1.2 The implementation of education

- HEI's self-assessment

Many aspects of HEI functions are regulated or organised nationally, for example large aspects of student intake and selection. We have chosen to focus on those aspects under the control of the UO, where significant development has taken place and/or where there are still clear enhancement areas.

Assessment and recognition of prior learning

The importance of harmonised systems for how prior learning is recognised and assessed (RL) and appropriately credited is recognised by the UO and significant steps have been taken in the past few years to improve these processes. Harmonised processes and conditions were discussed by the Education Council (EC) and codified in [Policies for Recognition of Learning](). Accreditation is now done via the Peppi system. Students are responsible for applying for RL. They assess whether they possess prior learning which is compliant with the degree's learning outcomes, and this is taken into account when composing the personal study plan. Recommendations on RL are made by persons in charge of the courses (for replacement), and decisions by Programme Directors (for replacement or inclusion) or the Service Manager of Languages and Communication (for exemptions). The same process applies to doctoral education. The Education Dean may be consulted for complicated cases. RL may be applied for from prior studies at the UO, at different HEIs or from studies completed during an international exchange. Clear technical instructions are provided for students and staff and there is transparency in the system as reports on RL are available for all staff.

While clear process and technical instructions are available for staff and students, there is still a

lack of clarity as to whether students are treated equally by the system. In addition, there has been training for persons in charge of the courses or student counsellors. Furthermore, the growth of small study entities (e.g. micro credentials) in the field of continuous learning should be taken into account when developing the recognition of prior learning.

Feedback to the students

The feedback students receive on their learning is a critical part of the learning process and development. Feedback on learning comes in multiple forms. These vary from oral feedback to individuals or groups of students, to written comments on graded and non-graded assignments and grades from assignments and examinations. Written feedback on assignments is often done through the Moodle system, intimately linking the assignment, grading and feedback. Staff-student feedback days are held in many units. The most common and natural feedback system in doctoral education involves discussions between the supervisor and the doctoral researcher.

While multiple routes exist to give feedback, there is a perception among students that the amount of feedback is variable, depending in part on the nature of the evaluation of the course, and overall, it is insufficient. The degree of feedback sometimes inversely correlates with the class size as it is partly linked to the resources of the teachers. Further development in student feedback may be closely linked to the evaluation methods, which in turn are linked to arising issues such as AI-written assignments.

Student well-being

The UO has a very wide variety of systems available to support students and promote their well-being. These include university-wide systems and policies such as the teacher tutor system, student tutors, student study psychologists, follow-up groups for each doctoral researcher, special study arrangements, guidance for thesis writers (including a designated person to guide students with the working process), traineeship support, developing career services, policies to ensure coherent timetables and equal working loads (so students don't have 80 hour working weeks) and flexibility of learning (e.g. through digitisation), sports activities (UniMove) and a clear equality and non-discrimination plan with a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and inappropriate behaviour for the prevention and processing of misconduct in studies and the UO level Equality and Diversity Committee supported by working groups at the faculty level.

In addition, local support, or well-being systems such as the Chaperone programme (see 1.4) in the FBMM (Faculty of Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine) are used and getting-to-know the staff/research events are held. The university is in the process of finalising a language policy programme. At the start of BSc studies, new students are split into small groups which get a student tutor who guides them through the integration process and a teacher tutor who supports the student through their BSc degree. The Students' Union (incl. doctoral researcher section) also plays a role with its wellbeing-tutoring, events, guidance and other, more grassroot actions. One clear strength is that the University has good spaces for students to study both alone and in small groups, several of which have been developed since the last audit in response to a clear need for

equality of access in both campuses.

While clear policies are in place in nearly all conceivable areas, there are still some outstanding questions. These include how well separate policies integrate, how informed staff and students are of these policies and of policy change, how the policies are implemented in practice, the extent to which practice deviates from policy, and whether all students are treated equally. In a recent student wellbeing survey, around 20% of students felt that they could not find their way to get the support they required from teachers or staff when in need of it. This requires making existing support structures more visible to all students and ensuring equal accessibility. Efforts are underway to also establish a clearer and more systematic approach for handling challenging cases between doctoral researchers and supervisors, with the goal of ensuring equitable support and fair treatment for both parties. There is also a need to further help promote the integration of international and domestic student communities. In addition, there is the post pandemic global challenge that a subset of students has isolated themselves and cannot be reached by normal routes. Finally, the UO still lags behind some other European universities in providing teachers with up-to-date contact information for services available for student support in the wider community outside the HEI.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Comprehensive redesign and implementation of recognition of prior learning.	Ensuring all students receive appropriate feedback on their learning.
Close cooperation between the UO and the student union.	Ensuring equal accessibility to support and well-being services for all students.
Increasing the internationalisation of education and ensuring a large variety of internationalisation opportunities.	Ensuring all staff and students are equally well informed of policies and of policy change and receive appropriate support/training for new systems.
Increasing digitalisation, flexibility of study paths and mobility.	Ensuring equal availability of information regardless of language (language policy programme currently being initiated to address this).

1.2 The implementation of education

- Assessment of the audit team

The University of Oulu has clear selection procedures for students. The university follows national guidelines for student selection procedures. The admission routes and selection criteria are published on the Studyinfo portal, an official website maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

The UO has recently harmonised processes that are presented clearly in Policies for the Recognition of Learning at the University of Oulu, updated in 2022. According to the Policies for the Recognition of Learning, it is the student's responsibility to apply for the recognition of

learning. Students are entitled to receive guidance on the process. Recognition of prior learning is done through the Peppi system and good instructions are provided for students and staff. The audit team suggests the university to consider making the reports on recognition of learning available for students as well. This would further increase transparency in the process.

