1.2 The implementation of education

- HEI's self-assessment

Versatile student recruitment

The UH aims to recruit the most talented and committed students from Finland and abroad. The admissions procedure appraises the applicants' motivation, commitment and/or aptitude for studies and focuses on the assessment of study skills and potential.

Faculties grant the right to complete a degree in the degree programmes for which they are responsible. As stipulated by the Universities Act, the right to pursue a degree is, as a rule, granted at the same time for a bachelor's and a master's degree. The faculty council observes the general guidelines confirmed by the rector in deciding the criteria for the admission of new students to the degree programmes for which the faculty is responsible. The admissions criteria are published in the national Studyinfo online service, which also serves as the application and admissions system.

The faculty council submits a proposal on student intake to the University Board. It also decides on the number of student places in the degree programmes (and their relevant options for application) based on the Board's decision.

Generally, bachelor's programmes have several application routes. The intention is to decide on the criteria for certificate-based admission, which was deployed in a larger scale in 2020, so that students who are beginning their three-year general upper secondary–level studies are aware of them. Students are also admitted on the basis of entrance examinations and Open University studies and, in the case of applicants from other universities, through a transfer application

procedure. An admission course open to all (MOOC) was offered for the first time in 2012.

In addition, the UH has developed open courses targeted especially at general upper secondary school students. These courses provide an idea of university studies and their content and requirements to make it easier for prospective students to select their field.

Students continue to master's programmes either directly from the UH's bachelor's programmes or are admitted through an admissions procedure. Doctoral programmes always arrange a separate admissions procedure; applications are accepted from one to five times a year, depending on the programme.

The Academic Affairs Council monitors student admissions at the university level and supports the faculties and degree programmes in the enhancement of the student admissions system. The steering group for doctoral education monitors admissions for doctoral education.

Flexible study paths, mobility and professional relevance of degrees

Education at the UH is organised in line with university-wide principles for teaching and learning. These fundamental principles are described from the student perspective on the [Instructions for Students](#) website, while the [Instructions for Teaching](#) website presents them from the perspective of a teacher.

Most of the bachelor's programmes offered are multidisciplinary, which means that when beginning their studies, students need not commit themselves to a single discipline, but may select their field more specifically as their studies progress. Having completed their bachelor's degree, in many fields students will be able to select between several master's programmes to continue to probe deeper into their selected field. After the bachelor's programme, students may also apply to a master's programme in another field at the UH, or to a master's programme in another university in Finland or abroad.

Students are able to flexibly complete studies in other Finnish and international universities. The recent education reform at the UH has boosted the multidisciplinary nature of degree programmes and increased students' opportunities for national and international mobility. To this end, the programme-specific curricula may include a special mobility window.

Eight bachelor's programmes offer students the opportunity to complete a bilingual degree. In these programmes students may complete studies in both Finnish and Swedish and thus enhance their language proficiency. A bilingual degree opens up employment opportunities requiring proficiency in both Finnish and/or Swedish.

The degree programmes include elements supporting employability, such as traineeships, courses supporting professional growth and working life projects. The UH must continue to increase the range of these studies.

Students can identify their learning achievements

The UH has systematic procedures for the recognition and validation of prior learning acquired either in formal education or in non-formal and informal education. The procedures for the recognition of prior learning, which apply to all degree programmes and students, are described on the [Instructions for Students](#) and [Instructions for Teaching](#) websites. The degree programme-specific curricula describe the most common studies and other forms of learning that can substitute for courses and modules in the programme.

The students are responsible for identifying their prior learning and applying for its recognition. In the recognition process, the relevant teacher compares the learning acquired by the student to the learning outcomes described in the programme curriculum.

Students may have credits completed during an international exchange recognised by University Services so that they constitute an independent module of international studies.

The process of credit recognition is being developed further as part of the new student information system.

Students give feedback and receive feedback on their learning

The UH makes use of the shared HowULearn feedback survey to enhance the quality of learning among students. Students respond to the survey three times during their bachelor's studies and once during their master's studies. The survey is based on research in university pedagogy.

