Quality System for Education at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

Quality System Description

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Please note that the English translation is for information purposes only. For all legal purposes, the original Quality System Description in Norwegian is the authoritative version.
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Introduction

The Quality System at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (hereafter INN University) aims to contribute to the systematic work towards maintaining and developing the quality of study programmes. The Quality System encompasses all matters that affect the quality of studies, from information to potential applicants to termination of studies and surveys targeting former students after graduation.

This document is a system description that provides an overall representation of the Quality System. The system description includes the core processes of INN University’s Quality System and shows how responsibilities and tasks are distributed. Full overview and complete description of all parts of the system (routine descriptions, mandates, templates and guidelines) can be found on INN University’s website inn.no.

The Quality System for INN University has been drafted on the basis of §1-6 of the Act relating to universities and university colleges, which stipulates the need for institutions to have a satisfactory internal quality assurance system. Further provisions on quality assurance systems are elaborated in Chapter 2 of the Regulations concerning quality assurance and quality development in higher education and tertiary vocational education, and further elaborated in Chapter 4 of the Regulations concerning supervision of the educational quality in higher education.

The quality work must be anchored in the Board and management at all levels, and the institutions shall facilitate development, reveal lacking quality and ensure documentation of quality-related work.

Furthermore, periodic evaluations of the study programmes should be conducted, and representatives from working life or community life, students and external experts relevant to the programme shall contribute to the evaluations. The criteria should also be in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

INN University’s quality work is anchored in the following documents:

- **INN University’s strategy**
  Describes long-term strategies that guide INN University. The systematic quality work at INN University is aimed at contributing towards INN University reaching the goals of the strategy.

- **The development agreement with the Ministry of Education and Research**
  The agreement contains targets for priority development areas, including quality of study programmes. The objectives will help to clarify the institution’s profile and in the long term provide better division of labour in the sector.

- **The annual letter of allocation from the Ministry of Education and Research**
  Annual allocation from the Ministry of Education and Research that provides frameworks and sets overall long-term goals for the sector.

- **Annual report and plans**
  INN University reports on last year’s achievement of goals, and describes the plans for the coming year, based on its defined institutional goals. Faculties prepare more detailed operational plans in line with INN University’s plans.

The Quality System must have a strong anchorage for those covered by the system. It applies to all who work and study at INN University. This is done primarily through the fact that the system – processes, roles and responsibilities – is clearly described and well known. Quality efforts shall promote a quality culture among employees and students. Educational quality is a key theme for various events and meetings for employees. In addition, funding for development efforts is made available, and INN University’s quality in education award is conferred annually.
A quality culture is also being built on solid cooperation with all INN University students. This is carried out through direct contact and feedback in teaching and supervision, and through different evaluation schemes. It is also carried out through the student organization and the student representatives. Here the students are instrumental in quality efforts at all levels, and especially through the quality efforts of the study programmes. INN University organizes training of union representatives and actively works for good representation from the student community in the Board and the committees. There are various meetings in which students, staff and management can discuss education quality. Among other things, there is an annual student seminar where student representatives meet the deans and higher leadership and discuss education quality at the faculty and institutional level. The seminar is a starting event for the coming academic year’s work with student democracy, and a summary for the students of how faculties have followed up last year’s evaluations with measures for improvements. INN University has a cooperation agreement with the student organization regarding, among others, student participation.

INN University is a multi-campus institution, with cross-campus faculties. The quality system is structured so that the programme-focused quality work is conducted in the academic units – the study programmes, departments and faculties. With cross-campus faculties, it is ensured that quality work is done according to the same systematics across all campuses.

**About the Quality System Description**

The quality system is based on the following principles:

- The quality work is conducted within *eight quality areas*
- The *study programmes* are the central quality units
- The *faculties* are responsible for the study programmes
- The *study programme committees* of each study programme are the core of the academic quality work
- There is a clear *division of responsibilities* between the actors in the system
- *Student participation* is a part of all quality work
- Continuous improvement should be a fundamental principle of work, and is ensured, inter alia, through periodic evaluations and systematic use of feedback loops.

