KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

- HEI's self-assessment

Annual follow-up and reviews as a tool in the quality management of degree programmes

The UH applies systematic procedures in monitoring and improving the quality of operations in its degree programmes.

Doctoral programmes were launched in their current form in 2014 and bachelor’s and master’s programmes in 2017. Since 2019, the activities of degree programmes have been followed and assessed in annual follow-up connected to university- and faculty-level operations planning. In the annual follow-up, degree programme steering groups discuss the current status of the programmes to form a picture of the situation and provide a general assessment of the different areas of operation. The current status, general assessment, successful activities and measures to be taken are documented on an electronic form (status report).

In addition to annual follow-up, the UH will begin conducting a review of degree programmes at three-year intervals in 2022. Reports on the current status and self-assessments will serve as core material for these reviews. Based on the reviews, the faculties may assess development needs in degree programmes as well as the need to establish, merge or discontinue degree programmes.

The UH must describe more clearly the process of annual follow-up and ensure that faculties take the results of annual follow-up into account. Communication about changes made on the basis of the results must be enhanced so that it is systematic and open.

The Academic Affairs Council, the Research Council and the steering group for doctoral education are responsible for developing quality management practices for degree programmes on the university level and for drawing conclusions from annual follow- and reviews.

Support services and the library enhance the quality of education

The UH provides systematically organised administrative, pedagogical and educational technology and library services.

University Services is responsible for the administrative support provided to degree programmes, and offers central services and training in educational technology. The senior lecturers in university pedagogy at the Centre for University Teaching and Learning support the degree programme steering groups in implementing pedagogical solutions related to curricula and in exploiting student feedback, especially the feedback obtained from the HowULearn survey.

University Services supports the selection process of degree programme directors and organises the orientation for new directors in collaboration with the Centre for University Teaching and Learning. The forum for bachelor's and master's programmes directors convenes regularly to discuss topical issues and offer peer support in management. The directors of doctoral programmes collaborate within the framework of the doctoral school steering groups and other meetings.

The management and development of support services for education is the responsibility of the director of development at Teaching and Learning Services and the director of development at Research Services.

The heads of academic affairs supervise educational planning and student advice services in the faculties. The head of services for doctoral education manages the coordination of services for doctoral education.

Enhancement of the status of and support services for degree programmes

Between 2015 and 2017, the UH carried out an education reform almost simultaneously with the separate processes of establishing discipline-specific units in the faculties and reorganising support services. The organisation of support services was also motivated by financial grounds as the resources of Finnish universities were cut on a national level.

Due to the separate processes, the status of the degree programmes and the distribution of the workload of the teaching and research staff between the degree programmes were not defined clearly enough. Since the reforms, the UH has sought ways of connecting the degree programmes with the UH's internal processes of operations planning, financial planning and human resources planning. In particular, the administrative structures and services of degree programmes jointly coordinated by multidisciplinary faculties must be reconsidered to clarify their position.

Degree programmes have a need for more numerous and more varying support services than what is currently available to them. The UH is solving the issue of the adequacy of services on a case-by-case basis.

Training in university pedagogy for the teaching and research staff

The UH offers the teaching and research staff training to promote their pedagogical skills and to enhance the quality of teaching.

The Centre for University Teaching and Learning trains the teaching staff to be experts in university-level teaching, learning and supervision. The centre conducts and supports research in its field and is engaged in research cooperation with other universities. The degree programmes encourage their staff to participate in pedagogical training, even if finding the required time for it might be challenging. The UH has recognised the need for increased training for the supervisors of doctoral students.

Stakeholder participation in the development of education

Internal stakeholder groups, including students, teaching and research staff, and the administrative staff, participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education as members of degree programme steering groups, other decision-making bodies as well as working groups. The UH interacts with the Student Union on a regular basis. Among other things, the Student Union appoints student members to different university forums and working groups.

The faculties have various ways of maintaining contact with external stakeholders and employer representatives. Some faculties engage in close collaboration with their stakeholders, such as the Faculty of Medicine with the Helsinki University Hospital.

Some faculties employ fixed-term professors of practice, who contribute to teaching, establish contacts with employers and support students' career skills. The UH has established a working group to further develop the duties and activities of professors of practice.

