

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES



Approved by UNIS Board February 22nd 2017

THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE
IN SVALBARD

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE IN SVALBARD (UNIS)

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1 About UNIS and the quality system for educational activities

The 27th of November 2009 the Board of The University Centre of Svalbard (UNIS) approved the Quality Assurance System for Educational Activities at UNIS¹. A revision of the system was carried out in 2015-2016 and approved by the UNIS Board on February 22nd 2017.

UNIS is a *unique and dynamic* university centre with four scientific departments (Arctic Biology, Arctic Geology, Arctic Geophysics and Arctic Technology). UNIS has a Board of directors appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research an administrative director hired by the UNIS Board. UNIS is not accredited by Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen (NOKUT), but is part of the NOKUT accreditation system through the relation and cooperation with the Norwegian universities. The cooperation agreement of 2011 between the Norwegian universities and UNIS specifies the goal of mutual integration and cooperation regarding education. Academic affairs at UNIS, such as regulations, exams, dissertations etc., should be recognized by all Norwegian universities in separate agreements enclosed to the cooperation agreement. The cooperation agreement also states that UNIS courses should be approved by the mainland universities and that the UNIS exam right is founded on the regulations of the mainland universities.

The quality assurance system for educational activities at UNIS shall secure high quality and continuous focus on improvements in all educational activities at UNIS. The UNIS strategy emphasizes that UNIS shall offer research- and field-based courses of high quality where students are actively involved, that the learning environment is at high standards and that there is a close follow-up of students. The system has clear definition of roles, responsibilities, tasks and processes that contribute to these goals being met. The quality system also includes links to administrative routines and regulations at UNIS.

The quality system is built upon the basis of the quality systems at the Norwegian universities and is anchored at these institutions through hearings during revisions of the system. This ensures that UNIS has a quality system recognizable for- and accepted by our cooperating Norwegian universities. The system should be revised every 4-6 years.

2 Objective for the quality processes

The goals of the educational activities and the learning environment at UNIS are set in the "Strategic plan 2014-2020" and in each UNIS course description. The quality assurance system will contribute to the realization of these goals.

The quality assurance system covers all education at UNIS. Its purpose is to:

- Overall secure UNIS' position as a leading Arctic educational institution.
- Create a reflective culture in which the focus is on continuous developing and improving the quality.
- Ensure regular reviews of courses, educational activities, -methods and quality.

¹ UNIS Board case 59/2009

- Promote sharing of experiences and best practices.

The quality assurance system is adapted to:

- UNIS offering single research- and field based courses at BSc, MSc and PhD-level. UNIS do not offer degrees or study programs.
- UNIS' distinctive character and size, being a small, dynamic university centre providing intensive research- and field based courses for students.
- Develop a reflective culture between the institution and the students on the effectiveness of learning experience and how these experiences can be improved.

UNIS' aims for educational quality:

- UNIS courses are state of the art within Arctic science and engineering, and the course portfolio consists of relevant education of high international quality in accordance with UNIS strategy.
- Learning outcomes are regularly reviewed and students achieve the learning outcomes defined for the courses through active participation, a variety of learning activities and assessment forms.
- Education and teaching at UNIS should be student centered, integrate theory, practical skills and relevance, and focus on a deep approach to learning.
- UNIS provide research based education both integrating discipline research in the educational activities, and development of learning activities based on research in higher education.
- There should be an improved alignment within and between UNIS courses and relevant study programs at the Norwegian universities. UNIS courses and the international aspect of UNIS should be relevant for the learning outcome of the programs at the Norwegian universities.

3 Responsibility and participation

The UNIS Board approves the UNIS course portfolio and has the overall responsibility for UNIS Quality Assurance System for educational activities. The responsibility for efforts concerning the educational quality is placed on all levels in the UNIS organization. The management at all levels is responsible for facilitation and coordination of quality work and for follow up of results. Responsibilities can not be delegated, however tasks relating to quality development or assurance can be delegated to relevant parties. Chapter 3.1 addresses the roles and responsibilities of all parts of the UNIS organization.

