KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OULU

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1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

- Högskolans självvärdering

The evaluation of education is a continuous function of people responsible for education at the faculty and university level. The Education Regulations of the UO state the roles, responsibilities and actions necessary to improve the quality of education, and to identify the possible challenges and to achieve results. Following the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and using the Annual wheel of education planning tool, the university periodically conducts internal evaluations of education, evaluates the degree programmes and monitors the progress of the students. Furthermore, in 2022 the UO launched Noste, a strategic programme for educational development. The Noste programme aims to ensure and enhance the competitiveness of education so that the UO will continue to be known as a high-quality HEI that offers research-based and attractive education with an excellent study experience.

The university collects feedback systematically based on the Annual Wheel of Education planning tool

The university collects student feedback from different groups of students at different phases of their study paths as well as after graduation. The purpose of collecting the feedback is to enhance the student experience, analyse and evaluate the quality of education, to reflect on the learning and enable cooperation with students. There is also an instant feedback channel to make quick changes according to the feedback received. Furthermore, feedback from continuous learners is collected systematically and used for the development of continuous learning.

Many of the feedback surveys are automatised and incorporated into existing information systems thus giving students equal opportunities to give feedback. Course feedback is also

incorporated in the university's internal funding model. The university has taken measures to encourage the collection of student feedback. Student feedback surveys utilised by the UO include:

- Course feedback (university level)
- Staff-student feedback days (programme level)
- The International Student Barometer (European level)
- Finnish Bachelor's Graduate Survey (national level)
- Career monitoring (national level)
- Surveys by the students' union (university level)

In addition to surveys, students play a critical role on university education committees. There are student representatives in the university's governance ranging from the Board of Directors to Degree Programme Committees, also at the doctoral level. They provide a valuable contribution to development and decision-making by providing student perspective.

It is highly important to have students represented in these committees, as the response rates are often low on feedback questionnaires collected from students, despite teachers having been encouraged to give students counter-feedback. It is possible that the range of feedback collected by different actors (e.g. The UO, students' union, national level surveys) at different times and in various forms may affect the overall eagerness to response. Some teachers collect feedback during the course using various digital pedagogical tools, which reduces students' motivation to give feedback again with the official course feedback system.

Programme evaluation is essential for all the programmes

The main goal for establishing and evaluating a degree programme is to improve the quality of the education offering of the UO. The set instructions must be followed in setting up new degree programmes. An evaluation team evaluates the proposal and gives a statement on whether the new degree or master's programme is ready to be launched.

Programmes evaluate themselves systematically on a yearly basis. Each programme is expected to evaluate the implementation of education and develop it further by involving all stakeholders. In addition, programmes conduct self-assessment reports, whose purpose is to provide information on the quality of education. Latest self-evaluation reports can be seen in Figure 6.

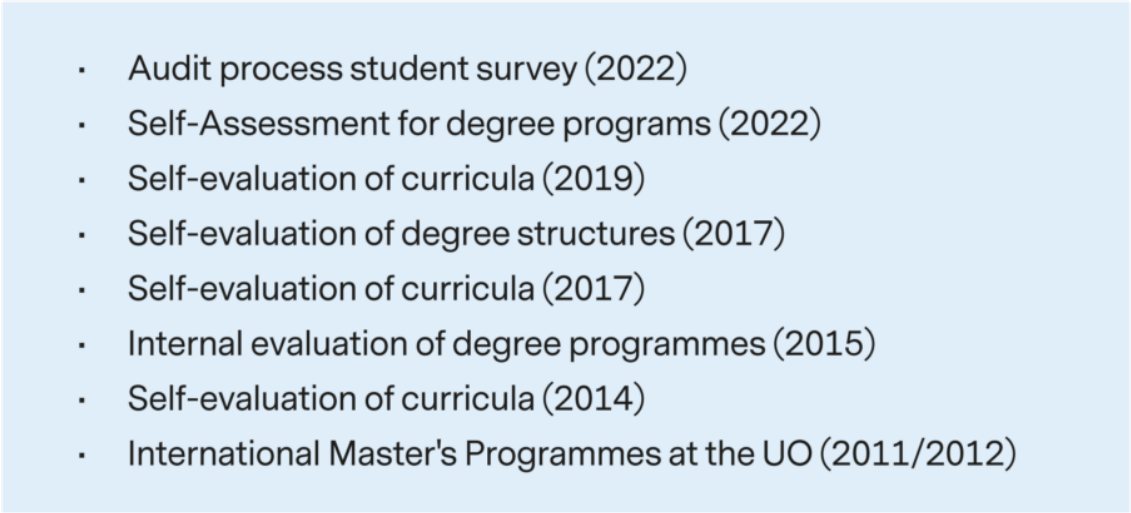

Figure 6. Latest self-evaluations of the UO.

It is worth noting that separate self-assessment processes have not yet been implemented within doctoral degree programmes. This can be attributed to the nature of doctoral education as well as the centralised structure of the university-wide graduate school, which facilitates transparent curriculum development. However, according to the Internal Education Evaluation Plan doctoral degree programmes are planned to be evaluated in 2026.

The evaluation of learning outcomes creates a basis for self-evaluation. It is highly important for degree programmes to recognise if the learning outcomes are in line with the profile and objectives, and if they are following the current development in the field. The characteristics of every programme need to be clear and goal oriented.

