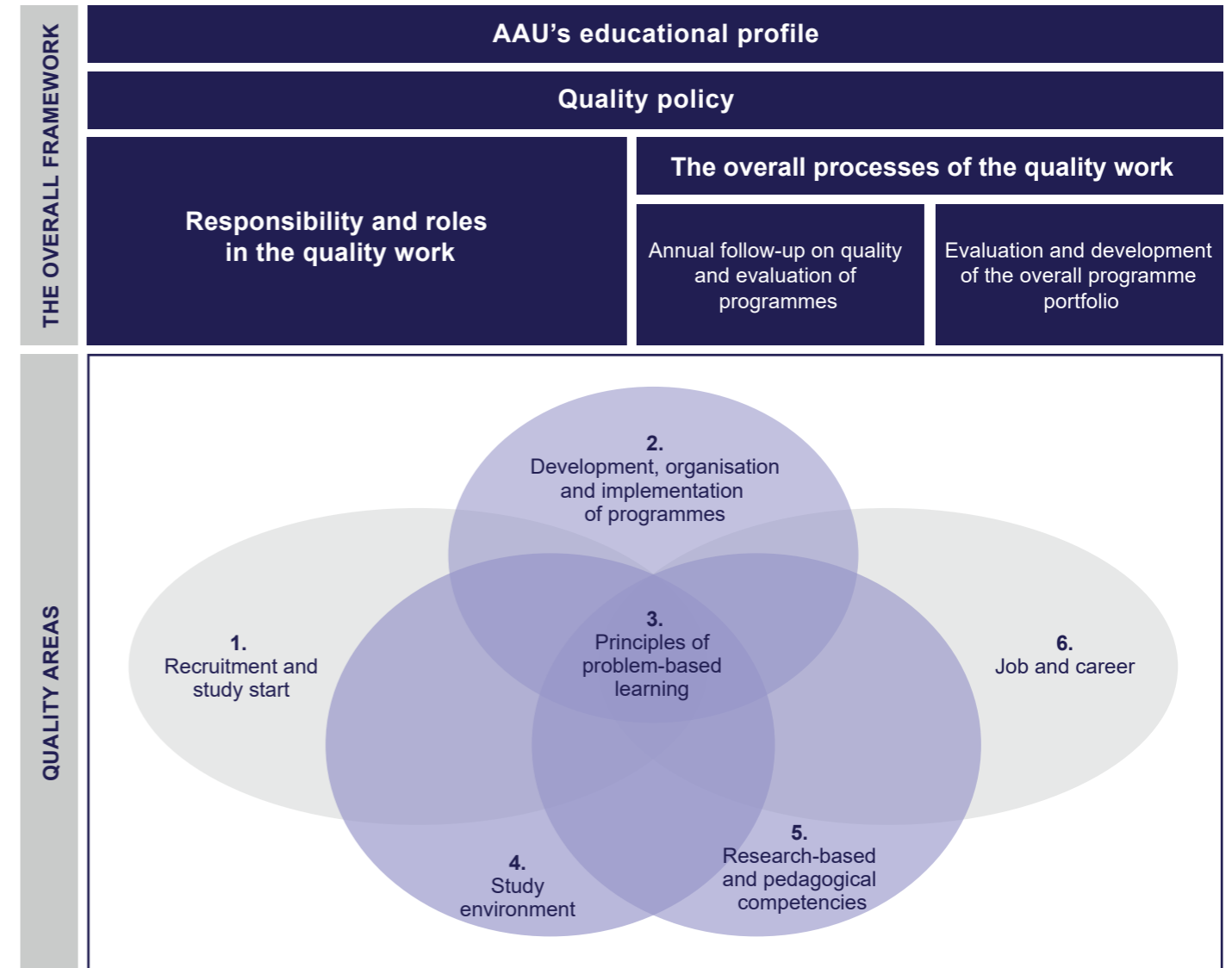


Figure 2. The structure of AAU's quality system.

The framework for quality work is defined in the quality system, see Figure 2.

The overall framework of the quality system consists of:

- The educational profile, which forms the basis for the work with quality in the programmes, and which puts into words what we at AAU understand by high quality in our study programmes and with our graduates.
- The quality policy, which sets out the overall principles of quality work and objectives for quality areas.
- Description of responsibilities and roles of the participants in the quality work.