After taking the survey, students receive personal feedback containing information on how they study and how other students at the same stage in their degree programme responded to various sections of the survey. The feedback also includes research-based tips that support learning, formulated by senior lecturers in university pedagogy and counselling psychologists. This feedback on feedback supports student wellbeing and progress at the different stages of studies.

The survey yields information on students' experiences of the learning environment, their learning processes and workloads.

Academic supervision, guidance and support enable a smooth study path

The UH has common principles for the provision of academic supervision and guidance and for the monitoring of student progress. The adequacy of supportive supervision and guidance is monitored and developed with the help of student feedback.

Teaching and research staff provide academic supervision and research-related supervision that require knowledge of the content of scientific fields and studies.

At least once a year, degree programme steering groups monitor student progress. Digital tools offer degree programmes improved opportunities to identify problems related to student

progress and enable them to offer support, for example, through the channels of student supervision. The directors of bachelor's and master's programmes have the digital tool Oodikone at their disposal for real-time monitoring, while the directors of doctoral programmes use the Thessa supervision support tool. The progress of doctoral students in their studies and theses is supported not only by their supervisors, but also by thesis committees.

University Services and [Helsinki University Library](#) are both responsible for disseminating information and providing advice and special guidance in their specialist fields as well as for offering support and materials to the teaching and research staff.

Practices supporting the protection of students' rights are described on the [Instructions for Students](#) website. These practices ensure the equal treatment of students at the different stages of their studies. The purpose of the student wellbeing group is to monitor students' wellbeing and learning ability.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Increasing number of applicants; motivated and committed students	Further development of the different application routes and renewal of the Open University route
Shared principles for the completion of degrees and for the recognition and validation of prior learning	Design and establishment of practices for continuous learning
Research-based HowULearn feedback system as part of studies	Introduction of HowULearn in doctoral education
Oodikone used by bachelor's and master's programme directors and Thessa by supervisors as a tool in monitoring doctoral student progress	Establishment of shared guidelines for supervision and guidance at the UH

1.2 The implementation of education

- Assessment of the audit team

Clear and consistent student selection processes in place

The University of Helsinki has well-formulated, transparent processes in place for student selection, which follow meaningfully the national principles for providing different pathways to university studies. The responsibilities are clearly assigned within the organisation. The university has ambitious qualitative targets in student recruitment, and it steadily attracts a good number of applicants. The admissions process addresses a wide spectrum of perspectives from applicants' motivation, commitment and aptitude for studies. The information for applicants is

well presented on the university's website and the national Studyinfo online service, which also serves as the application and admissions system.

The university has systematic procedures for the recognition and validation of prior learning (RPL) acquired either in formal education or in non-formal and informal education and practice. The RPL procedures apply to all degree programmes and students. As for many other study-related matters, there are good general instructions available for students and teachers on the Instructions for students and Introduction for teachers sites and Flamma (for staff). For advancing flexibility and fluency of studies, in addition to procedures, it would be worthwhile for the university to monitor how the recognition works in practice. For example, how well the students and staff are aware of these opportunities specifically in relation to learning objectives of different degree programmes.

There is variation in student experiences in relation to teaching and support

The examples of good experiences provided by students and teachers, gave evidence of teaching and learning activities with good variation in methods of teaching and learning, interactive ways of working with peers and the teacher, logically structured courses where the content, activities, learning tasks and assessment were aligned with the learning objectives. Students mentioned high-quality teaching, impactful assignments and group work, inspirational and committed teachers, and courses that had really changed their thinking. Continuing education students especially appreciated the flexible studies that they were easily linked to in their work. There was evidence of target-oriented teaching and students being active in their own learning processes.

Good examples were also given on interaction between students and teachers at course level – demonstrating flexibility and sensitivity to varying circumstances that the students may face during their studies. Students also point out that this kind of interaction and involvement supports well-being and a sense of belonging. Good support had also been available from teachers during the pandemic, independently of studies and courses. The overall impression is that the degree programmes are well managed, and that there are many dedicated and pedagogically-oriented teachers who engage with their students and support their learning. Overall, there is a positive spirit and atmosphere at the university encouraging pedagogical experimentation, developing teaching skills, and having a focus on students learning.