3.1 Participants and areas of responsibility and tasks

Role	Tasks and responsibility
<p>UNIS students and The UNIS Student Council</p> <p><i>The students have a responsibility to take an active role in efforts involving quality development and quality assurance of courses and the educational setting.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keep themselves updated about practical and administrative conditions. – Participate actively in learning and teaching activities. – Participate constructively in student evaluations of UNIS courses, education and the learning environment. – Follow UNIS routines and regulations on academic matters and HSE. – Elect a Student Council and student representatives to Boards and committees at UNIS. – The Student Council represents and forward the students’ opinion and act as a facilitator for students opinions towards UNIS and other relevant institutions. – The Student Council should initiate and engage in matters relating to quality of education or the educational setting at UNIS.
<p>Teaching staff, including adjuncts with teaching obligations</p> <p><i>Teaching staff report to their Head of Department and are responsible for implementing teaching and learning activities that help students to achieve the learning outcomes of the course. Teaching staff should focus on quality development in teaching and supervision of students.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure that courses have a correct course description, an updated learning outcome and assessment forms relevant for the learning outcome. – Ensure that courses have a reading list and that all course information is provided in due time to students and all relevant departments at UNIS. – Have an ongoing dialogue with students about quality of courses and/or supervision, and discuss any academic, pedagogical or practical aspects that could improve the quality. – Accomplish various forms of student evaluation of the course. – Quality developments in teaching – evaluate educational quality and implement actions/changes (e.g. pedagogical, content, techniques). – Guest lecturers: Coordinate teaching material and lecture content, and communicate student feedback. – Collaborate with colleagues, other departments and institutions on development of new courses and quality assurance/development in existing courses. – HSE responsibility in planning and execution of course activities.
<p>Head of Scientific Departments</p> <p><i>The Head of each scientific department is reporting to the Director and has academic responsibility for education (at all academic levels) at UNIS -</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality assurance and quality development of education. – Responsibility for the day-to-day and systematic efforts in the department. – Assess and coordinate courses and teaching resources within the department – Follow up on course evaluations from students and course responsible staff, including needs and implementation of actions.

<p><i>assuring the institutions effort concerning quality of educational activities within the department.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bring departmental matters related to educational quality to the Education Committee (ECom). – Responsible for development of the academic competence among its academic staff. – Participation and strengthening of the scientific cooperation and relationships with the Norwegian universities, supporting scientific and educational cooperation. – Collaborate with other departments on proposals for joint courses.
<p>UNIS Education Committee (ECom)</p> <p><i>Consists of all heads of scientific departments, one PhD and one student representative. Head of Academic Affairs holds the secretariat. The managing Director can choose to meet in the committee.</i></p> <p><i>ECom is an advisory forum for the UNIS Director and the UNIS Leader Group on quality assurance of educational activities and important quality measures.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advise on the overall quality assurance and quality development of the institution based on course evaluations, course revisions, establishing and discontinuation of courses. – Compose the yearly UNIS Report on Educational Quality. – Responsible for initiating processes related to flaws in educational quality and the educational setting. – Address subjects initiated by the UNIS Leader group, ECom members or students. – Arranging the yearly Learning Forum seminar. – Undertake prioritization and resource management relating to management signals and UNIS goals concerning the quality of education. – Undertake larger scale evaluations on quality in education or the educational setting, as required or on commission from the Leader Group or the UNIS Board.
<p>The UNIS Leader Group</p> <p><i>Consists of the Administrative Director, the Assistant Director, all department heads and one student representative.</i></p> <p><i>The Leader Group is an advisory forum to the Director.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discuss the day to day organization and make decisions to secure the management of the organization to be within the instructions provided by the UNIS Board and owner. – Develop joint visions, goals and strategies as foundation for the strategic work in the organization and in the UNIS Board. – Develop a common understanding in all parts of the organization to anchor visions, goals, directions and strategies provided by the UNIS Board. – Address flaws in educational quality. – Manage the organizations' standard for quality, ethics and HSE, including continuous orientation of HSE matters. – Coordinate activities between departments, share information, experience and ensure interdisciplinary initiatives relevant for the organizations management and goals. – Pay attention to matters raised by the UNIS Student Council. – Overall responsibility for organizational development. – Ensure external relations significant for the organization.