- The framework for the overall processes that ensures the annual follow-up on programme quality, the implementation of programme evaluations every sixth year as well as the annual evaluation and development of AAU's overall programme portfolio.

The quality areas define how quality work is implemented in practice through the overall quality objectives and defined principles and procedures. The overall quality objectives consist of objectives, standards and indicators. The connection is illustrated in Figure 3 – an example from quality area 6. The indicators are specific targets or actions to be achieved for all programmes. The quality objectives are met when all connected indicators are satisfactorily met.

THE QUALITY WORK PARTICIPANTS

As mentioned earlier, the six quality areas follow the students through their education at the university.

1. Recruitment and study start

The focus of the quality work is recruitment, information to potential students so that they choose the right programme, and that new students are offered a well-organised and introductory study start.

2. Development, organisation and implementation of programmes

The focus of the quality work is the continuous development of the programmes (curricula), the implementation of study activities in semester descriptions and including forms of examination, dialogue with external examiners and evaluations with students.

3. Principles of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

The focus of the quality work is the systematic assessment and reassessment of the PBL principles, the implementation of the PBL principles in the programmes and the evaluation of embedding problem-based learning in the programmes.

4. Study environment

The focus of the quality work is the continuous evaluation and development of the psychological, physical, aesthetic and digital study environment.

5. Research-based and pedagogical competencies

The focus of the quality work is development and ensuring the academic and pedagogical skills for the teaching staff. The research-based competencies are ensured through associated research/academic environments and staffing schedule, which ensures that modules and courses are organised, taught and supervised by teaching staff with relevant research or academic profiles. The focus is also that the students have contact with research environments/academic environments throughout the programme.

6. Job and career

The focus of quality work is supporting students' employability, career guidance as well as providing contact with graduates and prospective employers.

It is worth noting that quality area 3 "Principles of problem-based learning" is at the very centre of the model (Figure 2). From the time students are recruited and start their education until they graduate, PBL will be the central and continuous learning approach, which is why the PBL principles and the quality assurance of these are placed as the central quality area in the structure of AAU's quality system. Through PBL, AAU puts students' learning at the centre throughout the programme, from study start to graduation.

The quality work is anchored in AAU's existing management structure, which is why formal responsibility follows the management organisation. The overall formal responsibility for quality policy therefore lies with the Rector. The Pro-rector has been delegated academic management within the field of education by the Rector, and thus has the day-to-day responsibility for AAU's quality system and the implementation of the quality work.

The Deans' offices and the University Director are responsible for the implementation of the quality system at the faculties and AAU Shared Services.

The Heads of Departments implement the quality system in their departments by defining and describing their own organisation of the quality work in terms of responsibilities and roles for carrying out, evaluating and following up on the quality work. Therefore, the interaction of the participants may differ from one department to another, and it is important that everyone knows their responsibilities and roles within the departments.

The Study Boards play a particularly important role in the quality work, as they are responsible for ensuring organisation, implementation and development of programmes and teaching, cf. the Danish University Act.

AAU's quality work is embedded in a quality culture, where students and staff work together to maintain a high quality of programmes and develop the programmes so that they constantly match the societal developments. Both teaching staff and students play a special role in contributing constructively to the dialogue on educational quality, including the participation of students in evaluations of, among other things, study start, study activities, study environment and educational programmes.

The day-to-day coordination of the quality and relevance of programmes is carried out through the following bodies:

The Strategic Council for Education (DSUR) is AAU's overall body across the faculties which coordinates overall strategic issues related to education.

On behalf of the AAU Executive Management, it ensures the managerial anchoring of the development and quality of the programmes.

The Study Environment Council is an advisory board for the Pro-rector, which aims to ensure that AAU's programmes are based in an attractive study and learning environment that supports problem- and project-based learning. The students are represented in this council.

The Study Boards: Much specific day-to-day quality work and dialogues on educational quality take place here.

The Department Management is also a large part of the follow-up quality work, as it ensures that efforts to develop the quality of programmes are implemented.

