

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OULU

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3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- HEI's self-assessment

Quality system to support operational development

The UO's quality management activities are guided by the [quality policy](#). The most important goals of the UO's quality system are to guarantee effectiveness, efficiency, and smoothness of the core functions in accordance with the UO's strategy. With the help of the quality system, by describing and measuring the activities, we respond to the development needs of the UO.

The UO's quality system is based on the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle (Fig.13), i.e. the principle of continuous development. The PDCA cycle is monitored at the level of each unit and operation. Differences between units and functions lie in how precisely the individual quality system procedures and principles are incorporated into the operations. The PDCA cycle is combined with the planning and development of the operations but putting it into practice at the level of each operation poses challenges, which we strive to tackle.

Data collection, monitoring and analysis are key elements of quality management for the core functions. Based on the UO's strategy, action plans concerning education, research, innovation activities and their operating conditions have been defined, in which the key concrete development targets of the planning period are presented.

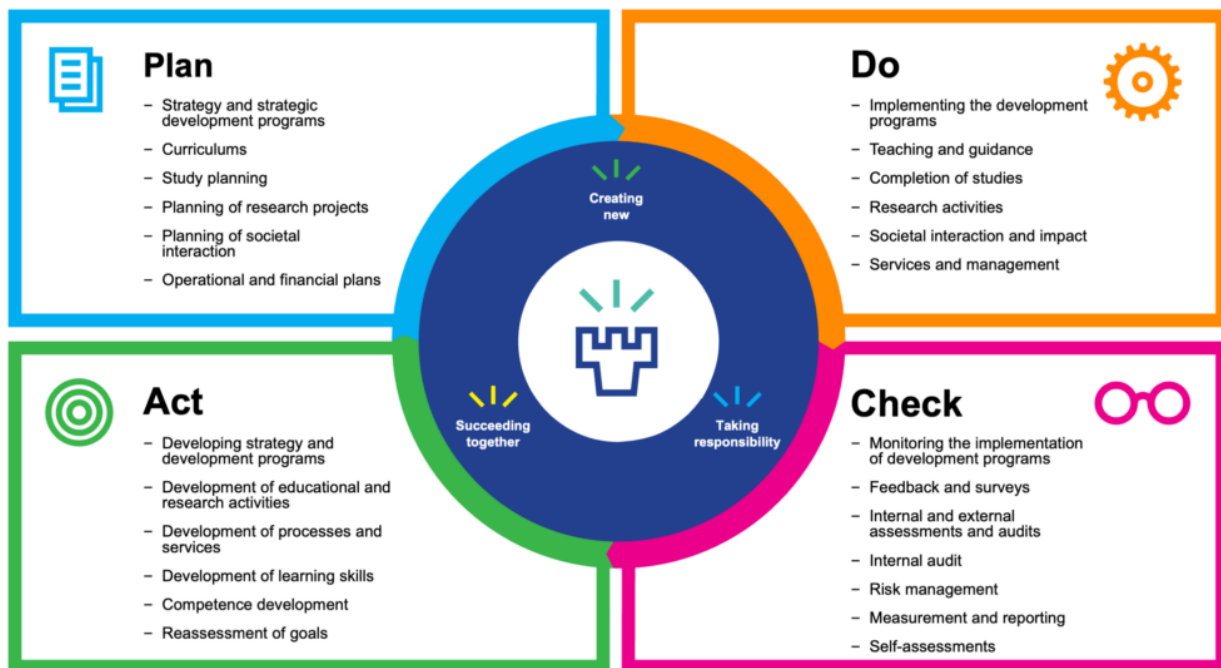


Figure 13. The UO's quality system.

Participatory quality culture and sharing good practices

The UO's quality culture is strategy-oriented, and all activities are linked to the goals set in the strategy.

The UO's operating culture emphasizes cooperation and enabling broad participation through various means. The members of the UO's various institutions represent their own communities. Staff and student representatives and external stakeholders are widely involved, e.g. on the Board, in the UO Collegium and several working groups. The interaction between the UO and the student union is close, also considering the subject organisations.

In addition to representative institutions and working groups, the participation of the UO community is facilitated through various events, surveys, and workshops. The Tellus collaboration environment also supports the operationalisation of the strategy and the building of an interactive operating culture. The forms of strategy work are participatory; for example, the preparation process of the UO's Arctic Strategy implemented in 2022 was the result of the cooperation of a wide network.

Information about the UO's quality system has been compiled for the staff on the Patio intranet system. Information is also conveyed about the operation and goals of the UO to the personnel via news on current topics. The personnel can comment on the Patio intranet news and hold discussions on the discussion platform found in Patio. Ideaposti serves as an open feedback channel for the UO's personnel, where you can send ideas and feedback to the management to implement the UO's strategy and develop operations.

