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FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

An integrated management system supports the UH’s management and objectives

The integrated management system of the University of Helsinki (UH) consists of a management system, a steering framework and a quality system. The different areas of the integrated management system are partly overlapping and partly parallel, supplementing each other.

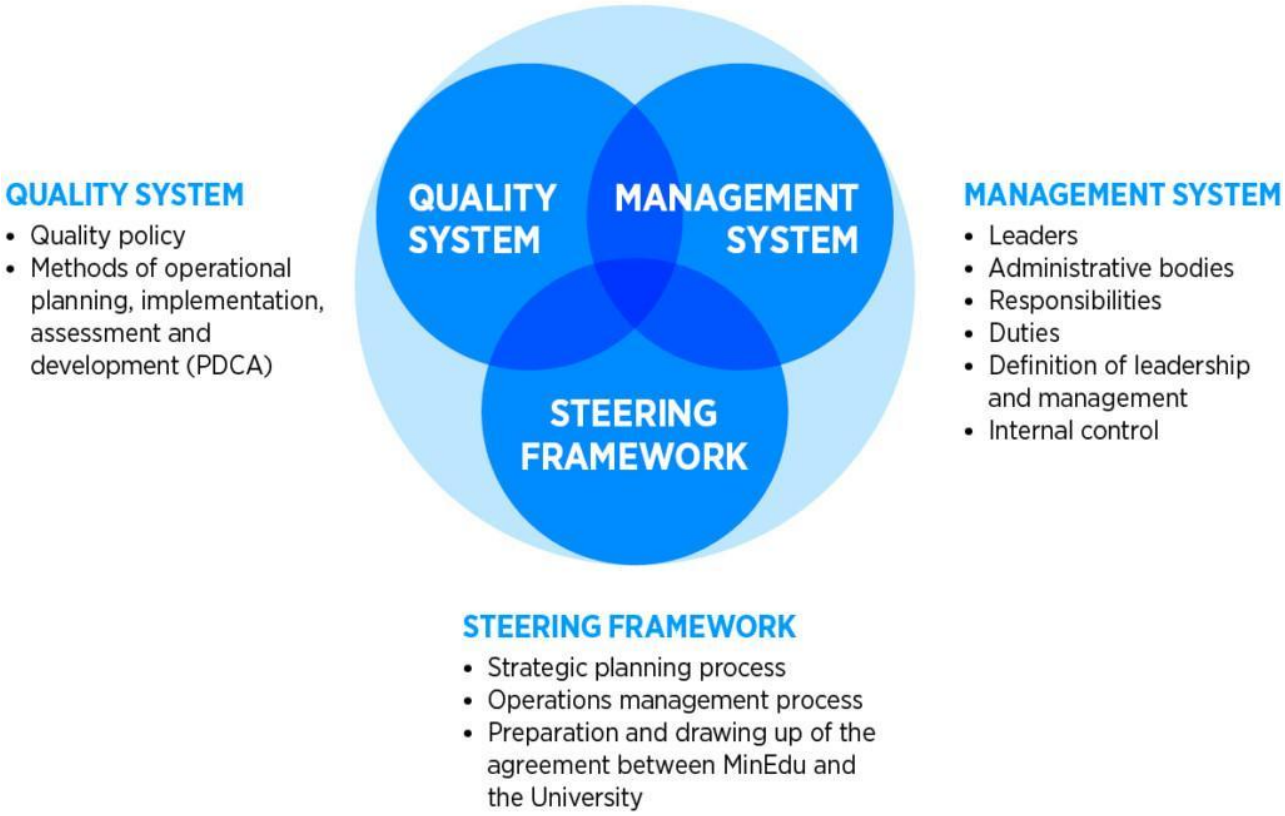

Figure 9. The UH's integrated management system

The steering framework is based on related principles approved by the University Board to ensure that the UH's strategic plan is implemented in accordance with the objectives set. To ensure that operations management supports management even more effectively, it is being further developed in a strategic, coherent and streamlined direction.

The operations management process consists of the subprocesses of operational planning (teaching, research, societal engagement, service operations), budget planning, human resources planning, teaching planning, continuous monitoring and assessment, and risk management.