A concern that came up during the audit visit was the student dropout rate in some degree programmes. The dropout rates vary greatly between degree programmes. The leadership and quality management of the university are aware of the problem and suggestions were made to further investigate the reasons for high dropout rates. The Student Union has also conducted its own survey of dropouts to find out what the university could do better to increase retention. The audit team recommends the university to look at ways to reduce the number of dropouts more efficiently for example through learning analytics.

Student-centred learning is emphasised

The University of Oulu emphasises student-centred learning and active student participation. Students in the student workshop valued flexibility of choosing courses and projects, the diversity of teaching and assessment methods as well as the accessibility of teachers. Teaching methods and approaches such as hybrid teaching, apprenticeship opportunities, group assignments, hands-on projects, field courses, discussions, feedback on learning, flipped learning, guest lectures and lab learning were discussed and appreciated.

Various teaching and learning methods were also discussed in the teacher workshop. Learning diaries are used widely to give students the opportunity to personalise their learning. In the student workshop, students were not fully satisfied with the heavy use of learning diaries or study journals as an assessment method. While many students appreciated the method, as it allowed for deeper understanding and personal approaches, it was also criticised for being overused on the account of more varied assessment. On a positive note, students appreciated the ease of communicating with their teachers, who were seen as accessible.

According to the student workshop, student feedback and feed forward on their learning is an area that can be strengthened. Teachers in the audit workshop discussed how students are increasingly requesting more individual and personal feedback and more varied methods of assessment, a request that is difficult to adhere to due to large student numbers in courses. The audit team recommends that the UO looks at ways to enhance assessment and feed forward practices on learning.

According to the audit visit, teaching staff find the pedagogical trainings useful and instructive. Some students complained about teachers' poor pedagogical and digital pedagogical skills. The audit team recommends that as many teachers as possible attend pedagogical trainings. The university could also consider a certain number of compulsory pedagogical courses for all teachers. Teachers appreciated the co-teaching and pair-teaching practices as well as the culture of sharing at the university. They expressed a wish that these practices would be used increasingly in the future. According to teachers and students, the frequent turnover of teachers

due to short employment contracts affects the development and quality of teaching. The audit team recommends the university to ensure that teachers receive relevant information and support for enhancing their teaching.

Student well-being is seen as highly important

The University of Oulu has implemented various support for students' educational progress and well-being. On the educational side, a tutor teacher system (oma opettaja) is in place to ensure that students receive personal tutoring and support. Tutor teachers are supported by faculty, with centralised training and resources. However, in the workshop, teachers complained about a lack of time to attend to their counselling role. As student services have become more centralised, tutor teachers have an increased role in advising and counselling students. The audit team considers the tutor teacher system a highly important part of student support and recommends the university to further focus on ensuring the quality of the system by allowing tutor teachers to use more working hours for tutoring.

Issues related to students' mental health were identified and discussed during the audit visit. The university emphasises the well-being of students. According to students, the OYY Wellbeing project (well-being tutors) is a good example of an effort to improve the well-being of students by providing various activities organised by students every day. Another example is a course called "The world's happiest student" organised together with the Student Union. Many study psychologists are available to students. However, more resources are needed from the YTHS (Finnish Student Health Service), university and teachers to improve student well-being.

In a recent well-being survey as well as in the student workshop, students complained about not being able to find information about the available support. The university is quite aware of this problem and various new ways are explored to address it, for example a chat service. The audit team confirms the need to find ways to increase students' knowledge of the support services available.

The equality of students is promoted throughout the student's study path, with particular attention being paid to international students. There is an Equality and Diversity Plan, policies to ensure the equality of different learners, and a guideline for the prevention of bullying and harassment. In addition, the Student Union has contact persons for students in case of harassment. There is a university form to report bullying and harassment.

More attention should be paid to the needs of international students and doctoral researchers

In the student workshop, participants mentioned that international students felt left out of Student Union activities. Some international students felt lonely. Students in the workshop hoped that the Student Union would provide more information and activities in English. There were also some complaints about teaching material in courses being in Finnish although the course is taught in English. International students would benefit from a more detailed explanation of the

requirements and assessment criteria, at least in courses at the beginning of their degree programme. Many of the learning methods used in Finnish universities are new to international students. The audit team recommends the university to ensure that international students receive enough support for their studies. The community integration efforts are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Each doctoral researcher is assigned a supervisor and an external steering group. According to the audit visit, doctoral researchers would like to have more content-centric and challenging feedback that could help them to steer and improve the quality of their research and strengthen their competences.

According to the audit visit, doctoral researchers would like to have more information about the practical arrangements at the university, such as the different platforms, visa process, guidelines to Patio, doctoral courses, and other requirements at the beginning of their studies. In addition, doctoral researchers expressed a need for faculty-specific meetings. Guidance for doctoral researchers is mainly based on peer support and help from supervisors. Offering general guidelines and a clear learning-path could help especially international doctoral researchers adapt to the new working and living environment. The audit team recommends the university to consider holding orientation events for new doctoral researchers where the structure of the university, its main systems and platforms, HR issues, support services, course offerings and other topical issues would be discussed at the beginning of each semester.