To boost stakeholder collaboration, some faculties have established advisory boards which include representatives of employers and alumni.

Faculties have also conducted surveys and organised stakeholder events to discuss the development needs of education with labour market and alumni community representatives.

Making use of student feedback

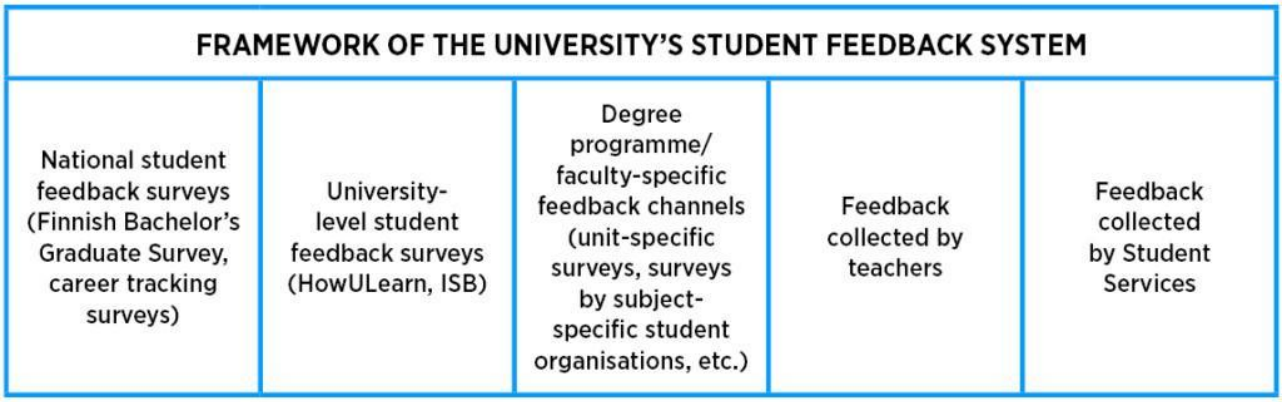


Figure 5. Framework of the UH's student feedback system

The UH collects student feedback in a multifaceted manner and systematically makes use of the information obtained through, for example, the Finnish Bachelor's Graduate Survey and career tracking surveys for holders of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. The HowULearn surveys provide degree programmes with feedback on teaching as well as information on the development of the students' learning skills and their workloads. The survey results help degree programmes to develop high-quality teaching and learning and support curriculum design. Every two years, the UH participates in the International Student Barometer.

The degree programmes use the annual status report form to assess the efficiency of their feedback processes. As the degree programmes have raised in the follow-ups the need for a university-wide course feedback tool, the UH is currently developing two different course feedback systems. The Centre for University Teaching and Learning is developing an interactive research-based tool for development measures taken during courses known as HowUStudy. In addition, the UH will deploy in the autumn of 2021 a more traditional system for collecting end-of-course feedback.

The Academic Affairs Council monitors the functionality of the framework of the student feedback system and issues guidelines for its further development. The UH has recognised the need for further clarification of the framework of the student feedback system.