The ongoing work to develop quality work and the AAU quality system is done through the following bodies:

The Council for Quality Assurance and Development is AAU's overall body across the faculties, which is responsible for developing AAU's quality system to meet external and internal requirements. The council establishes an overall framework and common procedures for quality work. The students are represented in this council.

AAU Quality Network is an informal open network that aims to work towards a common understanding of the quality work carried out at all levels at AAU through knowledge sharing. This helps to create a good foundation for AAU to have a well-functioning quality system and an open quality culture where we learn from each other's well-executed quality work.

Quality policy		The frame document for the quality area	
Quality areas	Quality objectives	Standards and indicators	Procedures
1. Recruitment and study start	1.1 The university's recruitment of new students ensures a well-balanced admission to the programmes		
2. Development, organisation and implementation of programmes			
3. Principles of problem-based learning			
4. Study environment			
5. Research-based and pedagogical competencies	6.1 The university supports the students' employability throughout the education 6.2 The university supports the students' transition from education to jobs	<p>Standard 6.2.1 All programmes are affiliated with panel of prospective employers. Indicator: There is an overview of the institutes' panel of prospective employers and associated programmes, where all programmes are covered and the composition of the panels is considered to be appropriate in relation to the work with the programmes relevance to society</p> <p>Standard 6.2.2 The university offers career-enhancing activities, including entrepreneurship activities, to students in all ordinary programmes. Indicator: There is an overview of offers and number of students who have used the various offers, and this is considered to be satisfactory.</p> <p>Standard 6.2.3 The graduates find employment after graduation. Indicator: The average unemployment rate of new graduates in 4.-7. quarter after graduation is satisfactory. Indicator: The development in the graduates' unemployment rate in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd quarter after graduation is considered to be satisfactory.</p>	Principles for general student guidance and career counselling. Procedure for graduate surveys.
6. Job and career	6.3 The university gives graduates the opportunity to continue their professional development throughout their careers (lifelong learning)		Procedure for setting up and dialogue with panel of prospective employers.

Figure 3. The connection between Quality policy and quality areas.

QUALITY FOLLOW-UP AND DEVELOPMENT

The process for systematic quality follow-up and development differs depending on whether it is completed at programme, faculty/AAU Shared Services or institutional level. For all levels, the efforts in the action plans are at the focal point for developing quality of programmes.

At programme level, the departments carry out annual quality follow-up on a six-year cycle for all programmes. The six-year cycle begins with a programme evaluation in year 1 and then a quality status in years 2, 4 and 6 and a quality report in years 3 and 5, see Figure 4. These quality follow-ups, together with the action plan, are the central elements of the quality work.



Figure 4. Cycle for follow-up on the quality of programmes .

At faculty level, a faculty report is prepared every second year (even years), summarising the quality follow-ups of the programmes. As the study programme evaluations at the individual faculties are spread over the six years of the cycle (running asynchronous quality follow-up), the faculty report is a summary of both study programme evaluations, quality reports and quality statuses in the faculty. The faculty report is the Pro-dean's overall quality follow-up for all programmes affiliated to the faculty.

In parallel with the faculty reports, AAU Shared Services also prepares a Shared Services report every second year, which summarises the area's quality follow-ups for the Shared Services support functions that support the educational activities within the framework of the quality system. The Shared Services report is the University Director's overall quality follow-up for Shared Services.

At the institutional level, the institutional report finally summarises the faculty and Shared Services reports. The institutional report is the Rector and Pro-rector's overall quality follow-up for the university.

The timeline for the process is outlined in Figure 5.