<p>The Administrative Director</p> <p><i>Responsible for the quality processes at UNIS.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Responsible for the management of the day-to-day operations at UNIS and shall practice this according to laws and regulations, the overall goals of the organization and directives from the UNIS Board and the General Meeting. – Responsible for the quality assurance system at UNIS and for providing a yearly report on educational quality to the UNIS Board.
<p>The UNIS Board</p> <p><i>Overall responsible for UNIS having a quality system for education and that it is revised and evaluated at least every 4-6 years.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The UNIS Board is responsible for the management of UNIS as provided by the companies act (AS) and the Ministry of Education and Research who constitutes the General Meeting. – The UNIS Board approve the yearly UNIS's quality assurance report and the development of the UNIS course portfolio.

Role	Tasks and responsibility
<p>Department of Academic Affairs</p> <p><i>Has secretarial-, system- and operational responsibility for the quality assurance system for educational activities at UNIS.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure quality in administrative academic matters. – Administration of admissions, PhD's, student exchange, reception of students, examinations, electronic course evaluations, and ancillary systems relating to academic and educational matter (FS, TimeEdit). – Administrative cooperation with the Norwegian universities, in accordance with the cooperation agreement, to support scientific and educational cooperation. – Consultant for the annual UNIS Report on Educational quality. – Compile and dispatch selected key educational data and provide long-term statistics to the management level of UNIS. – Student counselling and student welfare – Student recruitment and marketing of UNIS courses. – Content in UNIS web-sites, editorial responsibility for communication platforms including social media. – UNIS graphical profile.
<p>The UNIS library</p> <p><i>Reports to the Head of Academic Affairs. The Library provides information resources for students and scientists and offer students instruction in the use of the library's resources.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide information resources (subscriptions of databases and full text, book acquisition, inter library loans). – System operators of bibliographical support systems – A good student environment in the library through being a learning area. – Provide guidance on information literacy, reference management tools etc. – User surveys and library statistics. – Secretary for the library committee.

<p>Department of Administration</p> <p><i>Reports to the Director and has responsibility for attending to various parts of the university centre's effort concerning the quality of education.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reporting and corporate governance towards UNIS Board and owner (the Ministry). - Budgeting and finance. - Case handling related to recruitment of positions to UNIS. - Training and competence development for staff. - Office support, administrative services.
<p>Technical Department</p> <p><i>Reports to the Director of HSE and has responsibility for attending to various parts of the university centre's effort concerning the quality of education.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Logistics and safety related to fieldwork, excursions and other educational activities - Assurance and development of UNIS Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) policies. - Ensure that safety courses have a correct course description and learning outcome. - Quality in safety courses for students and employees. - Supplier of joint IT services and user support for the students and scientific staff. - Responsible of optimize, maintenance, upgrading and adaptation of the students' physical learning environment (infrastructure for students, including IT / PC rooms). - Developments of web-based assessment tools, and assist the scientific departments with developing and using new web-based techniques. - Laboratory and engineering services.
Other quality forums	Tasks
<p>The UNIS Learning Forum</p> <p><i>Yearly event where all scientific staff, including adjuncts, participate. Administrative staff and PhDs may also attend. The forum focuses on educational quality.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase competence on educational quality and educational activities through lectures, workshops, tasks and discussions on selected topics. - Facilitate sharing of best-practices - Use the competence and knowledge of existing The Centres for Excellence in Education Initiative (SFU) at UNIS, such as bioCEED (Centre of Excellence in Biology Education), as a source of competence and motivation.
<p>The Dean Meeting</p> <p><i>An advisory forum to UNIS, where representatives at Dean level from all the Norwegian universities discuss matters relating to educational quality at UNIS.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recommend establishment and termination of UNIS courses - Addresses new course initiatives to be established at UNIS. - Contribute to predictability for admission to UNIS for students in study programs at the Norwegian universities. - Other matters relating to educational quality and collaboration between the parties.

4 Educational quality at UNIS

UNIS has a regular, systematic monitoring of all courses through written course evaluations (Fig 1.). The purpose of the monitoring is to assess the need for adjustments in the courses and in educational activities. UNIS course descriptions are revised once a year. A yearly quality report on educational activities is delivered to the UNIS Board. During the yearly Learning Forum relevant topics from course evaluations, course revisions and quality work are highlighted and best practices are shared among staff.