Figure 10. The UH's operations management process

Operational planning

As part of the operations management process, the UH and its units draw up four-year implementation plans based on the strategic plan. The implementation plans set out the most important objectives and describe what will be done, by whom, with what resources and in what timetable. The plans are documented in the Suunta system, in which objectives and indicators are set for each action to be taken.

The UH's model for the allocation of funding has recently been updated. According to it the allocation of funding for the faculties is distributed according to a ratio of 80 % stable funding, 10 % based on performance and 10 % according to the strategic component. Incentives in the UH model include performance and strategy shares.

Implementation and follow-up of activities

The leadership of the UH (at the university level and the unit level) regularly monitor activities using various indicators. These indicators are presented in the RAPO reporting system and partly on the external University website. All UH staff have access to RAPO. The leadership also use the Suunta system to monitor strategic indicators as well as the activities and risks documented in implementation plans. The Institutional Research and Analysis unit supports the UH leadership and the University Services sectors in the production and analysis of information.

The rector and the Board monitor the situation in the units with the help of actual indicators as a

part of the steering process. The university-wide checkpoints in the monitoring of implementation plans have been agreed to coincide with annual and interim reports of the board and the UH management group as well as to always take place before the rector's negotiations. Implementation plans are updated annually based on monitoring, or if significant changes occur in the operating environment of the UH or the unit. The leadership meet regularly to discuss the operations management process and other topical issues.

Major strategic development activities are organised into projects or compiled into larger programmes in the UH's project portfolio and monitored in accordance with the UH's project management model.

Development of activities

All UH activities are developed in accordance with the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) model of continuous development. It has been found to function well and is used in a versatile manner as the basis of the quality system. The UH's shared approaches are described on intranet Flamma using quality cycles/navigators based on the PDCA method.

Project management is a key method of operational development. Projects and ventures related to operational development and information technology are increasingly implemented in accordance with the university-level project management model. Projects and project-like development tasks are described in the project portfolio. The model is currently not used in research projects or construction projects. The project management model has systematised and brought transparency into project management at the university level. Further, the self-assessment process associated with the audit has highlighted the fact that development efforts are undertaken broadly in many UH units and service sectors. However, each faculty has a distinct operational culture which, in turn, poses a challenge for managing the development efforts comprehensively.

At the UH, enterprise architecture seeks to enhance the way the operations and services of an organisation work together. It maintains models of the current state of the integrated management system (services, processes, information, data systems and technologies). The tool for modelling is the data governance model, which in future will be used in improving management, operations and data systems.

Collective strategic planning

The Strategic Plan of the University of Helsinki 2021–2030 was drawn up collectively. Staff and students had the opportunity to participate in the different stages of the preparation, and external stakeholders were also involved in drawing up the plan. The community had the opportunity to consider what factors will affect the operating environment of the UH in the future, what strategic choices the UH should make and how the choices affect the community members' own work or studies. After the strategic plan was approved in spring 2020, the UH organised open

campus meetings where participants discussed the strategic choices and related university-level activities. Unit-specific sessions, such as faculty development seminars, were also organised to help put the strategic plan into practice. The objective of these sessions was to incorporate the strategic plan into the work and studies of each member of the UH community.

Implementation plans and target and development discussions strengthen links between day-to-day work and the strategic plan

When drawing up unit-specific implementation plans, units and communities discuss the impact of the strategic choices on studies and work both within them and in their immediate community (degree programme, faculty, separate unit, independent institute, research group, service sector, team). The role of University Services is to support the UH and individual faculties and units in realising their implementation plans.