The students' instructions, news and events are gathered on the [Student page](#) in the oulu.fi service, from which the news and event feeds are also published in the [Tuudo mobile application](#). According to a survey about communication for students in 2023, e-mail and Tuudo reached the students the best. The student page will be developed based on the feedback given by the students in the survey. Based on the survey, a need for monthly student newsletters emerged, which we are starting to develop.

As part of the quality culture, good practices are shared in different ways in the community. Faculties and units organise joint meetings of the key members of the teaching staff (e.g. degree programme committees), monthly or weekly unit meetings, teacher meetings and Teams coffee moments. Joint meetings are organised for the Degree Programme Heads a couple of times a year.

At the university level, good practices are shared in Patio. For example, the weekly Digipedavinkit have been developed to make the teacher's work easier.

Development of the quality system

The UO has invested in the development of operational models and resourcing of quality work during the past four years. A quality specialist has been recruited for the UO, a steering group for quality work has been appointed, a quality network has been put together, and a quality team of the Unit for Strategy and Science Policy (STY) has been established. In addition to this, the UO's organisation has been supplemented with the roles of Development Director and Director of Services, both of whom have a strong role in quality work. Risk management has also been developed at the university level as part of quality work. During 2022, a joint project with KPMG was implemented, which defined university-level risks and their management methods. Thanks to the development measures taken, quality work is now carried out more systematically than before. The next step is to deepen our operations and bring the practical quality work closer to the faculties and units.

The development of the UO's quality work has also been supported by the systematic development of service process descriptions created in the IMS software since 2021. The challenge is to get the personnel to utilise the process descriptions more widely. Informing the faculty and unit levels about IMS is still in progress.

The quality of the core functions is regularly developed through external and internal evaluations, but more systematicity is needed especially for internal evaluations. A 4-year plan for internal evaluations of education has been created, and implementation is currently being planned. Regarding external accreditations, the UO's School of Economics has an international AACSB quality label, and the Production Economics Degree Programme has been awarded ASIIN and EUR-ACE accreditations and quality labels. Cooperation in the European University Alliance at UNIC has also supported quality work, e.g. through UNIC's internal diversity peer review. Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) are carried out regularly, and the previous one was done in

2021.

An Internal Auditor has been recruited for the UO at the end of 2019. Internal audit processes have been created and established in 2020. Follow-up audits have been carried out since 2021, if significant deviations have been detected in the audit target that require immediate corrective measures. Prior to 2019, the corrective measures implemented based on inspections obtained from external consultants have not been followed up accordingly. Based on the findings of the follow-up inspections, the corrective measures related to the inspections have generally been completed.

Strengths

Strong development ability and efficiency.

Intense cooperation with external stakeholders.

Participatory quality culture.

Enhancement areas

Consolidation of quality management practices throughout the organisation.

The process of internal evaluations of education.

Establishing the operation of the quality network.

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Assessment of the audit team

The quality system enhances the core duties of the university

The university has recently updated its quality system, including the quality manual, procedures, and processes as well as its internal audits and risk management. According to the audit visit, there is widespread awareness among management and staff of the need to further enhance the quality system, in particular its implementation. Enhancement is ongoing in several areas.

The audit team found evidence that the quality system improves the performance of core duties of the university. The university's management and administration work intensively to include all staff from core activities and support services, students, and external stakeholders in the overall implementation of the updated quality system and its continuous enhancement.

The quality system is regularly checked and changed when needed. During the audit visit, some staff expressed complaints about the updated quality system and the velocity of its implementation. The audit team recommends that the UO works towards enhancing and synchronising the use of the quality system at the university level and across faculties.

International staff and students could be more involved in quality work

The quality culture of the UO is participatory and open, especially at the top management level. Staff, students, and external stakeholders participate in the enhancement of activities at the university. However, student representatives who were involved in shaping the new structures of the quality work expressed that they would like to be engaged even more in enhancing activities in the Quality work steering group. The audit team encourages the idea to ensure the engagement of students in the enhancement of the university's activities. In addition, the audit team recommends involving more international staff and students in the enhancement activities to bring in diversity and new perspectives.

It was evident to the audit team that the university could collect and analyse data in an even more systematic and ongoing manner to ensure the strategic enhancement of its activities. The university's quality system can provide a lot of information from within the university. However, the use of that information for the management of the university could be strengthened. Thorough and well-analysed information from national and international sources, debates and decisions should be considered when steering the direction of the university. Strategic and quality plans should be based on internal results from the quality system as well as collection and analysis of signals from the surrounding world. The audit team recommends that the university strengthens the identification and use of relevant external information to support the proactive enhancement of its activities.