Six-Year Follow-Up of Research Environments[1]

These guidelines were finalised by the Faculty Board on the 8th of June 2022 and take effect the same day.

Registration number HS 2022/660

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[1] This is a translation of the Swedish version (Sexårsuppföljning av forskningsmiljöer, registration number 2022/459). In the event of any discrepancy, the Swedish version of this document shall prevail.

Contents

1   Introduction

The quality assurance procedures in research cover all research carried out at the University of Skövde (the University). They occur within the framework of improvement cycles, which is described in "Quality Policy for the University of Skövde (the quality policy). The Improvement Cycle consists of four clear and connected phases, namely planning, implementation, follow-up and development. The improvement cycles always have operational development as their purpose.

In the document "Quality Assurance Procedures in Research" two activities for follow-up of research are stated, namely annual follow-up of research projects and follow-up of research environments. The follow-up of research environments is done within a six-year cycle. This document describes how the six-year follow-up is carried out.

The aim with a systematic follow-up of research environments is to provide basis for continued development of the conditions and quality of research, as well as for operational planning and development. The aim is to identify factors and strategies that provide conditions that are conducive for high quality research within the environments, as well as to identify development areas. An additional aim is to provide an assessment of the quality of the research. Research collaboration with the surrounding society is also followed-up within the framework of the six-year follow-up.

The quality assurance procedures in research comprise activities that have their basis in four focus areas (figure).

Figure: Four focus areas of quality assurance procedures in research at the University of Skövde

The four focus areas for quality assurance procedures in research are:

- Quality assurance of research applications and ongoing projects
- Staff recruitment, career paths and competence development
- Research building the research and education environment
- Research ethical questions and the responsibility for societal development held by research

The six-year follow up of research environments covers all focus areas.

1.1 General information about the follow-up

There are five research environments at the University, namely:

- DHEAR (Digital HEAlth Research) – School of Health Sciences
- Enterprises for the Future – School of Business
- Informatics – School of Informatics
- Systems Biology – School of Bioscience
- Virtual Engineering – School of Engineering Science

As seen above, each environment has an organizational attachment to a School.

Every research project at the University is followed-up annually by the respective Schools.

Furthermore, the research environments are followed-up in a six-year cycle[2]. The Faculty Board is responsible for that this follow-up is carried out. The Office for Research Support, Collaboration and Innovation provides administrative support and appoints a project leader for the six-year follow-up. All research environments are usually followed-up at the same time. The six-year follow-up is carried out through a review by external assessors. The basis of the follow-up is a self-evaluation written by each research environment, background material in the form of, for example, bibliometric data and a site visit. The assessment panel then submits a statement of the research environment to the University.

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[2] If research at a School is not organized within the research environment, it will still be included in the follow-up of the environment. In that way it is ensured that all research at the University is followed-up.

2   Process

The follow-up of each research environment consists of the following steps that are more closely described in the sections below:

- Information meeting
- Start-up
- Self-evaluation
- Assessment and site visit by the assessment panel
- The statement from the assessment panel
- The University's processing of the statement
- Feedback of implemented and planned measures

The time frame for the follow-up normally encompasses about 10 months, from start-up-meeting to the statement from the assessment panel. A schematic time plan is presented in Appendix 1. A specified time plan is determined before each follow-up.

The results from the follow-up constitute basis for the continued development of the research environment. Goals and measures related to the results of the follow-up are to be documented in the Schools' and the Support Services' operational plans or in other documents connected to quality assurance procedures within the research environment. The results should also be used in the development and planning of the University's operations.

2.1   Information Meeting

Three to six months before the start-up, the Faculty Board invites relevant functions within the research environment to an information meeting. The purpose of the meeting is broad dissemination of knowledge concerning the follow-up within the research environment. At the meeting, an overview plan of what is being followed up, how the follow-up will take place, and a preliminary timetable are presented, to facilitate the environment's preparation and planning of resources (such as staffing) that are needed for the follow-up.

2.2   Start-up

The formal beginning of the follow-up is when the Faculty Board and the Office for Research Support, Collaboration and Innovation hold a start-up meeting with the Head of School, Appointed Representative

of the Research Environment[3], Heads of Divisions and Research Group Leaders. Representatives of the doctoral students are also invited to the meeting. In connection to the meeting, templates, material from previous follow-ups and other relevant material and data are made available on a joint storage surface. The goal of the start-up meeting is to gather everyone concerned, and to ensure that everyone has a good understanding of the follow-up process and the work ahead.