This overall system description is thus divided into the following main chapters:

1. Quality areas – encompassing the ambitions in each of the eight areas
2. Quality System for Education
3. Development of the study portfolio
4. Gap management
5. System audit

Appendix 1 is an overview of the distribution of responsibilities and tasks, and Appendix 2 is an overview of how the quality areas are used in different parts of the Quality System.
1 Quality areas

Work on education quality can be made concrete by describing key quality areas. The eight areas are used to ensure that we work systematically and broadly with education quality. The quality areas serve as a basis for evaluations, surveys, analyses and assessments. In particular, this applies to the academic quality work, i.e., that which happens at the programme level.

Internationalization is not described as a separate quality area. INN University chooses to view internationalization as a perspective to be included in all eight quality areas.

First, the ambitions are presented in the quality areas that are the prerequisites for INN University for offering quality education: The academic environments’ professional and educational competence comprises INN University’s knowledge base. Thereafter, the ambitions for the processes are described: from recruitment of students, through teaching and studies, and up to achieved learning outcome. The last group of quality areas describes ambitions in areas that influence the students' learning outcomes more indirectly: the learning environment, the interaction of the study programme with society and working life, and the design and management of the study programmes.

Figure 1 INN University’s quality areas

INN University has the following ambitions for the eight quality areas:

1. **Professional competence of the academic environment**
   The academic environments shall ensure the knowledge base for their educational offering by keeping up to date and participating in research and development work nationally and internationally. INN University shall have a high proportion of first-level competence (associate professors/professors) in all study programmes. Students shall be welcomed to the academic community and to R&D activities related to the education.

2. **Pedagogical competence of the academic environment**
   The academic environments must have high competence in terms of planning, implementing and reflecting on their own teaching. They should have thorough knowledge of a variety of different teaching and assessment methods and master relevant teaching technology. The academic environments must conduct or initiate research on teaching and learning.

3. **Student recruitment and start of studies**
   INN university shall recruit well-qualified students. Information on study programmes must be up to date and relevant. Planning and completion of Study-start ensures that students are included...
in a social community. Academic activities must get started quickly and inspire and motivate students to make their best efforts.

4. **Teaching and studying**
   Students should develop good strategies to acquire new knowledge. They must be active participants in a learning community. Together with academic staff and in contact with employer and community organisation, students will gain increased knowledge, experience and education. Lessons should motivate students, and there should be good procedures for feedback and follow-up of students.

5. **Student’s learning outcomes**
   The learning outcome descriptions should be comprehensive and relevant to the competencies that students will have attained after completing their education. Students shall complete the study programme within the specified time. The teaching, learning and assessment methods should help students achieve a defined learning outcome.

6. **Student’s learning environment**
   There must be emphasis on continuous improvement of the conditions that secure a good learning environment. A holistic learning environment encompasses physical, organisational and psychosocial conditions, and how the different circumstances affect students' learning and wellbeing. There must be a good student participation. Good structures for student democracy will ensure the development and improvement of the learning environment.

7. **Study programme’s interaction with society and working life**
   Study programmes should be relevant to society and working life. Relevance must be ensured through cooperation in various fora. Here, the Council for Cooperation with Working Life (RSA) is an important venue, but industry cooperation at various faculties and programmes makes for important arenas as well. Relevance must also be ensured through job placement and work practice at employer organisations. Other important sources include feedback from former students in the form of candidate surveys, and through alumni networks.

8. **Design and management of the study programmes**
   There must be close correlation between learning outcome descriptions and teaching and assessment methods in the study programmes. The programmes must be evaluated regularly and according to established evaluation procedures; the results must be used for improvement. Study programmes’ leadership and management should be clearly established and follow other chains of management.
2 Quality System for Education

The figure below shows the structure of the Quality System at INN University. The chain of management (red) runs from the course coordinator to the programme coordinator and further to the head of department, on to the dean and up to the rector and the Board. The chain of reporting is marked in green. Periodic study programme evaluation and management dialogue (purple) are managerial schemes for dialogue and supervision of the faculties and study programmes, respectively. Student contributions constitute a foundation of the system. This is facilitated through various evaluations, as well as student representation in the various committees (yellow). The committees (blue) are composed of leadership members, and representatives of employees and students. The mandates clarify the composition, role and function within the system of the individual committees.