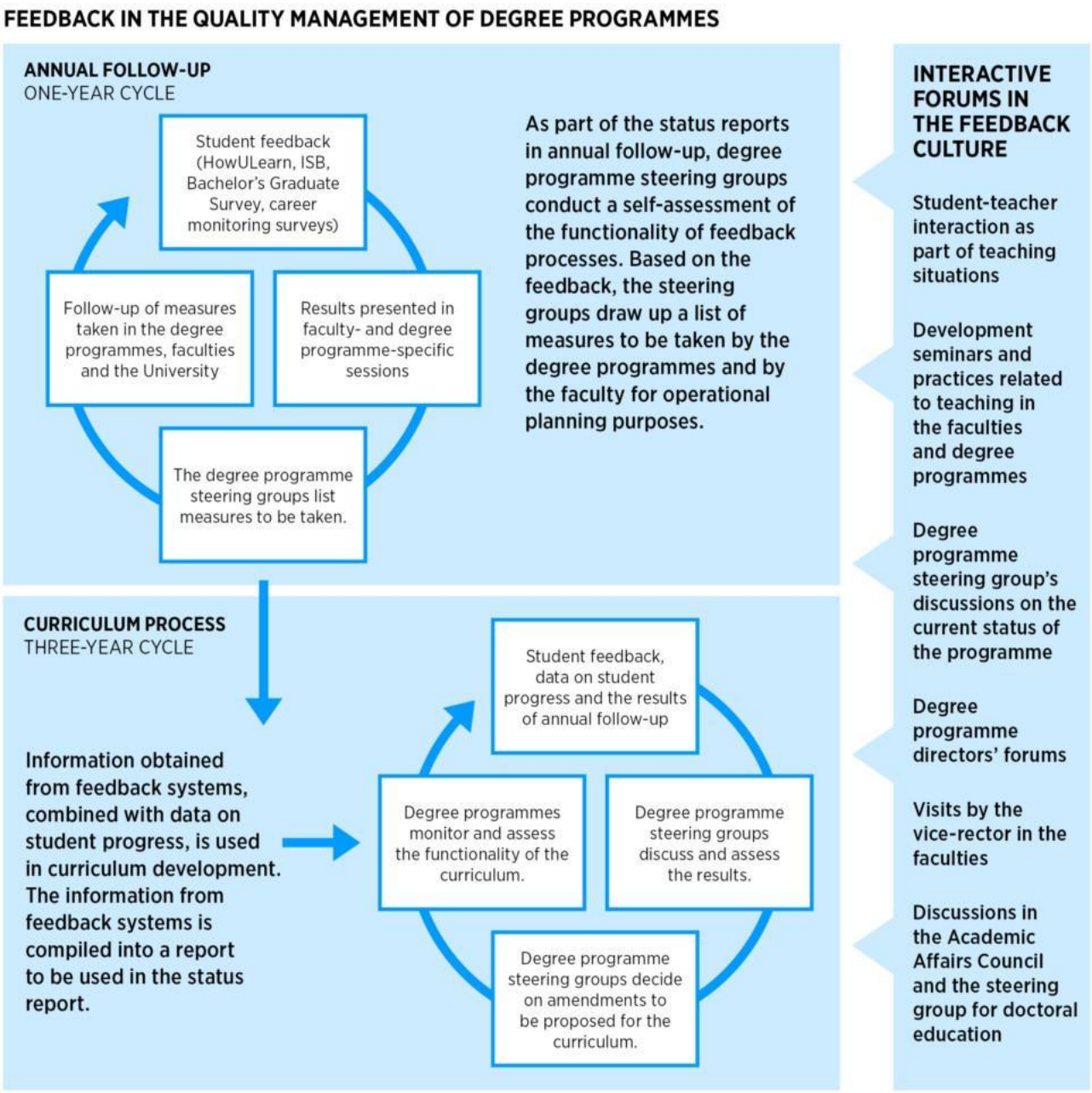


Figure 6. Use of feedback data in the development of teaching

Strengths

Systematic annual follow-up of degree programmes

The degree programme directors' forum that regularly convenes to support management and leadership

Enhancement areas

Clarification of the position of degree programmes in the organisation

Training for the supervisors of doctoral students

The activities of the Centre for University Teaching and Learning and its senior lecturers in university pedagogy

The role of the Academic Affairs Council in the development of education

Processes and practices relating to collaboration with external stakeholders

Clarification of the framework of feedback systems; communication about the changes made on the basis of feedback

1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

- Assessment of the audit team

The university collects student feedback data systematically to enhance the quality of education

For its degree programmes at bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree levels, there are digital tools available for monitoring students' progress and responsibilities have been assigned to directors of programmes and steering groups. The University of Helsinki collects data from the national, university, degree programme, teacher and student services level. The degree programme, faculty-specific or course surveys are not compulsory, but the teachers are encouraged to collect feedback. The HowULearn questionnaire provides feedback on the teaching and development of students' learning skills and workloads. The data are analysed at degree programme and faculty levels and cover the demographics of the students, their progress, and their experiences of studying at university.

