3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

The quality system supports the continuous development of activities

In accordance with its strategic plan, the UH aspires for the highest possible quality in all its activities. The UH's quality system encompasses the UH's core duties of teaching, research and societal engagement, the services supporting these duties, and the management methods of continuous development (PDCA).

The objectives of the quality system have been defined as follows. The UH's quality system

- Supports the attainment of the objectives set forth in the University's strategic plan
- Supports work, studies and management within the University community
- Ensures operations that are fit for purpose, and supports the reform and continuous development of operations
- Encourages the sharing of good practices, the use of feedback and collaborative learning
- Indicates whether we are heading in the right direction and whether we need to adjust our course
- Promotes the clarity and visibility of operations.

HIGH-QUALITY OPERATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

ACT
- Development projects
- Sharing of good practices
- Development of staff skills
- Development of learning skills

CHECK
- Monitoring and feedback
- Annual reporting and statistics
- Internal audit
- Self-assessments
- External evaluations and audits

PLAN
- Implementation plans
- Planning of research projects
- Curriculum and teaching programme design
- Personal study planning
- Planning of public engagement

DO
- Research
- Teaching, assessment, guidance and supervision
- Completion of studies
- Public engagement
- Support services

ACT | PLAN | CHECK | DO

RESEARCH | TEACHING AND LEARNING

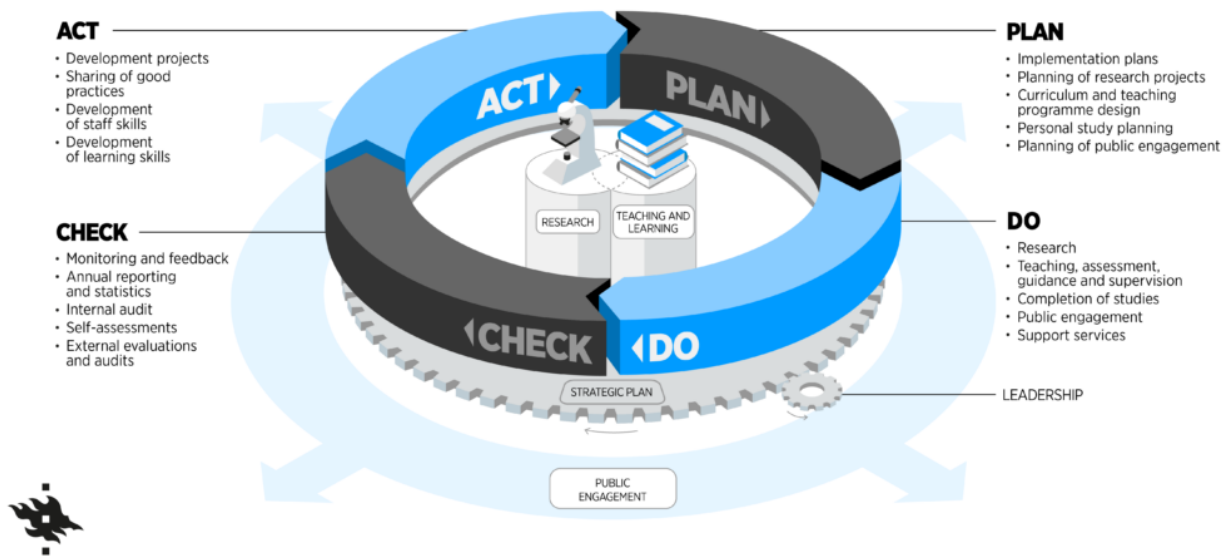STRATEGIC PLAN

LEADERSHIP

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Figure 15. The UH's quality system

Guidelines and instructions corresponding to the UH's quality documentation are available on the UH's intranet Flamma and on the Instructions for Students and Instructions for Teaching websites. The content on Flamma is targeted to staff, but students can also access the site.

Flamma and the websites offering instructions serve not only as quality documentation, but also as platforms for internal communication and inclusive leadership. The distribution of the instructions across several platforms poses challenges, particularly for internal communication aimed at the whole community (both students and staff), but it has the strong point that all student instructions can be found in a single location where anyone can access them.

Documentation corresponding to a quality manual is described on Flamma using quality cycles/navigators based on the PDCA method:

- High-quality operations of the University
- High-quality research of the University
- High-quality teaching of the University
- High-quality studies at the University
- High-quality support services of the University

Faculties and independent institutes have compiled their quality documentation on their Flamma pages. To ensure the quality of content on the above sites, a model for reviewing quality documentation is currently being developed. The quality documentation reviews will be part of quality reviews, which are also under construction and will be put into operation in 2022 as a part of the operations management process.