2.3   Self-evaluation

The Appointed Representative of the Research Environment (See 2.2.) is responsible for the compilation of a self-evaluation with appendices. Collaboration in this work shall take place with those involved in the research environment, especially the Research Group Leaders.

In the self-evaluation the research environment is described, analysed and evaluated in relation to assessment areas and assessment criteria. In the closing section of the self-evaluation, the research environment provides a summarized evaluation and analysis of its environment. Strengths and development areas should be identified. The reflections should be clearly forward-looking and describe opportunities and development needs for the research environment. In the closing section it is also possible to briefly address important areas for quality and renewal of the research that are not already covered in previous sections.

The emphasis of the self-evaluation should be more on evaluation than on description and it is important to highlight how the assessment criteria are met by providing concrete examples. The purpose of this is to provide the assessors with an understanding of the research environment as a whole and of how the internal processes promote quality.

The self-evaluation must be written in English. There is a special template for this purpose. The self-evaluation should be no longer than 30 pages (excluding appendices). The Head of School is responsible for that the document is sent to the Registrar's Office and submitted to the project leader.

2.4   Assessment panel's Analysis and Site Visit

The self-evaluation and other documentation are evaluated by one external assessment panel for each research environment. The Dean

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[3] At some of the Schools the Head of School has appointed a representative for the Research Environment, whom then will take part in the Six-year follow-up of the research environment. At other Schools the Head of School has this role.

appoints the assessment panels. The composition and assignment of the assessment panels are outlined in Appendix 2.

Included in the assignment for the assessment panel is to conduct a site visit to interview the concerned Head of School, Appointed Representative of the Research Environment, Research Group Leaders and representatives of the doctoral students. The assessment panel may choose to interview additional functions, including representatives from the Support Services. If needed the interviews can be held entirely or partially in English.

The purpose of the site visit is to supplement the information in the self-evaluation and other documentation.

2.5   Assessment Panel's Statement and Assessments

Each assessment panel draws up a statement which highlights the research environment's strengths and provide recommendations for development. In the statement the panel provides an assessment for each criterion included in the follow-up (see section 4).

The assessment panel also leaves a summarizing reflection of the research environment as a whole. The research environment's strengths and development areas are highlighted in the summarizing reflection. The assessment panel shall also provide recommendations on how the research environment can be further developed. The summarizing reflection is based on the panel's assessment of all assessment areas and assessment criteria.

For assessment areas and assessment criteria, appraisals are given according to a graded scale. The following three grades are used for each assessment area:

- **Satisfactory:** No development areas that risk negatively affecting the quality of the research have been identified.

- **Satisfactory with reservations:** Development areas that need to be addressed in order to maintain the quality of the research have been identified.

- **Not satisfactory:** One or more assessment criteria that are considered to have shortcomings that could seriously affect the quality of the research have been identified.

Each assessment criterion is marked with "fulfilled" or "not fulfilled".

The statement is handed to the University in accordance with the agreed time plan and in the provided template.

The research environments are given the opportunity to read their respective statements and comment on factual errors, if any, before the statements are finalized.

2.6   The University's Processing of the Statement

When the assessment panels' statements are finalized, they are handed over to each research environment as basis for further quality development of the environment. In order to identify recommendations that need to be handled in the quality assurance procedures in research at an overall level at the University, the Faculty Board also processes all statements at one regular meeting.

The results of the follow-up are communicated to relevant stakeholders within the University and externally, according to an established communication plan. The assessment panels' statements are also published on the external website of the University.

2.7   Feedback of planned and implemented measures

If the follow-up has resulted in that one or more assessment areas have received the grades "satisfactory with reservations" or "not satisfactory", the representatives of the research environments must give feedback to the Vice-Chancellor on implemented and planned measures. This is done in connection with a regular dialogue meeting between the School and the Vice-Chancellor. If the implemented and planned measures are considered to be insufficient to assure the quality of the research environment. The Vice-Chancellor, in collaboration with the concerned Head of School, decides which measures have to be taken to assure the continued quality of the research environment.

The feedback takes place after approximately six months for assessment areas with the grade "not satisfactory" and after approximately one year for assessment areas with the grade "satisfactory with reservations[4].