The usefulness and importance of the different systems for collecting feedback is acknowledged by staff and contributes to a quality culture built on evidence from data. Although several channels for student feedback are used and have an established role in the quality management of teaching and learning, some aspects can still be improved. Responsibilities for collecting course feedback – whether it is the responsibility of the teachers, the degree programme or the faculty or even the student associations – are sometimes unclear. Possibly the new systems, HowUStudy and Norppa, will clarify this. Many of the student associations, which are numerous at the university, also have their own feedback surveys, and provide that feedback in programme steering groups. The university's student feedback systems such as HowULearn create valuable data on student learning, but as mentioned by some students they also want to give feedback concerning their programmes and structures.

As described in SAR, as part of the annual follow-up cycle, national- and university-level feedback results are presented in faculty- and degree programme-specific sessions. Degree programme steering groups conduct a self-assessment in which the feedback is analysed, and programme-level and faculty-level measures identified. The new Norppa course feedback system was recently launched, but information on the feedback process from a PDCA cycle perspective is not yet

available. The audit team suggests that the course-level feedback is also integrated into the steering group self-assessment process. Feedback systems for doctoral students focusing on programme- or doctoral school-level feedback also need attention.

The audit team recommends a continuous dialogue with students regarding their possibilities to influence the degree programme they are engaging in. In addition, the university should initiate closer collaboration and discussion with the student associations regarding their role in relation the university's role in collecting student feedback. If feedback is collected too many times, it may result in low response rates in surveys. On the other hand, not all students understand why they should fill out the questionnaires as they are not clear about what it might lead to or how it will benefit them. This also leads to low response rates and reduced trust in the outcomes of questionnaires being valid.

Several students, including international and doctoral students, met by the audit team were uncertain whether their feedback had an impact, and if their views were considered when they were heard. When improvements and developments are made, it is thus important to make them visible, so that students can see that their feedback matters. Although student feedback may have a big impact, that information is not necessarily reaching students. A good thing would be to involve student associations in the analysis of the feedback and in discussions about what could be improved and how. There are also some good practices of mid-course evaluations, a practice that the audit team recommends could be employed on a wider range of courses.

The university monitors and evaluates educational degree programmes in a systematic way

The university gives strong evidence of long-standing, university-level development of degree programmes and teaching, which has transformation in university pedagogy at the core. A driving force has been the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (HYPE) and its staff. The audit team considers the implementation and spreading of HowULearn as a tool for evaluation and enhancement of education as a great example of the impactful work at the university, and even nationally.

The university employs annual follow-ups and reviews as a tool in the quality management of degree programmes that are connected to university- and faculty-level operations planning. The steering groups discuss the status of programmes and conduct the annual programme reports. This system, based on the sample of reports reviewed and audit discussions, seems to work well and is a good practice for systematically integrating the analysis into the annual operations management process.

As mentioned, the university has undertaken a massive reform of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programmes. The reform was initiated based on feedback received and different evaluations. A review of the degree programmes and the reform will be conducted next year, and in the future at three-year intervals. This is well in line with the European guidelines (ESG) requiring periodic review of degree programmes.

The link with the changing needs of society and working life is in general taken into consideration in the programmes. The ways and the extent to which programmes take the perspective of external stakeholders into account and are geared towards relevance to working life differ due to the various types of programmes offered at the university. There is still room for the university to carry out more versatile monitoring of how its education provision impacts and links to society through following up on employment rates more systematically, for instance. Continuing education needs are considered effectively in the university's educational provision and are also well linked to the university-level strategic development processes.

Systematic developments of support services are based on the needs of students and staff

The support services as part of University Services are part of the annual operations planning process with linked assessment. In addition, University Services have their own surveys and there is evidence of data use for the improvement of support services for both staff and students.

There is a high level of understanding for students with special needs, a group of students that seems to be expanding. A specific task group has worked on special needs and developed the concept of 'individual needs' to be more flexible and support students across campuses.

The Centre for University Teaching and Learning (HYPE) plays an important role in researching higher education and implementing pedagogical solutions, and in linking teaching practice to higher education research. The responsibilities of HYPE as well as university services have clear responsibilities and are contributing to a systematic approach to the development of teaching and learning throughout the university (see also Section 3.2). There are ample opportunities for collaboration and sharing informally through various networks such as the forums for programme directors. The educational leadership course developed by HYPE together with the HR department also afford good opportunities for the development of leadership and educational leadership among meso level leaders.