INTRODUCTION TO AAU’S QUALITY SYSTEM

MARCH 2021
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.

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.

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
QUALITY PRINCIPLES – THE BASIS FOR A COMMON QUALITY CULTURE

The following principles apply to quality work at AAU:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Quality work is a shared concern, based on common approaches when considered appropriate.
4. The quality of the programmes is created in cooperation and dialogue between students, staff members, and other stakeholders.
5. 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.
6. 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”.

AAU’S QUALITY SYSTEM MARCH 2021

1. Recruitment and study start
2. Development, organisation and implementation of programmes
3. Principles of problem-based learning
4. Study environment
5. Research-based and pedagogical competences
6. Job and career

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE 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:

1. 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.
2. The quality policy, which sets out the overall principles of quality work and objectives for quality areas.
3. Description of responsibilities and roles of the participants in the quality work.
4. The management 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.

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

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Institution will assess AAU’s quality system and how it works in practice in order to be re-accredited by 2024.
The connection between Quality policy and quality areas.

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.

![Figure 3. The connection between Quality policy and quality areas.](image)

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. Through 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.
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, 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.

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 internal 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 included 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 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 indicated. 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 and set deadlines for implementation.
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.

### QUALITY DIALOGUE

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 6.

#### 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/MA)¹
- 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)

### AAU’S QUALITY SYSTEM

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](https://www.kvalitet.aau.dk)

### TABLE: QUALITY DIALOGUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality area</th>
<th>Number of indicators</th>
<th>Responsibility for the indicators</th>
<th>Department Management</th>
<th>Dean’s Offices</th>
<th>Executive Management</th>
<th>AAU Shared Services/Administration Management Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Recruitment and study start</td>
<td>20 indicators</td>
<td>7 out of 10</td>
<td>3 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>5 out of 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Development, organisation and implementation of programmes</td>
<td>12 indicators</td>
<td>12 out of 12</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>5 out of 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Principles for problem-based learning</td>
<td>3 indicators</td>
<td>2 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>5 out of 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Study environment</td>
<td>4 indicators</td>
<td>4 out of 4</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>5 out of 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Research-based and pedagogical competencies</td>
<td>12 indicators</td>
<td>12 out of 12</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>5 out of 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Job and career</td>
<td>9 indicators</td>
<td>8 out of 9</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>1 out of 3</td>
<td>5 out of 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

¹PBA: Professional bachelor programmes, BA: Bachelor programmes, MA: Master programmes, Full-time programmes
²PBA: Professional bachelor programmes, BA: Bachelor programmes, MA: Master programmes, 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.