The part of the system that includes the study programmes is marked with a frame within the diagram. This illustrates that the academic quality work, which takes place at the programme level, is an important starting point for the work revolving quality of education. At the same time, the lines in the figure show that the academic quality work is the basis for consistency and all-encompassing reach of the quality work, thus ensuring continuous improvement.

Figure 2 Overall Quality System for INN University
2.1 Student evaluations and key figures

Student evaluations of different types and a set of key figures are the basis for a large part of the quality work. These are both subjective and objective data: we receive subjective data by gathering students' perceptions and views on different aspects of the academic activity. Objective data is obtained using numerical data – so-called key figures – for the sector as a whole, and for INN University in particular. All in all, the various student evaluations and available figures are used to provide necessary information about the eight quality areas as applied to INN University.

Evaluation schemes

Various evaluations form a central part of INN University's quality work. A number of evaluation schemes provide updated information about different parts of INN University's operation. The information is sent back to those responsible for the study programmes, and further to the students. The information is used to ensure and further develop the quality of the study programmes.

Evaluations at the study programme level

- **Course evaluation**
  In general, evaluation will be conducted for all courses. The study programme committee will decide on the type of course evaluation that will be used each year at its first meeting in the fall. There is a collection of suggestions on different methods for conducting course evaluation. The size, duration, teaching methods, etc. of the courses will determine whether it is appropriate to carry out mid-term evaluation and/or final evaluation, and which form the evaluation should take. The course coordinator is responsible for the evaluation being carried out. The course evaluation should be summarized in a document to be made available to the students.

- **Periodic evaluation of study programme**
  Periodic programme evaluation is a systematic review and deliberation of various aspects of each study programme. The faculties are responsible for preparing a plan for conducting periodic evaluations of the faculty's study portfolio. External representatives from work or community life, students and external experts relevant to the study programme will contribute to the evaluations. Periodic evaluations are conducted with a maximum of six years' intervals. Between these major evaluations, INN University leadership will also conduct other smaller scale reviews by the study programme committee. These reviews may have different initial perspectives, goals and focus.

Other evaluations and surveys

- **Programme start survey**
  A survey of all new students (not PhD candidates) regarding study programme information, recruitment, the application process, communication with INN University, start-up phase and expectations for the period of studies. Conducted by INN University in September each year.

- **Studiebarometeret**
  National annual survey for all 2nd and 5th year students. It is conducted by NOKUT in October each year, followed up by INN University, the faculties and the study programmes in February.

- **Teacher survey**
  A national survey conducted with a few years' intervals for all teachers and researchers. Conducted by NOKUT and followed up by INN University, the faculties and the various departments.

- **Graduate survey**
  Surveys for graduated candidates. NIFU carries out these surveys, and INN University carries out its own.
Evaluations of special areas and activities

- **Evaluations related to practical experiential learning, stay abroad, etc.**
  Special evaluation schemes for parts of the study programme, such as practical experiential learning and international exchange. INN University has many study programmes featuring practical experiential learning, regulated both through national frameworks and other types of designated schemes, as well as through curricula developed at INN University. Practical experiential learning activities have their own evaluation schemes. The same applies to internationalization work with incoming and outgoing students.

- **Internal or external delimited evaluations**
  Individual measures that can be implemented at INN University’s initiative based on circumstances that come to light and require follow-up. There are also limited evaluations for quality development, such as professional evaluation of academic environments related to study programmes.

We also use other schemes from NOKUT in our local quality work, such as:

- **National examinations**
- **Evaluations of selected academic areas**

**Key figures**
In addition to data from the various evaluations, a set of fixed key figures is used as indicators of status in the various quality areas. Key figures are also used as the basis for study programme evaluations and other dialogue based evaluations, and for discussions in the Education Committee, the Learning Environment Committee and the Research Committee. Many of the key figures are taken from DBH (Database for Statistics on Higher Education) and updated each fall and spring following INN University’s report. The key figures are available on INN University’s website and are updated as the sources are updated.

The following key groups of key figures are used in the different focus areas:

- **Student recruitment and study programme start-up**
  Numbers of applicants, admitted candidates and attendants from DBH. Figures regarding satisfaction from the programme start survey.

- **Teaching and studying**
  Figures for completion, credits production, drop-out etc. from DBH. Figures regarding student satisfaction from Studiebarometeret. Figures regarding internationalization.