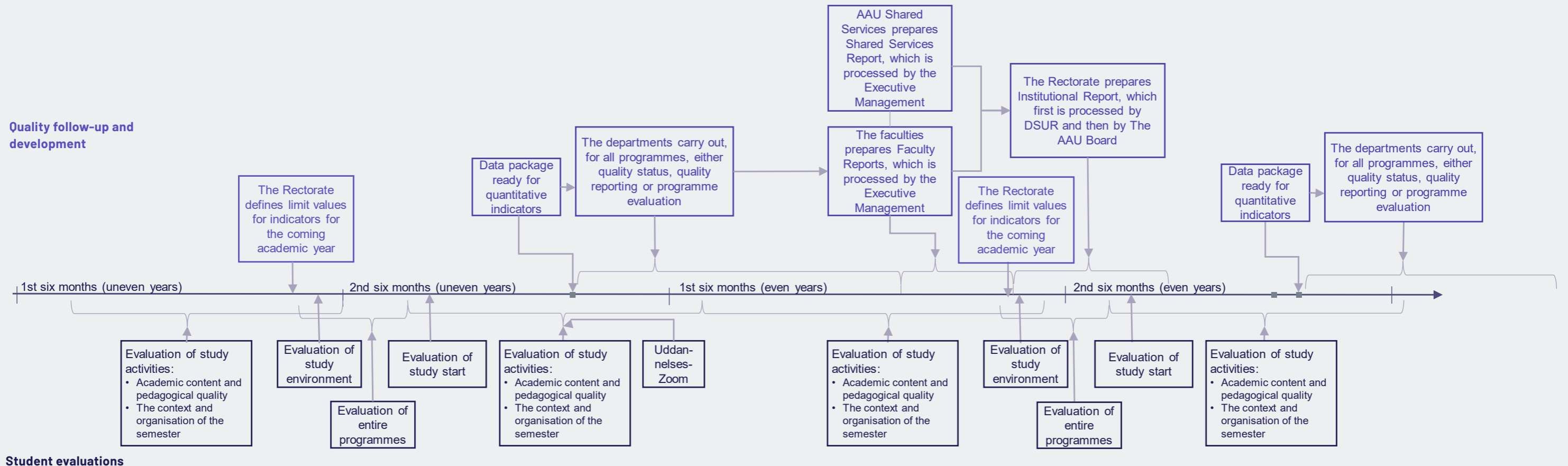
FACT BOX:

Programme evaluation (year 1) is an evaluation of the programme with the involvement of external experts. The evaluation aims at strategic development of the quality and relevance of the programme, and the involvement of external experts ensures an external view of the quality and relevance of each programme. The programme evaluation is reported in an evaluation report, and actions are initiated in the action plan after the programme evaluation meeting, where the external experts have given their input to the development of the programme. The Pro-dean attends the programme evaluation meeting and approves the action plan.

Quality reporting (years 3 and 5) is an internal evaluation of the programme based on the quality system framework, including a follow-up on indicators reported together in a quality report. The action plan launches new efforts and adjusts existing ones. The Pro-dean attends in the quality reporting meeting and approves the action plan.

Quality status (years 2, 4 and 6) Quality status is a status based on ongoing efforts and assessment of new data for selected indicators. The action plan is adjusted and any new efforts initiated. The status is prepared by the Department Management and reported to the Pro-dean.

Action plan (all years) The programme action plan is a description of both strategic and specific actions to be focused on and implemented in the programme. The action plan describes the challenges/potential improvements identified in the quality system framework, the specific actions and responsibilities as well as deadlines for implementation.



Figur 5. Timeline for quality follow-up and development.

QUALITY DIALOGUE

Central to the continuous quality follow-up and development in the programmes is a dialogue-based quality culture. The dialogues range from dialogue between the students and the individual teacher to dialogue in Study Boards, in the Department Management and between the Pro-deans and the Department Management.

Part of the basis for the dialogues is the quality system indicators, which include data, evaluations and other information for the quality work.

The indicators can be either quantitative or qualitative. For selected quantitative indicators, a limit value has been set so that it is clear when the standard, to which the indicator is linked, is satisfactorily met.

Indicators without limit value provide space and management responsibility for the educational management to discuss and assess when the standards are satisfactorily met.

There are different follow-up frequency requirements for each indicator, as some have follow-up every year, some every second year and some only every sixth year in connection with the programme evaluation in the six-year cycle of the programme.

