

Overall assessment and recommendation

The University of Southern Denmark (SDU) has a coherent quality assurance system comprising specific, transparent and clearly defined goals, a clear division of responsibilities, a well-functioning practice and the system has a high degree of joint ownership in the organisation. Quality assurance is effectively supported by a series of tools and processes such as programme reports, the WhiteBook key figure system, teaching portfolios, etc. SDU has worked with a quality assurance system since 2005, and regularly develops its quality policy, which was last reviewed in 2012-2013. This builds confidence that the system will also be developed in future.

The clear division of responsibilities in the SDU quality policy is a great advantage. This applies in the descriptions in the policies, in principle papers, in the faculties' implementation memos and in practice in the five faculties and the five campuses. Another advantage is that quality assurance is rooted and organised in the existing organisation, and involves all management levels and relevant institutional levels, including the Executive Board, the education council, the faculty management, heads of departments, heads of studies and study boards. This contributes consistency and integration between the quality assurance system and other parts of the organisation's work on studies and programmes. It is also positive that SDU's organisation of the quality assurance system allows and expects everyone to play an active role.

The quality policy lays down specific and ambitious goals for quality assurance of the knowledge base, level, content and relevance of programmes. There is a high degree of cohesion between quality policies, all of which supplement each other from recruitment and admission of students to their transition to jobs and the labour market. Similarly, there is cohesion in the policies' overall objectives, their more specific quality goals, standards and indicators as well as implementation and practice at the faculties.

The programme report is a central and efficient tool in SDU's quality assurance and quality development of the overall goals, content and completion of programmes. The report is prepared every other year by the head of studies and consists of a follow-up of the previous action plan, a programme-strategic SWOT analysis, follow-up of individual policies, key figures for programmes and a prospective action plan. The programme report is also prepared at faculty and university level. The programme report at programme level contributes to providing the head of studies with an overview of his/her own programme. At institution level it helps provide the senior management at the faculty and university with an overview of an individual programme and an overview across programmes. The report is therefore an important element in cementing quality assurance at institution level. The status meeting further to the programme report is viewed by the faculty management as well as the heads of studies as a constructive development tool, and the action plan usually makes follow-up more concrete. The central role of heads of studies in preparing and following up the programme report contributes to strong ownership of quality assurance and supports systematic dialogue on quality efforts. This allows central quality policies to be coupled with local processes and academic values. The programme report is also an important element in SDU's work in practice on creating cohesion at programme level between planning/goal, practice/execution, analysis/evaluation as well as action/adjustment.

SDU has developed a solid key figure system. It is important that the heads of studies perceive the quality goals laid down and the associated indicators as useful tools in quality assurance which identify where it is necessary to take action. Key figures also play a central role in the six-monthly key figure overview for the Executive Board (*Nøgletaloversigt – Til direktionens behandling*).



SDU ensures effectively that programmes and teaching are founded on a research and knowledge base that corresponds to the level of the programmes. The research base of the programmes provided at several campuses is also ensured in a reasonable manner. The programme reports help ensure that any challenges are brought up and dealt with by the faculty management. The level and content of programmes is secured through approval by faculties of curricula and through processing by the study boards of competence profiles, goals, subjects, evaluations, etc. Moreover, SDU is striving to ensure that programmes have a sufficient pedagogical quality to support the students' learning, e.g. through the introduction of teaching portfolios.

In 2013, regular evaluation of the programmes with involvement of external experts became a new requirement for the institutions, and practice in 2014 should be assessed in light of this. Therefore, it is understandable that SDU does not have a fully developed system and still only has limited experience. Furthermore, over the course of several years, SDU has established a relatively solid internal view of the overall strengths and weaknesses of programmes through the SWOT analyses and through key figures in the programme reports. This builds confidence that SDU has the foundation to develop evaluations involving external experts in a reasonable manner. However, it is important that SDU does not just use any new external input from evaluations to develop the individual programme, but that it also uses this input to develop the overall quality assurance system's ability to capture and react to the quality issues identified.

SDU's principles for involving employers in the development of new programmes work well in practice. Policies, procedures and principles for good dialogue with employers set the framework for regularly and systematically involving relevant, external stakeholders in dialogue about existing programmes. Several programmes have focussed on active and development-oriented use of dialogue. Other programmes, however, have challenges with establishing and using in practice dialogue with employers' panels.

Monitoring of the employment situations of graduates takes place through employment statistics for new graduates, and is included in the programme reports, in the work by study boards and in the six-monthly key figure overview for the Executive Board. In addition, dialogue with graduates and monitoring take place through the university's graduate surveys. The study boards discuss systematically the results of graduate surveys, but they do not systematically discuss unemployment/employment on the basis of key figures. There are also a few examples where graduate unemployment is not included in the follow-up of key figures or action plan in connection with the programme report.

SDU's quality assurance efforts are generally cohesive and include clear, well-defined goals as well as a clear division of responsibilities. The efforts work in practice and have a high degree of joint ownership. However, in some quality assurance areas there is room for improvement. This applies to the systematics in the dialogue with employers and monitoring of employment on some programmes as well as work by the study boards on this part of the quality policy. Low response rates in connection with student evaluations are also a challenge for SDU, and evaluation of programmes with external experts is an entirely new practice. The problems and challenges in SDU's quality assurance are generally small and defined. SDU's management is already aware of these issues and are taking steps to address and resolve them. This builds confidence that problems and challenges will be resolved.

On this basis, the University of Southern Denmark has been awarded positive institutional accreditation.