- **The students’ learning outcomes**
  Credit production, completion and grade distribution from DBH. Information from the graduate survey regarding the quality and relevance of the study programme, as well as employment rates in relevant professions after graduation.

- **The students’ learning environment**
  Figures for satisfaction with the learning environment from the programme start survey and Studiebarometeret. Statistics from libraries and other bodies related to the learning environment work.

- **Academic competence of the academic environments**
  Figures for formal competence in the teaching academic environment. Figures from graduate surveys.
2.2 Study programmes - first, second and third cycle

The study programmes in higher education are divided into three cycles. The first cycle is bachelor's education, the second cycle is master’s education, and research education is the third cycle.

Quality work on the study programmes

The study programmes are central to the quality work. In the quality work of the study programmes, the study programme committees include regular meetings, course evaluations, reporting by course coordinators and programme coordinator reports as key elements.

These schemes constitute a standard model to be followed in the quality work for the individual study programmes. The model is essentially similar for all study programmes, but in some programmes adjustments are needed to achieve the purpose of the quality work. This applies, for example, to programmes featuring practical experiential learning. Mandate and templates for all the schemes can be found on the Quality System’s web pages.

Research education – PhD programmes

INN University’s Quality System shall also ensure and develop the quality of the institution’s research education. The study programmes in higher education are divided into three cycles. The first cycle is bachelor’s education, the second cycle is master’s education, and research programmes constitute the third cycle. As in the first and second cycles, quality work takes place through evaluations, annual reports, assessments and development measures at the study programme, faculty and departmental levels. Since research students, to some extent, follow more individual study courses, some elements have been developed that are specific to quality assurance and development of the PhD programmes. These additional elements are listed in the Regulations for the PhD Degree at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences based on UHR’s national recommended guidelines for research education.

INN University’s PhD Handbook, which is a collection of common guidelines for the PhD programmes, provides PhD candidates, supervisors and others involved in research education, a detailed description of how the different requirements of the PhD Regulations for PhD education and the PhD candidates themselves are integrated into INN University’s quality work, from recruitment and admission to completion and public defence of theses.

Unlike the first and second cycles, where the Education Committee has key tasks, the R&D Committee is the body central at INN University that receives and processes the annual academic quality reports from the PhD programmes. The committee shall contribute to the cooperation, coordination and overall assessment being implemented across faculties and campuses.
2.3 Committees

The various committees have an important function in the work for quality in education. The committees have different functions within this work.

Study Programme Committee

The study programme committee is an advisory body for the programme coordinator. The committee is a driving force for further development of the quality of the study programme. The study programme committee reviews evaluations by identifying and systematizing results and proposing measures. The committee is chaired by the study programme coordinator, usually meets twice a semester and consists of:

- The study programme coordinator
- Course coordinators affiliated with the programme
- Student representatives from all years

The study programme committees address the following issues:

- Planning and follow-up of student evaluations of the study programme and courses
- Follow-up of major key evaluations at the programme level
- Auditing and development of new courses and curricula
- Teaching and supervision methods in the study programme
- Social environment and social offerings in the study programme
- The annual report by the programme coordinator to the faculty leadership
- Other issues that students and/or others consider important for the academic quality work.

Minutes of the meetings are approved by the representatives – both student representatives and employees. The programme coordinator is responsible for making the minutes available to the students and archived.

Education Committee

The Education Committee is chaired by the pro-rector of education and is composed of the deans of education (or a party entrusted by the deans) at all faculties, and two student representatives are appointed by the student organization.

The Education Committee has a special responsibility for following up INN University’s Quality System and quality work in the fields of studies. The committee approves INN University's curricula and establishes delegation studies in accordance with the delegation decision. The committee processes proposals for study portfolio. The committee shall take special care in assessing the relevance and adequacy of study programmes for use in working and social life. The committee shall provide input to INN University's quality report.

R&D Committee

The R&D Committee is composed of the R&D vice deans (or parties entrusted by them) from all faculties, PhD leadership from all doctoral programmes and student representatives. The committee is chaired by the pro-rector of research. The R&D Committee is a strategic, coordinating and advisory body for INN University's research activities, the artistic and academic development work and the PhD Programmes. The committee has the special task of ensuring the quality of the PhD programmes. This is achieved partly through the fact that the R&D Committee is responsible for managing overall regulations, common guidelines and procedures for the PhD programmes, and processing the annual reports from the faculties' PhD committees. The R&D Committee shall promote measures that ensure the quality of the PhD
programmes and submit annual reports to the Board on the activities of the previous year and recommend measures for implementation.