It is notable, that regarding evaluation it is highly important to set targets which allow programmes to evaluate if they have taken the right actions to reach the targets. In addition to the rather strong self-evaluation culture the UO already has, it could take the next step further and compare its programme-level activities and competencies to other players both internally and externally. While benchmarking activities are done they could be a more systematic and visible process. Such comparisons would help to learn from others and set goals even further and in that way improve education.

Utilisation of external stakeholders’ views on education quality

The UO actively promotes the development and deployment of research-driven education to different actors in society. Hence it is only natural that external stakeholders are represented on all the Faculty Boards, as well as in the University Board of Directors. External stakeholders are also invited to give their input to curriculum development and quality evaluation. All the faculties and units have also various other ways of maintaining contact with external stakeholders, companies, and employer representatives also in the context of education. For example, they

conduct surveys and organise stakeholder events to discuss the development needs of education with labour market and alumni community representatives. In addition, University of Oulu Career Centre promotes employability skills to build students' future careers and has strong collaboration with companies to support networking. Trade unions do a lot of collaboration with the university and for the education quality as well.

The perceptions of external stakeholders can differ compared to students and teachers and it would be interesting to analyse what causes the differences. JOY, the university of continuous learning and open university, builds on the idea of stakeholder involvement in developing the education offer, and it remains critical that stakeholders contribute with their experiences and expectations. Stakeholder engagement will certainly become even more important in the area of quality assurance and the UO should think even more thoroughly about the role of all stakeholders in shaping the education quality assurance processes.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Systematic feedback and processes available to evaluate and develop programmes.	Student feedback rate and feed forward are low.
Utilisation of both internal (students, staff) and external feedback from stakeholders (employers, labour unions etc.)	Interrelatedness and comparison of programmes with other programmes within and outside the university.
External stakeholders have increased their share of contribution to education development.	External stakeholders' role in education quality assurance process.

1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The university collects extensive feedback for enhancement

The University of Oulu collects extensive feedback on different levels and through different methods to evaluate and enhance programmes. At the course level, student feedback is collected through Peppi. The student response rate tends to be low. Continuous feedback is collected during each course. Some student societies and faculties organise feedback days or other events to discuss the received feedback. Both staff members and students participate in these events. Faculties also organise other events and Dean's Coffees to discuss the received feedback. The International Student Barometer and the Finnish Bachelor's Graduate Survey also provide the university feedback data. In addition, the Student Union carries out surveys on students' needs. Student representatives participate in various committees to ensure that their voices are heard. There is close cooperation between the Student Union and the university management.

Feedback data is formally analysed at different levels and action is taken to find ways to utilise the feedback. Students reported that they were encouraged to give feedback and that there were various mechanisms to provide feedback in their courses. Students expressed that they would

like to give more feedback on degree programmes, not just on individual courses.

Students in the audit visit complained of not seeing the impact of their feedback and they were not sure how teachers utilise the feedback given. Feedback on feedback to students (i.e., information about changes carried out because of student feedback) could be improved. Although feedback is acted upon, the consequences are not always sufficiently discussed with the students. Students feel that the feedback culture at the UO had improved but needed yet to find ways to measure the improvement. Ideas to enhance feedback on feedback were raised by the students, for example, changes made by teachers to their courses or teaching based on student feedback could be broadcasted on public screens.

Degree programmes are evaluated using various methods

As stated in the self-assessment report, the university regularly monitors and evaluates degree programmes offered. Clear instructions need to be followed when new degree programmes are established and all programmes carry out an annual self-evaluation process, except at the doctoral level. The basis for the self-evaluation of programmes are the defined intended learning outcomes.

Various methods and metrics are used to gather data, such as the number of graduates and employment. Feedback from the labour market and stakeholders is sought through various formal channels. Stakeholders have representatives on the faculty councils and are consulted within different programmes. Stakeholder meetings are conducted, and data is gathered from industry associations. External stakeholder collaboration in the planning of education is a well-spread procedure in the faculties. During the audit visit, external stakeholders indicated that graduates have good professional competences.

The UO has developed and utilises a strong system of collecting data that is used extensively by Deans and Deans for Education to discuss, analyse, and valuate the quality of degree programmes. The Programme Directors hold a central role in ensuring the quality of degree programmes and gathering developmental ideas from different sources. The audit team recommends that the UO addresses the role of Programme Directors in the university’s evaluation loop.

The audit team confirms the following enhancement idea: that the university should check the existing interrelatedness of study programmes inside and outside the university. The results could lead to, among other things, unique and innovative study programmes and to new research ideas. JOY, the university of continuous learning, and the open university might function as a basis for such a project.

The university’s support services develop their activities from the perspective of continuous improvement. Feedback is collected extensively on a regular basis and discussed with appropriate bodies for improvement. The support services provide support directly to students and support the teacher tutors, who are the prime support providers for students. The UO offers a

wide variety of support for students, but there is room for improvement in ensuring that information on the support available reaches students in general and especially vulnerable student groups. In the student workshop, complaints were raised that feedback provided to educational designers was not acted upon. The audit team recommends the university to ensure that every student knows who to contact when they have a question or want to provide feedback.