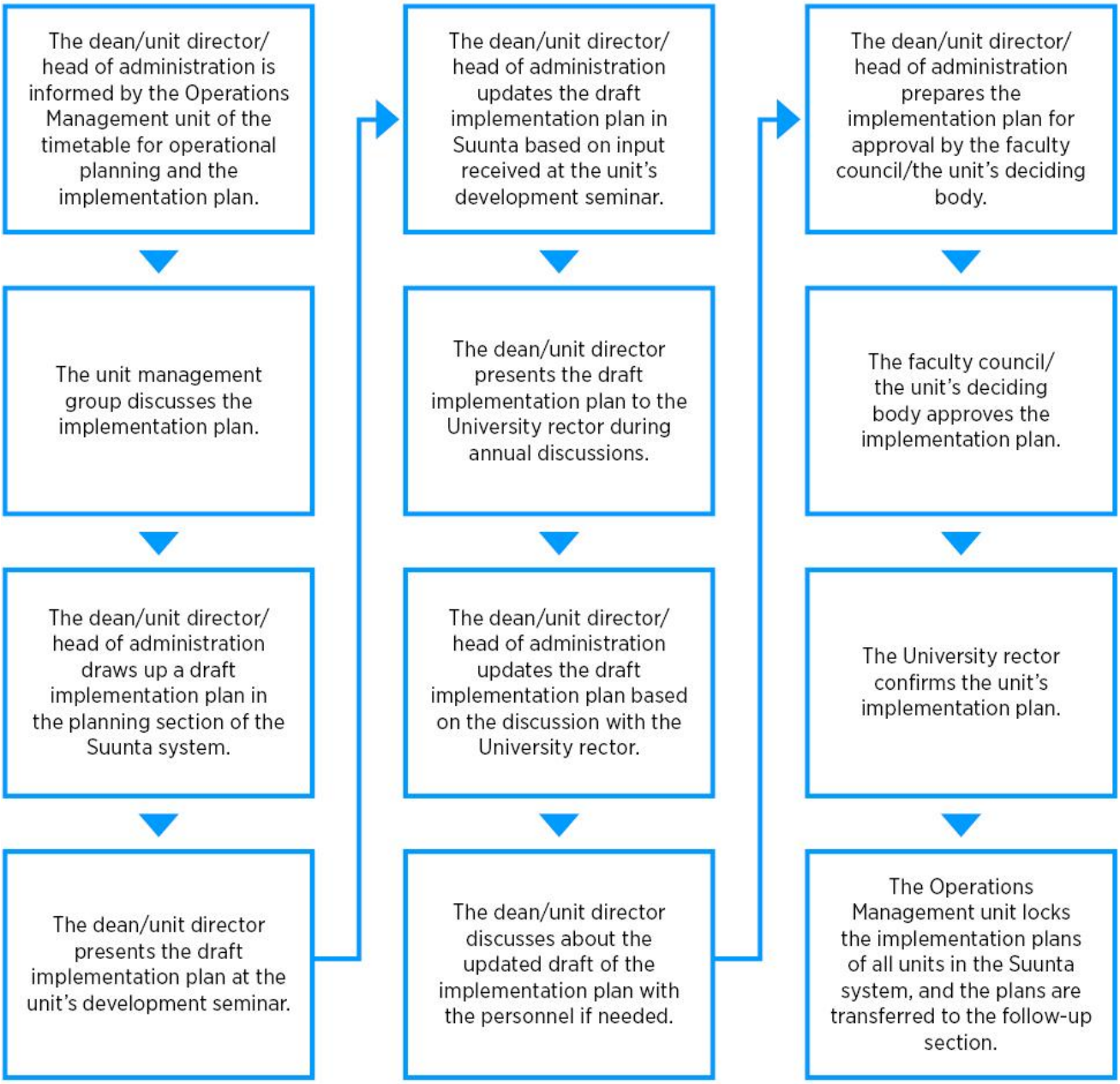

Figure 11. The process of devising a unit-specific implementation plan

The links between the strategic and implementation plans and day-to-day work is discussed as part of the orientation process and in target and development discussions. The supervisors have the responsibility of connecting the strategic plan with the employees' work tasks in these discussions. The UH's project management model connects each project to the development areas in the strategic plan. This helps staff involved in projects to understand the link between their work and the strategic plan.