On the other hand, several students' experiences were also influenced negatively, where teaching did not fully live up to the university's set principles. These may be individual cases, pockets or perhaps in some cases wider challenges in some units. Although the overall experience may be good, these individual cases have an impact on student experiences at the university. The challenges had to do with the teachers' overall commitment to teaching, overlaps and repetition in course designs, unidimensional teaching in the form of mass lectures, or a lack of support or engagement with the students. In doctoral education, the experiences were mostly linked to supervision.

The dividing factor between experiences seemed to relate to the size of the student group and how the programme was delivered and support made available. Students talked about the importance of feeling welcome and feeling a connection with the university community. The variation in experiences also related to feedback and guidance. In smaller group settings students were mostly pleased with the guidance and had received personal feedback. However, sometimes a personal contact with teachers was missing, and no feedback was available. This is a challenging issue considering the different volumes of students in different programmes, disciplines and faculties. But because it is creating some inequality in student experiences, this should be addressed by the university together with the linked question of resources that was frequently mentioned during the audit visit. The issue also relates to the question of teaching as a private act, and accountability mechanisms in place to assure a certain quality of teaching. One such mechanism in place is the tenure track system, in which teaching, development of teaching and learning, and feedback are considered. However, this mechanism does not include all teaching staff. The university could also consider further structures and incentives to increase the value of engaging in teaching and educational development.

The doctoral students' learning environment is strongly impacted by their supervisor, and it is of importance that supervisors have the tools to provide a good learning environment for doctoral students. The audit team suggests that the university creates a framework for supervision and supervisory competence, together with an ongoing dialogue regarding the quality of doctoral education. The university could also consider compulsory training for doctoral supervisors, which would be in line with many other Scandinavian universities.

Teachers and external stakeholders both identify that there are good examples of interaction between university and working life – different stakeholders in society, industries and companies. There are also obvious differences in the university's disciplines, in which the professionally oriented have more built-in and natural links to working life. In the more theoretical degrees, compulsory practice periods play an important role in supporting the students' integration into professional life. At the same time, external stakeholders in particular point out that there is also potential for more systematic engagement between the university and different stakeholders in society. Some of the stakeholders suggest that the gap between academic studies and real life should be further diminished. More systematic connections, whether in the form of guest lectures, real life cases or excursions, could be beneficial and would advance both the quality of learning and the impact of the whole university.

Support and guidance for international and doctoral students needs attention

The university has a data-driven approach to student well-being, and there is also flexibility exercised by individual teachers that indicates sensitivity to well-being issues. The audit team commends the university for investing in communicating to the university community in three languages. Introduction to Studies, which is the key information site for all students, is an indication of this commitment. The university has made clear efforts to reach students and

doctoral students with study-related information and their services. There are also service points that provide general study services at different campus and faculty-specific service points. However, several groups of students find the university's support system somewhat difficult to navigate. This relates both to the digital and physical support systems available. Some students suggested a complete map of university services and IT services with brief descriptions available from the Introduction to Studies front page. A one-stop student services helpdesk was also among the students' suggestions.

One of the strengths of the university's educational provision is the options available for students in their study choices. Students can quite freely benefit from the offering of different faculties. There are also defined practices for study transfers. The other side of the freedom and flexibility is that it requires more guidance for students in relation to their study choices.

The university has good guidelines for the provision of academic supervision and guidance and for the monitoring of student progress that covers all degree levels. The guidelines provide, among other things, a clear framework of responsibilities and general content in terms of guidance. According to the principles, each student and doctoral student should have an assigned coordinating teacher responsible for guidance. The university is encouraged to follow up on the implementation of the guidelines in practice, because academic guidance is not reaching all students and doctoral students in the way it is described.

Doctoral students appear to need more information about the doctoral education system and core processes (e.g., doctoral education structures, criteria for article-based dissertations, criteria for the assessment of dissertations and for defending the thesis), with some differences in processes and procedures experienced across the university.

Based on the discussion in the audit, international students feel less included, and are sometimes left to caring peers or teachers. These students have some difficulties in engaging with the community and finding practical support for their studies. International students are treated at the university as any other students. This is a good principle overall, but the approach does not sufficiently acknowledge the fact that international students have special needs of support. The audit team recommends that the university develops the support provided for international students and engages international students in this work so that the services meet their needs (see also Chapter 4).