

New research assessment to boost long-term quality and development

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Uppsala University is currently conducting its third University-wide research assessment: "Quality and Renewal 2017" (Q&R17). This time, the focus is on preconditions and processes for maximising research quality. The aim is to strengthen Uppsala University's research in the long term, and one means is to clarify how forms of work and environments can be developed. During spring 2017, the evaluation work is in its most intensive phase.

In 2007, with international expert panels' assistance, Uppsala University was the first Swedish higher education institution to conduct a self-initiated, comprehensive overhaul of its [research](#) activities. This was followed up in 2011, when the purpose was to identify and reinforce strong, promising research areas on which to base strategic initiatives.

"We've done two performance-oriented evaluations, and they've been good and useful. Now we want to develop this one step further and analyse how well the processes that drive quality and renewal work in our research environments. Top-quality academic research requires a strong culture of quality, built-in quality assurance in various forms and dynamic discussion of long-term research development. This time, we're getting international experts to help analyse how well these cultures and systems work, rather than assessing the research as such," says Deputy Vice-Chancellor Anders Malmberg, who is running the project.

As before, the new evaluation contains bibliometric analyses, self-assessments in the research environments and visits by external

reviewers. However, the procedure has now been supplemented with an internal questionnaire survey to provide a picture of how the University's researchers see their own environments.

Bibliometrics and questionnaire results laid the foundations for the departments' self-assessments and critical self-reflection. The external reviewers are to receive the material collected and, as "critical friends", express their views on the research environments' strengths and weaknesses. Their evaluation also includes reflection on the connections between research and education, and between research and collaboration.

"Quality assurance is a natural part of the research, for which individual researchers and academic leaders at various levels must be collectively and independently responsible. This culture of [quality](#) has to be actively maintained, discussed and developed in the University, and Q&R17 is part of this," Malmberg says.

Q&R17 is now in its most intensive phase. In the questionnaire survey conducted in autumn 2016, a total of 3,800 researchers at the University answered questions on how they perceived their respective local research environments. From the end of November, the departments worked on their self-assessments, which have now been submitted and forwarded to the 19 panels of international experts due to visit Uppsala in May.

"On two occasions in February and March, we had preliminary meetings with the panel chairs and the member of each panel who has expertise in how research environments work," Malmberg says.

"These preliminary meetings have been important in giving these key people real understanding of the project's purpose. This time, we're not looking to rate our research. Instead, we want the external reviewers' critical views on how our research environments work. Do we have

structures and systems for optimal recruitment, career support for young researchers, reciprocal critical feedback and good infrastructure provision? It's crucial for the panels to understand that, this time, the self-assessments aren't about telling us what we're good at but, on the contrary, are based on self-critical reflection."

"When I see all the dedication that's gone into the task of self-assessment, I want to hope and believe that Q&R17 also contributes to something that's at least as important for the University's long-term development: strengthening academic leadership and revitalising collective responsibility at our departments."

Provided by Uppsala University

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