**Learning Environment Committee**
The Learning Environment Committee is composed of 14 permanent members, of which seven are student representatives and seven are employee representatives. The Inland Student Welfare Organisation attends and reserves the right to speak in all meetings. The Learning Environment Committee has statutory tasks. These are set out in § 4-3, third paragraph of the University and University Colleges Act.

### 2.4 Reporting
Reporting addresses the need for documentation in the system. The reports are also used for contributing to quality development. This is done through reports on one level forming the basis for identifying challenges and possible measures for the level above. In this way, reporting is an important factor in the improvement loops. INN University’s chain of reporting goes from the course level to INN University Board. At the same time, feedback loops function so that the information in the reports can be used on multiple levels and ensure continuous improvement. The “annual wheel” is adapted to the work on INN University’s annual report to the Ministry of Education and Research.

- **Course coordinator report to study programme coordinator**
The course coordinator provides a report to the programme coordinator following each course. The report follows a template for content and format, and is distributed according to a defined scheme.

- **Study programme coordinator report to dean or head of department**
The study programme coordinator provides a report to the head of department in the fall. The report follows a template for content and format, and is based on the course coordinator’s reports and various evaluations. Together with the report, the study programme coordinator provides an assessment of the compliance of the study programmes with the requirements of the Supervision Regulations, following the stipulated template. The report and assessment are to be submitted to the study programme committee. The minutes of the discussion of the report in the committee meeting must be submitted to the dean / vice-dean with the report.

- **Head of department report to dean**
The head of department collects content from the study programme coordinator’s reports and sends them to the dean. At some faculties, the study programme coordinator’s reports may be submitted directly to the dean, depending on the academic organization at the faculty.

- **Dean**
Reports to the rector each fall about the work on education quality in the faculty. The report is based on the reports of heads of departments / study programme coordinators, and various evaluations. The Education Committee and the Learning Environment Committee also receive these reports and shall use them in their reports to the rector.

- **Rector**
Submits INN University’s Quality Report on Education to the Board in January.

- **INN University leadership**
Uses the quality report as the basis for INN University's annual report to the Ministry of Education and Research in March. Information from the quality report is a basis for decision making in
regard to next year’s plans for the areas of education. The quality report is also important for INN University’s leaderships’ management dialogue with the faculties each spring.

3 Development of the study portfolio

INN University’s study portfolio consists of all study programmes at all levels at all six faculties. Development of the study portfolio is based on political signals and overall strategy for the development of INN University’s academic profile. The needs related to education offerings and student recruitment are other important factors in assessing the study portfolio together with other forms of evaluation and surveys.

Requirements in key regulations for quality and supervision govern the work on development, approval, accreditation and revision of INN University’s study programmes. Procedures for study portfolio development describe this work, and it is elaborated in underlying routines, guides and templates. There are set procedures for study programmes in which INN University is self-accrediting, and procedures for study programmes that must be accredited by NOKUT. Having said that, all INN University’s study programmes undergo the same processes and are subject to equally high standards of quality. All of these quality elements are discussed in detail on the Quality System’s web pages. Work on the development of the study portfolio follows an “annual wheel” with fixed activities:

*Figure 3. Annual wheel for the development of the study portfolio*
4 Gap management

The quality system for education at INN University offers students and employees an opportunity to speak up in cases of unfortunate circumstances, submit suggestions for improvement or report on circumstances that they do not think are addressed elsewhere, such as through regular evaluations. This is part of the schemes that are laid down in health, safety and the environment (HSE) legislation in a comprehensive Speak Up scheme. This is a scheme that can be used when students experience a situation in which inquiries in other and more common channels do not work. The scheme is available on INN University’s website.

5 System audit

INN University’s Quality System for Education is reviewed regularly to identify and implement measures in areas requiring follow-up. This is part of the mandate of the Education Committee and is done in one of the spring semester meetings of the committee, after the quality report and the annual report have been presented. The structure of the system description is used as the basis for the review.