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[4] The Vice-Chancellor and the Head of School can agree upon that the feedback should be given after six months for all assessment areas if the follow-up has resulted in assessment areas with the grade "not satisfactory" and assessment areas with the grade "satisfactory with reservations"

3   Documentation for the Follow-up

Different types of documentation are produced by the Support Services to support the self-evaluation. The documentation is made available by the project leader. The documentation is also made available for the external assessment panel.

The documentation is mainly the following:

- List of staff in the research environment
- Bibliometric data
- List of research groups in the research environment
- Compilation of obtained external research grants
- Completed annual follow-ups of research projects

Additional documentation can be added.

4   Assessment Areas and associated Assessment Criteria

4.1   Assessment area 1: Organization, Support Services and Infrastructure for Quality Assurance of Research

This area includes support services and infrastructure for research, in order to ensure that there are good conditions in place for quality assurance of research applications and ongoing projects, and thus the development and renewal of research and the research environments. Processes that promote equality in the conditions and implementation of the research are also included.

Assessment criterion 1:

> The research environment ensures that there are good conditions in place for the development and renewal of the research groups and the research, as well as for the freedom of the research.

Assessment criterion 2:

> The distribution of work tasks (teaching, administration, research and other tasks) is done in such a way that it promotes

high research quality. Gender equality is one factor that is
considered when tasks are distributed.

Assessment criterion 3:

The School and the University's Support Services provide a stable and appropriate infrastructure for the research environment. The infrastructure is adequate and promotes high quality research.

Assessment criterion 4:

The research environment ensures that gender equality is promoted in the conditions for and implementation of research.

4.2 Assessment area 2: Collegial Activities, Funding and Publication

This area includes the collegial activity, such as peer review, and learning from colleagues and in that way contribute to quality assurance.

Assessment criterion 1

An active academic culture exists that includes all researchers in the research environment, with research being followed up on a regular basis and researchers receiving feedback on their achievements.

Assessment criterion 2

There are distinct plans for research funding, as well as quality assurance of research applications. The plans are long term and contribute to opportunities to carry out research of high quality, publish in highly ranked channels, fund PhD students and career development for researchers.

Assessment criterion 3

The research environment has an adequate and distinct publication plan. Research results are published in highly

ranked channels for the subject area and the research is cited and known internationally and nationally.

4.3 Assessment area 3: The Research builds the Research and Education Environment

The area includes activities that contribute to strengthening the connection between research and education and the research's contribution to creating complete environments, with education on all levels, at the University.

Assessment criterion 1:

The research groups and the research that is carried out contribute to the development of the research environment.

Assessment criterion 2:

Research within the research environment is actively used in teaching at all levels (first, second and third cycle education).

4.4 Assessment area 4: Recruitment, Career Paths and Competence Development

This area includes processes to secure long-term competence supply, recruitment, and competence development. Clear academic career paths, with well-functioning career support for researchers in all career stages independent of their form om employment, are also included.

Assessment criterion 1

Within the research environment there is long-term work to secure competence and to ensure that there are conditions for competence development. There is a well-functioning career support within the research environment for researchers in all career stages, independent of their form of employment.

4.5   Assessment area 5: Questions relating to research ethics and the research's responsibility for societal development

The area includes support to researchers regarding application of good research practice and systematic follow-up of suspected cases of misconduct with appropriate actions. Also included in the area are systematic processes to promote the utilization of the research in a broad sense as well as processes for strengthening the quality and relevance of the research through collaboration and mutual learning. The area also includes the research's connection to the global sustainable development goals and the overall theme for the University – Digitalization for sustainable development.

Criterion 1

The research environment provides adequate support to researchers regarding the application of good research practice and systematically follows up suspected cases of misconduct and takes appropriate actions.

Criterion 2

The research environment works systematically and strategically to promote the utilization of the research in a broad sense and to enhance the quality and relevance of the research through collaboration and mutual learning.

Criterion 3

In the research environment there is active and fruitful collaboration with external parties (higher education institutes, businesses, public sector) nationally and internationally. Collaboration with external parties contributes to a higher quality in research and to the renewal and development of the research. Collaboration also leads to increased opportunities for the utilization of the research.

Criterion 4

The research environment applies the global sustainable development goals and the overall theme for the University – Digitalization for sustainable development.

5 Division of Responsibilities

Head of School:

- allocates resources for the follow-up, mainly in the form of working hours.

- actively participates in the follow-up process by participating in the information meeting, start-up meeting and interview with the assessment panel, contributes to and approves the self-evaluation etc.

