



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
quality assurance and enhancement
of university programmes

April
2008

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Introduction and Results

1. This report concerns Rigsrevisionen's examination of how Denmark's eight universities assure and enhance the quality of their bachelor and master programmes, and the part played by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (Ministry of Science) in this relation. Rigsrevisionen launched the examination on its own initiative in March 2007.
2. Rigsrevisionen examined the quality work performed by the universities in the educational area, because growth and welfare is today linked to world class education programmes. This means that education programmes must at all times be of the highest standard and relevant to society's requirements. Rigsrevisionen has therefore examined how the universities assure and enhance the quality of their programmes and how the Ministry of Science supports this work.
3. To ensure the continued relevance and high standard of university programmes, it is essential that the universities' approach to quality assurance and enhancement of education programmes is focused, well-considered, and comprehensive. This means that the universities need to decide on the quality of their education programmes and how to achieve that quality.
4. The universities are responsible for the ongoing monitoring of the quality of their education programmes. According to the University Act of 2003, the quality work pursued by the universities shall be based on systematic and continuous evaluation of education programmes and teaching, yet without narrowing the concept of quality by introducing "state authorised" evaluation. The universities must involve relevant employers, graduates, and the body of external examiners in their quality work to ensure that the content of the education programmes meets society's requirements.
5. The universities' performance contracts are essential for the quality work – within the university and in relation to the Ministry of Science – and they therefore play a major part in this examination. The content of the performance contracts relating to quality work is governed by the University Act. The contracts must contain plans for evaluation and follow-up on evaluations, and the content of the contracts is subject to the approval of the Minister of Science. The requirements to the performance contracts, with regard to the quality work, were discussed in detail with the Ministry of Science in connection with the examination. Rigsrevisionen agrees with the Ministry of Science that the performance contracts are strategic documents covering the activities pursued by the universities and therefore they should not include detailed manuals and answer lists.
6. Rigsrevisionen examined, *how* the universities work with the quality of education and not *what* quality in education programmes is. The purpose of the examination is to assess whether the quality work is performed in a satisfactory manner.

The examination will answer three questions:

- Do the universities assure and enhance the quality of teaching and education programmes in a satisfactory manner? (section III).
- Does the fundamental framework of the universities support the quality work relating to teaching and education programmes (section IV).
- Does the Ministry of Science support the universities' quality work in a satisfactory manner? (section V).

7. In the last chapter of the report, Rigsrevisionen presents examples of how the universities have organised the quality work. The examples may serve as inspiration to the universities in their future quality work.

8. The examination covers the period June 2003 – when the University Act took effect – to the end of 2007.

RESULTS OF THE EXAMINATION

According to Rigsrevisionen's overall assessment, the universities can and should be more focused and comprehensive in their efforts to assure the quality of the education programmes. The Ministry of Science should support the universities in the activities to achieve a comprehensive approach to quality work in the educational area.

Rigsrevisionen's examination shows that the universities conduct activities with the purpose of evaluating and adjusting individual segments of the education programmes, in particular within teaching. However, these activities do not provide an adequate basis for evaluation and visualisation of the quality of entire education programmes. Neither the universities nor the Ministry of Science has supported the quality work sufficiently.

As part of the follow-up on the results and recommendations of the examination, Rigsrevisionen presents examples of activities which may inspire the universities in their future efforts to assure and enhance the quality of their education programmes.

This overall assessment is based on:

The quality work performed by the universities is predominantly focused on evaluation of various segments of the education programmes, and lack a coherent perspective on *entire* education programmes. Involving the body of external examiners, employers and graduates actively in the quality work would benefit the universities.

- The universities have not planned or launched external evaluations of entire education programmes in the period 2003-2007, and the universities have only to a limited extent implemented internal evaluations of entire education programmes.

- The introduction of education accreditation in 2007 systematized external quality assurance work. But in the opinion of Rigsrevisionen, accreditation cannot replace the internal work done to enhance the quality of the education programmes. The universities should therefore evaluate their education programmes regularly.
- The universities evaluate teaching regularly. However, low response rates undermine the value of the students' rating of the teaching. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the universities should invest less energy in evaluations of teaching, and strengthen the collaboration with the teachers as follow-up on the teaching evaluations.
- The universities collect data on the quality of teaching and education programmes from students, teachers, relevant employers, graduates, and the body of external examiners. However, a significant number of study programmes do not systematically collect data from the body of external examiners on the quality of the education programmes.
- The universities use the data collected from the stakeholders in their quality work, but feedback from students and teachers carries more weight than feedback provided by other stakeholders, in particular at certain universities. The universities should include feedback from external examiners, graduates and employers more actively in the quality work.
- The universities should compare systematically the feedback received on quality work to create a better basis for assessment of the standard of education programmes and whether they meet society's requirements.

The fundamental framework of the universities should to a higher degree support ongoing quality assurance and enhancement of education programmes. The universities would benefit if the quality work was directed towards education programmes in their entirety.

- The universities' performance contracts include strategic objectives for the quality work, whereas plans for evaluation and follow-up on the quality work are few and far between. Still, the performance contracts have progressed over time and the most recent contracts include several plans for evaluation of teaching. But in general, the universities do not commit to implementing evaluations of entire education programmes. In the opinion of Rigsrevisionen, the performance contracts should set operational objectives for the content of quality work with particular focus on the *entirety* of the programmes.
- Three universities have policies and guidelines for the quality work within the educational area. Rigsrevisionen assesses that all universities would benefit from formulating policies and guidelines for their quality work. The policies should support the universities in their efforts to keep focus on entire education programmes and systematically involve external examiners, employers and graduates in the quality work.

The Ministry of Science should more extensively support that the universities approach quality assurance and enhancement of their study programmes in a comprehensive manner. In particular, the ministry should in the performance contracts support that the universities work more focused with the quality of entire education programmes.

- The Ministry of Science has taken several initiatives to ensure the right content of the performance contracts. But the initiatives have not sufficed to ensure that the universities in the performance contracts are committed to implementing, for instance education programme evaluations. In consequence, Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the Ministry of Science should intensify its efforts to ensure the correct content relating to quality work in the performance contracts.
- Rigsrevisionen recommends the Ministry of Science to inform the Folketing (parliament) of the content of the performance contracts relating to the quality work. For instance, this information could be included in the statement on the development of the universities which the ministry is required to submit when entering into new performance contracts.
- The Ministry of Science has not established any general rules governing quality assurance and thereby defined the framework of the statutory evaluation activities. The authority to establish rules of quality assurance was revoked in April 2007. Rigsrevisionen assesses that a clear definition of the rules would have brought forward the quality work at the universities, including programme evaluations.
- Rigsrevisionen recommends the Ministry of Science to clarify to the universities how the requirements to quality work, as stipulated in the University Act, interact with the requirements to accreditation of education programmes. Moreover, the Ministry of Science should contribute to strengthening knowledge sharing with regard to the organisation of quality work to ensure that the overall quality system is well-considered, focused and comprehensive.
- The Ministry of Science has launched several initiatives, for instance the qualifications framework and institutional audits, which have contributed to the quality work performed by the universities. Still, Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that these initiatives have not to the extent necessary contributed to making the quality work coherent and comprehensive.