4.1 Report on Educational Quality

UNIS delivers the annual report on educational quality to the UNIS Board once a year in February. The report addresses the overall statistics on quality indicators and findings from evaluations provided by students and staff. The statistical parameters include student numbers, intake- and result-quality at UNIS. Due to UNIS offering only single courses and not programs, UNIS do not measure throughput of students, besides the failure rate. The evaluations from students and staff include course specific matters, the educational setting, the learning environment and the cooperation with support functions at UNIS. The quality report should be available for the Norwegian universities and the public at UNIS web-site and upon request.

The foundation for the report is found in all aspects of course feedback provided, especially the written, anonymous course evaluation at the end of each course. All Heads of the scientific departments look through all course evaluations from their department and report the overall findings in ECom. Twice a year, in January and September/October, the Department of Academic affairs presents an overall summary to ECom describing the most evident findings for the previous term. The response rate is also addressed.

4.2 Evaluation and revision of UNIS courses

The effort to improve UNIS courses are a continuous process. Courses are evaluated every time they are arranged. Student feedback is given through course evaluations, but also continually in the day-to-day contact between the students and UNIS staff or through the Student Council. The different types of course evaluations (see 4.2.1) give students an active role in the work on quality of education at UNIS. Student feedback leads to a greater focus on the students' total learning environment and to entrenching efforts concerning the quality of education in the academic environments. The evaluation reports should be available for students and student representatives at UNIS.

The course revision process may also address special focus areas from year to year. All courses receive an inquiry of revision well in time before the next course and with a time line so that the most recent findings relating to quality development can be implemented in the revised course description. If there are major changes in the course content or distinct changes in the course, UNIS will inform the mainland universities of the changes.

4.2.1 Guidelines for evaluation of courses at UNIS

Operational evaluation

All UNIS courses perform operational evaluation. This also applied to short/intensive courses (2-6 weeks). Operational evaluation can take form of oral feedback in the classrooms, box for sticky notes by the door or similar activities. The purpose of this

evaluation is to receive input on the course, teaching activities/processes, learning environment, in time to assess need for adjustments as the course goes along.

No report is required from operational evaluations.

Mid-term evaluation

Full semester courses have a mid-term evaluation initiated by ECom. The course responsible can arrange the mid-term evaluation in any form preferred by the course responsible, including delegate the task to the student representatives of the course. The evaluation should be conducted approx. 1,5 months after start-up. The results should be discussed by student representative(s), the course responsible and the Head of Department. Findings and actions are to be implemented immediately, and the outcome of the dialogue should be communicated to the students in the course.

No report is required from mid-term evaluations, but Head of Departments should report on relevant findings in ECom.

Written course evaluation

All UNIS courses should include a written, anonymous student evaluation at the end of the course. The overall results per course are presented in a report which is sent to the course responsible and the related Head of Department. The Head of Department and the course responsible discuss measures/flaws and actions to be taken and the course responsible submit a short, written course responsible evaluation to UNIS. This evaluation lists feedback to other part of UNIS and actions/changes to be taken in coming year. All course evaluations from students and course responsible are archived in UNIS archive system (Public 360). The Head of each Scientific Department use ECom as the forum to discuss special cases raised by students or staff, or general findings that need improvement. A compiled report of all course evaluations is made by Dept. of Academic Affairs each term and presented in ECom. The overall reports are the foundation for the yearly institutional quality report. UNIS aims for students to receive information about results and plans for follow-ups of evaluations in which they have participated.

4.2.2 The content of UNIS written evaluation forms

UNIS student course evaluations:

The student evaluation shall include an assessment of the relationship between the course's planned learning outcomes and the learning activities and how the course assessment corresponded to the learning outcome. Other key topics are the learning environment, infrastructure, workload, field work, HSE- matters and the students' completion of the course.