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

In continuous quality follow-up and development includes the following mandatory quantitative data in the following indicator areas:

- Student intake (all programmes)
- Dropout (PBA/BA/MA²)
- Planned teaching and supervision hours (PBA/BA/MA)
- Students' time spent at studying (PBA/BA/MA)
- Exceeding the standard duration of study (PBA/BA/MA)
- Study environment (PBA/BA/MA)
- Research base and knowledge base (all programmes)
- Students' thesis/project-oriented courses with external collaborations (MA)
- Unemployment rate (PBA/MA)
- Relevance of programmes (graduate survey)(all programmes)

There is quality follow-up in the programmes every year in the six-year cycle of the programme for the indicators mentioned. The exception is the study environment, as the indicators used are from UddannelsesZoom, a survey conducted only every second year.

SURVEYS AND EVALUATIONS

Surveys and evaluations are carried out as part of the quality work. They form the basis for the dialogues on programme quality and quality follow-up and development, and ensure that we use the input of the students and graduates in our quality work, among other things.

Surveys and evaluations include the graduate survey and evaluations with students. The different types of evaluations with students are also shown on the timeline, Figure 5.

MORE INFORMATION

AAU's overall quality system is described at www.kvalitet.aau.dk. Here you will find all the documents that form the framework for quality work, including the specific procedures and principles.

Below is a quick overview of the division of indicators in the quality areas, including which management levels and areas are responsible for the follow-up. For some indicators, follow-up is required in the educational area (departments) as well as in the Shared Services, as there is a shared responsibility here.

Requirements for decentralised plans, which are local procedures to be established by departments based on central frameworks and principles, are also indicated in Figure 6.

The quality system as a whole is available on AAU's website: www.kvalitet.aau.dk

Quality area	Responsible for the indicators		Department Management	Deans' Offices	Executive Management	AAU Shared Services/Administrative Management Group
	Number of indicators in the quality area					
1. Recruitment and study start	10 indicators		7 out of 10			6 out of 10
	Follow-up		2 out of 7 have follow-up every year * 3 out of 7 have follow-up every 2nd year # 2 out of 7 have follow-up every 6th year "			every 2nd year in Shared Services Report
2. Development, organisation and implementation of programmes	12 indicators		12 out of 12			
	Follow-up		5 out of 12 have follow-up every year * 2 out of 12 have follow-up every 2nd year # 5 out of 12 have follow-up every 6th year "	The faculty's approval of the curriculum		
	Requirements for decentralised plans		Plan for evaluations with students			
3. Principles for problem-based learning	3 indicators		2 out of 3	1 out of 3	1 out of 3	
	Follow-up		1 out of 2 has follow-up every 2nd year # 1 out of 2 has follow-up every 6th year "	every 2nd year in the Faculty Report	every 6th year in the Institutional Report	
4. Study environment	4 indicators		4 out of 4			3 out of 4
	Follow-up		3 out of 4 have follow-up every 2nd year # 1 out of 4 has follow-up every 6th year "			every 2nd year in Shared Services Report
5. Research-based and pedagogical competencies	12 indicators		12 out of 12			
	Follow-up		4 out of 12 have follow-up every year * 5 out of 12 have follow-up every 2nd year # 3 out of 12 have follow-up every 6th year "			
	Requirements for decentralised plans		Plan for ensuring the knowledge base for professional bachelor programmes ¹ Plan for pedagogical-didactic competence development			
6. Job and career	9 indicators		8 out of 9			1 out of 9
	Follow-up		4 out of 8 have follow-up every year * 3 out of 8 have follow-up every 2nd year # 1 out of 8 has follow-up every 6th year "			every 2nd year in Shared Services Report

* Follow-up in quality status, quality reporting and programme evaluation

Follow-up in quality reporting (year 3 and 5) and programme evaluation (year 1)

" Follow-up in programme evaluation (year 1)

while data for 1 out of 4 indicators comes from UddannelsesZoom every 2nd year (the even years), follow-up is done either in quality status, quality reporting and programme evaluation, depending on where the programme is positioned in the 6 year cycle. For the other 3 indicators the follow-up is done as in

¹ Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Engineering programmes (Professional bachelors programmes) as well as HD-programmes (HD-programmes is a part of AAU's part-time programmes)

Figure 6. An overview of indicators and responsibilities for the follow-up and preparation of decentralised plans. The responsibilities will be specified for the departments in the Head of Department's Description of the organisation of quality work.

READ MORE AT:

www.kvalitet.aau.dk



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