3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- HEI's self-assessment

Quality system supporting the achievement and enhancement of key functions

UVA has a comprehensive quality system covering all core activities: research, research-based education, and sustainable societal impact. The system is an integral part of its management system, which determines the key institutional goals. The annual operating and financial plan process (see 3.1. for details) is the main tool in setting both quantitative and qualitative targets and monitoring their progress. Each member of the UVA community and its bodies are responsible for carrying out the actions needed to reach the targets as they pertain to their specific areas of responsibility (see the [Quality Management](#) site of the university).

UVA carries out systematic risk assessment as part of its annual strategic planning, including maintaining a risk register that is used as part of the annual strategy and budgeting review process (TTS). Financial risk assessment is one core part of the overall risk management process. Financial projections are systematically created that consider different scenarios in state and external funding to assess the potential impact on university operations. As part of the TTS process, the rectors and management group perform an institutional-level (UVA) risk assessment, and the deans perform a school-level risk assessment. This culminates in risks being classified into low/medium/high likelihood of occurring, impact if risk occurred, and severity based on impact and likelihood within a colour-coded risk register. Mitigating actions and responsible

parties are identified for each risk. Risk registers are created around the core activities of: Education, Research, Internationalisation, and Impact and Engagement.

The quality system is regularly evaluated both internally and externally through accreditations, research evaluation exercises and other assessments at multiple levels (institutional, school, programme, research group, services). These processes monitor and enhance the quality covering both KPI's and strategic goals. The system identifies areas of development, allowing UVA to focus on resourcing for growth and quality. The system supports the achievement of objectives set for the core duties and enhances them through resourcing, faculty sufficiency strategy and curriculum management processes.

Evidence speaking to the effectiveness of UVA's quality system is its performance in a variety of international rankings, accreditations and evaluations. For example:

- UVA is ranked third in Finland in 2023 THE World University Rankings (201-250 internationally), as well as the Shanghai Global Ranking of Academic Subjects (18th internationally), for business administration, and received the highest evaluations for citations of any Finnish university.

- UVA is ranked 18th in the Times Higher Education (THE) Small Universities Ranking. Among the Nordic universities, UVA is ranked 4th.

- In the THE Impact Rankings (2024), UVA is ranked 201-300 globally for SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 13: Climate action, and SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.

- All three of UVA's international masters programmes in business studies have received the maximum 5 years accreditation from EFMD.

- Business studies is pursuing AACSB accreditation (accreditation visit carried out in April 2024), and the University has started the EQUIS accreditation process. Programmes in the School of Technology and Innovations are either ASIIN, EUR-ACE- or Euro-Inf –accredited.

- The most recent annual study by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research put UVA in first place in its university 'fitness test'. The test is based on how the performance of Finnish universities has changed in recent years (2019-2022). The criteria include student applications, graduations, headcount, student/personnel ratio, publications, publications/faculty, and total costs.

Stakeholder participation in the quality system and quality culture

Continuous collaborative efforts with staff, students, and external stakeholders ensure that UVA's activities are continuously enhanced and aligned with the needs of industry, society, and the academic community. UVA fosters a participatory quality culture through active and comprehensive stakeholder involvement and representation, both internal and external, through

a combination of institutional, and programme-level processes and committees. Development needs are identified by the quality system developed during these processes.

UVA values student input. Students provide feedback, participate in decision-making, engage in practical learning, and contribute to programme design and review. Student representatives are consulted about programme management and the student experience, and review the resulting improvement actions annually. UVA is also working on improving student communication and participation through the Jolla online student portal and new tools, such as Annie Advisor. Students also participate in various activities such as student hackathons, competitions, and mentoring.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Strong link from the strategy to quality assurance. Systematic use of international standards and experts (evaluations, accreditations) against which to benchmark the UVA quality system and receive developmental feedback	Inclusion of all parts of UVA under international (accreditation) standards to help ensure greater harmonization of quality practices and processes
Participatory and inclusive QM processes across core activities and decision-making bodies	Development of a more sophisticated business intelligence system to track and forecast performance across key indicators, and to facilitate more agile organizational responses
Comprehensive and balanced use of internal and external QM assessments	Greater emphasis on the student learning experience and graduate placement, especially among the growing population of international, tuition fee-paying students

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Assessment of the audit team

The quality management system needs to be further developed

UVA's quality management system covers its core duties. Many elements of the system are in place, such as the Quality Management Manual, quality policy, and quality governance bodies. According to the audit visit, the system has been mainly based on the accreditation of study programmes. Recently, the university has realised the need to build a more coherent university-level quality management system. The audit visit found that UVA strives to harmonise and systematise the university's standard practices. The quality management system helps the university to recognise development needs and to enhance its activities in a goal-oriented

manner. There was evidence of the functionality and impact of the quality system as regards improving the core duties.

A robust programme-level emphasis on international accreditations is used as a tool for quality enhancement. The outcomes of international accreditations are used to improve the overall quality of work at UVA. However, according to the audit visit, there is room for improvement in quality management. The best programmes work in accordance with the accreditation criteria, but there is a lot of variation between programmes.

Based on the audit visit, the UVA would benefit from establishing a permanent structural unit at UVA to improve the organisation of quality management and enhancement at the university. The unit should be responsible for implementing the quality policy and coordinating and monitoring the daily quality management tasks. From the audit team's perspective, such a structural unit responsible for overarching quality management activities would provide a holistic approach to quality management and continuous improvement.

Based on the audit visit, the quality management manual is quite general and repeats content in other documents. The audit team recommends that the manual be revised and clarified. The manual could include precise descriptions for key process descriptions and visualisations. They also suggest that UVA organises more quality management activities based on the PDCA cycle at the institutional and unit levels, e.g., on societal impact.

The audit team recommends improving the organisation of UVAs quality management system by describing key processes and responsibilities in more detail. During the visit, the audit team found that reflection on the organisation of quality management is still needed with regard to digitising quality system, visualising the critical quality management processes, and applying data analytics to provide the basis for data-driven decision-making. Access to such data should be given to all relevant parties. Benchlearning could be organised by learning from peer universities in Finland and abroad. UVA could also utilise more quality expertise within the university, such as professors in the field.

Quality culture is participatory and open

The quality culture of UVA is participatory and open. According to the audit visit, staff, students and external stakeholders are aware of quality and participate purposefully in enhancing the university's activities. During the audit visit, a strong quality culture was observed at UVA, referring to the collective beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours and practises regarding prioritising and promoting quality as a fundamental basis of its activities. The values of UVA are community, courage and responsibility.

The audit team believes that building a shared understanding of the meaning of quality among staff and students would help to enhance quality work, measurement and improvement at the university. Setting clear goals based on the shared understanding of quality for the diverse activities of UVA, teaching and learning, research, use of research results, and societal

engagement and impact, and its systematic monitoring would enhance the decision-making of relevant bodies. These goals should become a part of UVA's overall strategy. This will allow the development of a more systemic approach to quality management and enhancement and the monitoring of the quality level achieved.

Building shared understandings about the meaning of quality and communicating it through different channels will help to further develop the quality culture at UVA. Students particularly welcomed the idea of their further involvement in quality enhancement activities at the university as part of student-centered learning. Doctoral students enthusiastically shared their research work based on which new study programmes or courses could be introduced. This requires organising open discussions with relevant parties on the directions and opportunities for further development in the light of study programmes portfolio revisions and further internationalisation of UVA.