UNIS course responsible staff evaluation:

The course responsible evaluation is completed after the compiled student evaluation report has been made available to the course responsible. The evaluation shall contain an assessment of conditions of significance for the quality of the course and also potential actions to flaws. Key-topics are: The relationship between the course's planned learning outcomes and the learning activities, and how the course assessment corresponded to the learning outcome. Other topics include a reflection around the students' academic prerequisites for the course, their motivation, workload, cooperation with the supporting departments at UNIS, HSE-matters and actions to flaws.

4.2.3 Responsibilities for actions relating to flaws in UNIS courses

The course responsible and the Head of Department are responsible for actions relating to flaws discovered in evaluation of courses. Actions should be listed in the written report from the course responsible at the end of each course. If there are feedback relevant for more than one course, on a more general level or concerning the support functions at UNIS, ECom is responsible for ensuring that such matters are addressed and communicated to the relevant Departments (e.g. technical/administrative departments) – in order for further actions to be taken. Relevant matters and actions should be listed in the yearly quality report.

4.3 Illustration of course evaluation and responsibilities at UNIS

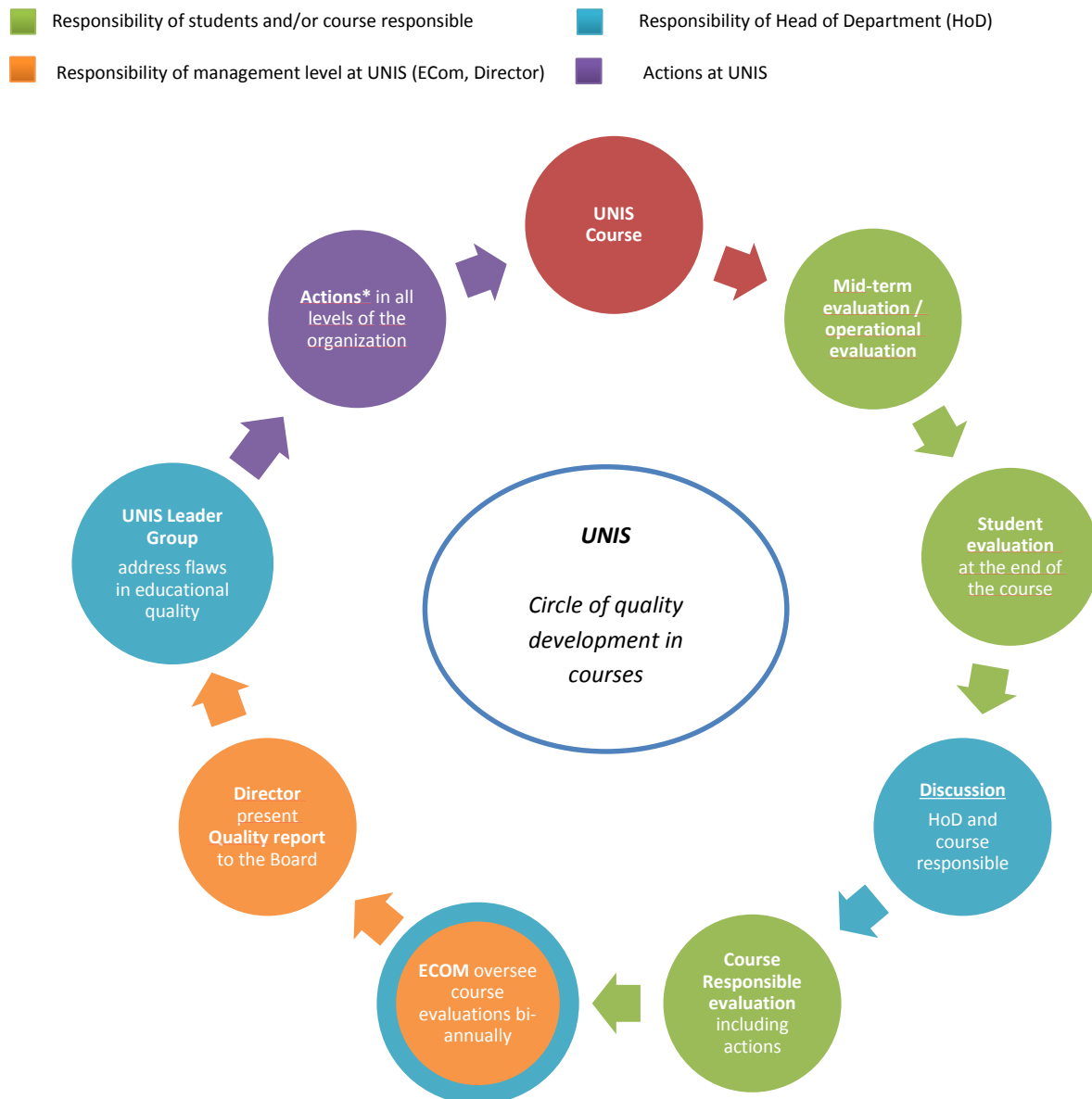


Figure 1: The process of course evaluations and the inclusion of these in the “Report on educational quality” at UNIS.
*Actions could be anything from changes in course description to improved technical/logistical/administrative support.

5 Development of new courses

The process of establishing new courses at UNIS has a time-span of approximately 1 year. Courses are initiated by UNIS, the Norwegian universities or UNIS and the universities together. The Norwegian universities can suggest courses to be implemented at UNIS and comment on quality or other matters relating to existing or new UNIS courses.

1. Courses are developed according to the routines, procedures and resources established at UNIS, the individual department evaluates which courses to put forward for evaluation in ECom.
2. Suggestions for new courses are evaluated by ECom.
3. Courses accepted by ECom and the Leadergroup at UNIS are sent on a hearing to the Norwegian universities for course-specific feedback on the suggested courses.
4. UNIS evaluates the feedback from the Norwegian universities and makes necessary adjustments to each course description.
5. The new courses are recommended by the Dean meeting which is held in either May/June or August.
6. The new courses and the overall UNIS course portfolio are finally approved by the UNIS Board in the autumn meeting. The new courses can at earliest start the following academic year.