Strengths **Enhancement areas**

Collective implementation of the strategic planning process	Further boosting of the competence of supervisors to enable them to discuss the strategic plan and implementation plans in target and development discussions
The implementation planning process is connected to strategic objectives and, hence, unit objectives. Operational planning and management have been strengthened in recent years	The development of shared approaches requires continuous discussion on how to move from distinct operational cultures to shared, university-level approaches and when variation is justified
Regular leadership sessions linked with annual cycle (annual seminar concerning the implementation plan of the UH, Leadership Arena sessions, extended management group meetings, leader meetings on campuses) have been found to be useful	The role of the enterprise architecture and the data governance model in improving management, operations and data systems can be reinforced
The introduction of the project management model in 2018 has increased the systematisation of the UH's operational development and made development work more visible	Management of the UH's development projects takes place so as to align their objectives, content, interrelationships and timetables

3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

The university's integrated management system needs to be streamlined

As described in the self-assessment report (SAR) and the intranet Flamma, the university has an integrated management system that combines quality system, management system and steering framework. The quality system follows the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) model where the development objectives make the starting point of the planning cycle with the target of continuous development driven by follow-up indicators and other data, feedback and evaluation data and internal audits.

The key principles, objectives and responsibilities of the quality system have been clearly defined on the university's intranet Flamma and on the external web pages in three languages. The quality policy states that the aim of quality work is to support the achievement of the university's strategic objectives, and it assigns the responsibility to each member of the university community in contributing to those objectives and for the quality of their own work. The quality policy also states that the purpose of the quality system is to provide the supporting framework for the quality management of the university's activities.

The integrated management system has evolved organically from on the one hand traditional

steering systems and methods, which were described during the audit visit as ‘top-down’, and on the other hand a quality system which was considered as ‘bottom-up’. New elements have been amalgamated with the old ones and the system has been modified to meet the temporal requirements and novelties. This has resulted in a rather complex system which should be streamlined for better and more simple usability.

Both the visualisation and the description of the system in the SAR and on Flamma are complex with partly overlapping and parallel systems. The role of the quality system in the whole system, in particular, is not fully clear. Neither is it clear how the steering framework and management system are separate entities. In the documentation available, the quality system was described as the same as the integrated management system and sometimes as a separate and subordinate system. There are currently several visualisations in place to some degree affecting the user-friendliness and understanding of the system (integrated management system, quality system, operations management system, annual cycle for the operations planning process, university-level quality cycle/navigators for different core activities and units). The need to develop the integrated management system into one coherent system was also recognised during the audit visit.

The strategic objectives of the university are at the core of the integrated management system

Based on the audit discussions, the strategy compilation process was excellent in terms of participatory approach and dialogue with both the internal and external stakeholder communities. The discussions during the audit confirmed that the staff of the university had been involved in the strategy process and could easily identify themselves in the strategy. While this approach was very laborious, it guaranteed an end product that enjoys wide support and commitment from the entire community, making the implementation easier and more successful. Based on discussions with student representatives, the compilation of the strategy was a well-managed and engaging process, and as a result they were able to see their input in the current strategy. On the other hand, it was noted that in the implementation phase students are not that involved anymore. This would be an opportunity for the university to think about innovative ways to engage the students in some of the strategy-linked processes, for instance in furthering the target ‘Our University is the best place to study and work’.

The university’s strategy forming the core of the integrated management system clearly defines the objectives for the core duties. The systematic strategic implementation process ensures that there is a clear target setting, actions are defined at university and unit levels, and there is an annual follow-up process in place connected to operations management. Many processes and actions are underway, and the university has already identified needs for further development as part of the strategy implementation.

The integrated management system serves the management, units and administration of the university

There is a certain level of discrepancy between academic freedom and a strict quality system. The faculties operate quite autonomously and have their distinct operating cultures. As described in audit discussions, there is a constant balancing at the university of how much structure and guidance should be common to all units, and on the other hand giving room for and respecting discipline and faculty needs and differences. The university has focused on developing a system serving the university as a whole, which is more flexible and dynamic than ready-made systems. A fully harmonised quality management across the entire university was considered as challenging due to the wide variety of cultures, traditions and types of science in the faculties and units.

In the discussions with university and faculty leadership, the integrated management system was considered to serve their needs well, bringing a more professional grip and effectivity to their management practices. The system has also enhanced collaboration. At the same time, the system was regarded to be quite complex, and many different digital tools are used for monitoring and reporting.

The university is commended for developing its system towards an integrated management system, which provides better support for the management of the university and the systematic implementation of its strategic objectives. However, as mentioned, there is a need for more clarity in the system but also for streamlining to make faculties and university-level approaches converge more effectively. The university has a well-functioning committee structure and uses different university-wide networks and inter-campus initiatives, and these are certainly important for a more converging approach.