- ensures that the results from the follow-up are taken care of and included in the development of the research environment, the operations planning for the School and the School's internal quality assurance procedures.

- ensures that planned measures are communicated to concerned researchers.

- ensures that the results from the follow-up and any planned measures for the research environment are communicated to relevant external stakeholders (such as external parties in research projects).

Head of School alternatively the Appointed Representative of the Research Environment:

- compiles the self-evaluation, including appendices.

- actively participates in the follow-up process by taking part in the information meeting, the start-up meeting and the interview with the assessment panel.

- includes the results from the follow-up in the development of the research environment.

Research Group Leaders:

- participate in the work of the compilation of the self-evaluation, appendices to the self-evaluation and other data.

- actively participate in the follow-up process, by being present at the information meeting, the start-up meeting as well as the interview with the assessment panel.

The Student Union:

- actively participate in the follow-up process through their representatives in the Faculty Board and the PhD Student Council.

- appoints doctoral students from the research environment to participate in the interview with the assessment panel.

Office Directors in the Support Services:

- allocate resources at concerned offices for example to produce statistics and other factual data, design of system support for producing statistics and communication of the results from the follow-up internally and/or externally.

- include relevant results from the follow-up in the development of operations.

The Office of Research Support, Collaboration and Innovation:

- Project leader of the follow-up and provides administrative support to the follow-up

- communicates and makes the results from the follow-up, in the form of the statements from the assessment panels, available to the research environment and representatives of the doctoral students (in English, when relevant) and otherwise disseminate the results from the follow-up internally and externally.

The Faculty Board

- makes use of experiences from the follow-up with the aim of continued improvement of the follow-up process.

- identifies recommendations that need to be handled in the quality assurance process in research on an overall level at the University.

The Vice-Chancellor:

- includes the results from the follow-up in the work of developing the University's research environments and Support Services at an overall level at the University.

- ensures that feedback of implemented and planned measures due to the follow-up takes place within the frame of regular dialogue meetings between the Vice-Chancellor and the Schools.

6 Taking effect

This document takes effect on June 8th 2022 and replaces Guidelines for Six-year Follow-up of Research Environments (Registration no. HS 2020/878).

Appendix 1: Schematic Time Plan

A schematic time plan for the follow-up of a research environment is described below. Specific time plans are produced before each follow-up. The time plan usually encompasses 10 months, depending what time of year the follow-up is carried through.

Date	Activity
Month 1	Start-up meeting
Month 1	Template for self-evaluations are made available
Month 5	The finalized self-evaluation is sent to the project leader
Month 7	Site visit from the assessment panels
Month 8	Preliminary reports are shared with representatives of the research environments (for comments on factual errors, if any).
Month 9	The final reports from the assessment panels are submitted

Appendix 2: The Composition of and Assignment for the Assessment panel

The Composition of the Assessment panel

The assessment panel shall consist of three subject experts, one labour market representative and a doctoral student representative.

The subject experts must be professors in areas relevant to the research environment. All subject experts must be external, i.e. not be employed at or in any other way affiliated to the University of Skövde. The combined knowledge and experience of the assessment panel should form the foundation for assessment of the areas included in the follow-up.

If different research areas are part of a research environment, it is important that the experts' joint subject knowledge covers the entire environment.

At least two of the subject experts must have good knowledge of and experience from the Swedish research and education system, and hence good understanding of the conditions of research in Sweden.

The labour market representative must have good knowledge of collaboration between higher education institutions and external organisations, as well as of the significance of research in relevant sectors of the working life.

The doctoral student representative must actively conduct studies in the third cycle in an area relevant to the research environment, or has recently defended his or her thesis. The doctoral student must not work at, or have conducted third cycle studies at the University of Skövde.

Appointment of assessment panel

Proposals of assessors are given by the Head of the School where the research environment is organized. Aspects of bias and gender equality must be considered when appointing the assessment panel and its chairperson.

The assessment panels are appointed by the Dean. The Dean also appoints one of the subject experts as chairperson of the group. The levels of renumeration to the assessors is found in a separate decision.

The assignment of the assessment panel

The assessors' assignment includes:

- Reviewing the various types of documentation.

- Preparing and conducting a site visit at the University including interviews with representatives of the research environment.

- Summarizing their assessments and recommendations in a joint statement, based on template and agreed time plan. The appraisals

must be based on the assessment areas and assessment criteria decided by the University.

- Correcting factual errors, if any, after sharing the statement with the School.