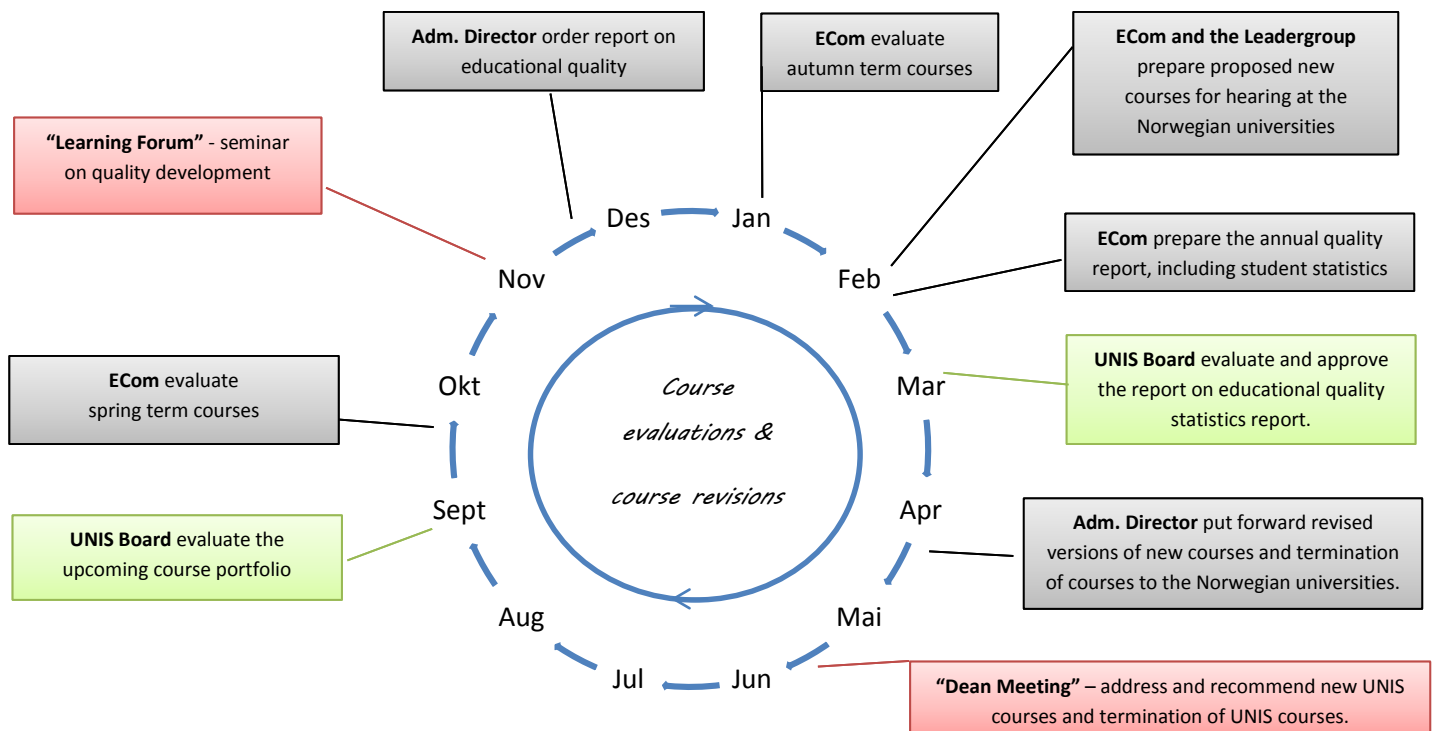


Figure 2. The annual cycle describing the major quality processes at UNIS, course revisions and evaluations are done throughout the whole year.



Figure 3: The process of establishing new courses at UNIS in cooperation with the Norwegian universities.

6 Learning environment surveys

The academic and psycho-social environments as well as good and accessible information about student-related conditions are important topics to survey. The learning environment shall therefore be included in the systematic, written student evaluations of all courses. Specially designed questions should map the students' psycho-social and physical learning environment and detect shortcomings concerning the facilities the students use in an academic context. If required, UNIS may initiate special, tailor-made surveys relating to the student's learning environment. This would be mostly relevant for master- and PhD-students spending a large part of their studies at UNIS.

6.1 Supplementary investigations

There are regular institution-wide investigations of students' satisfaction with the quality of education and the learning environment (e.g. Technical Department, Library etc.). UNIS leader group must assess the need for and, if applicable, open investigations that can provide supplementary information to the assessments of the quality of studies. In between the students themselves also initiate a student survey. This survey is conducted by the Student Council and covers all relevant student matters. UNIS receives a copy of the result and pay special attention to matters relating to the learning environment, HSE or other issues relevant for the overall educational quality at UNIS.

7 "Speak up about the learning environment"

The students shall have the opportunity to provide continuous feedback of their experience of the quality of education and the learning environment. UNIS is currently working on establishing this system and will make sure it is well established and well working at the next revision of the UNIS Quality System for Educational Activities.

"Speak up about the learning environment" (hereafter named "Speak-up") will be an additional UNIS system for students' reporting of physical and psycho-social matters. The system shall be easy to use and to find information about on the UNIS website. The "Speak-up" system contains procedures for reception, processing and reporting of cases. Cases are reported electronically using an online form. The reported case will thereafter be handled through the lines defined in the "Speak-up" system.

Reporting

ECom must be kept informed of the number and type of reports sent regarding the physical and social learning environment. Statistics from the "Speak-up" system should be included in the UNIS report on educational quality.

8 List of links – resources - toolbox

This toolbox will be continuously updated as soon as documents are revised or established.

1. UNIS admission regulations:
<http://www.unis.no/studies/regulations-and-routines/admission-regulations/>
2. UNIS Exam regulations:
<http://www.unis.no/studies/regulations-and-routines/exam-regulations/>
3. Form for initiation/proposal for new courses: TBA²
4. Course alignment guidelines: TBA²
5. Spreadsheet/form for calculating workload and estimate ECTS: TBA²
6. Course evaluation form students: TBA² (*under revision*)
7. Course evaluation form – course responsible: TBA² (*under revision*)
8. Templates, forms and suggestions for mid-term or operational evaluations: TBA²
9. Guest student opportunities: <http://www.unis.no/studies/guest-student-opportunities/>
10. Reports on quality in education at UNIS: TBA²
11. Template for Departmental Report on educational quality per term: TBA²
12. UNIS strategy 2014-2020: http://www.unis.no/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/UNIS_Strategy_2014_2020.pdf

² TBA = to be announced – currently under production