Act

- Development projects
- Enterprise architecture
- Lean development
- Skills development
- Make a difference at the University

Plan

- Operation planning
- Objectives and planning of work

High-quality operations of the University

Do

- Management and decision-making
- The University Guide to How It's Done
- High-quality research of the University
- High-quality teaching of the University
- High-quality studying of the University
- High-quality societal interaction of the Unversity
- High-quality support services of the University

Check

- Monitoring and feedback systems
- Annual reports and statistics
- Internal Audit
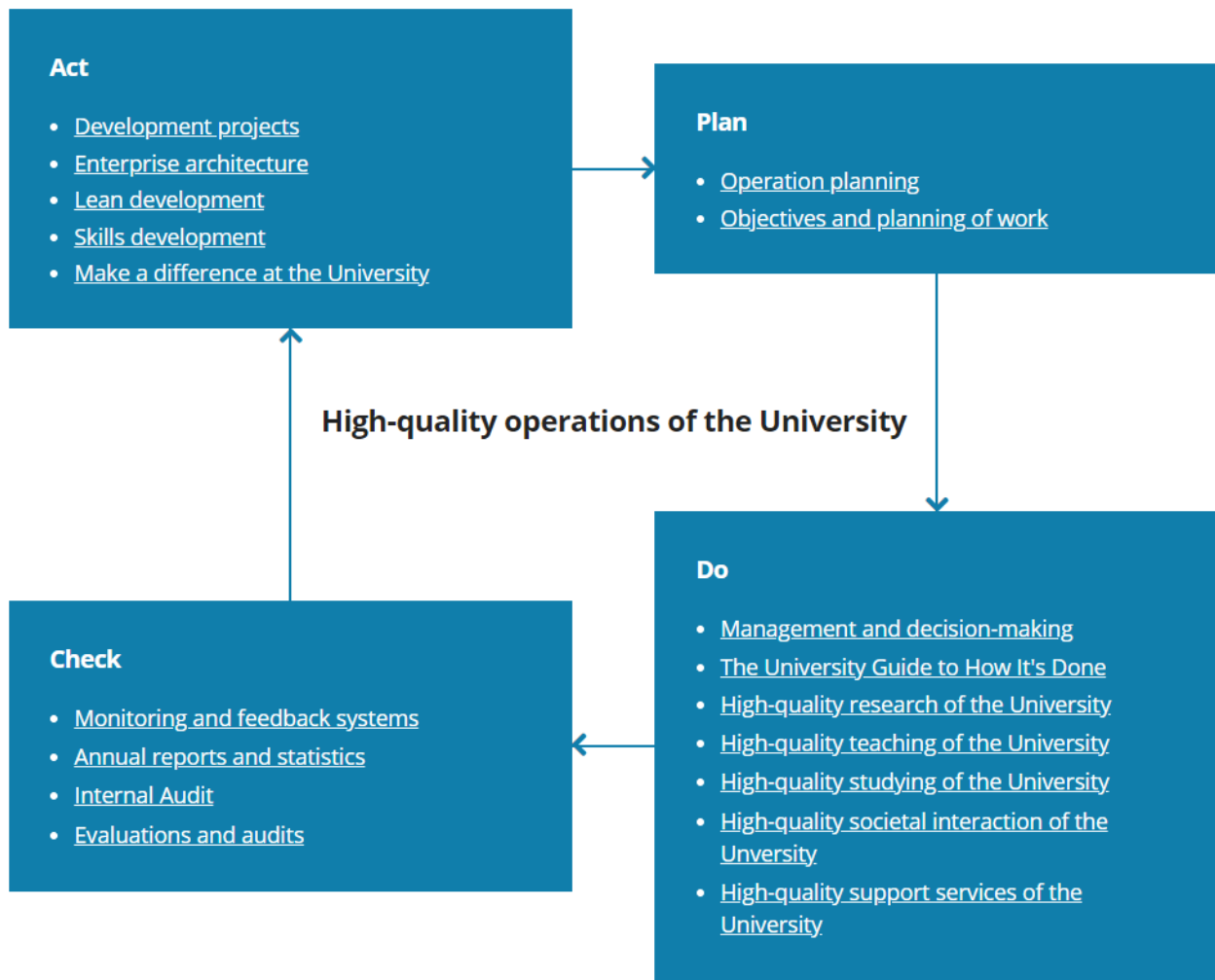- Evaluations and audits

Figure 16. The university-level quality cycle/navigator

A participatory quality culture and the sharing of good practices

The UH's decision-making bodies apply a tripartite approach to ensure that members of the UH community participate in decision-making that affects them and the UH. The tripartite approach is also used in many preparatory bodies. Following the reform of the UH's degree programmes, the new programmes' steering groups have enabled students to influence the development of teaching and other issues.

The activities of units are planned annually through collaboration, for example, at the development seminars of faculties and independent institutes. Activities are also developed in connection with statutory cooperation procedures.

Members of the UH community participate in the development of operations through projects, serving, based on their regular duties, as project group members, advisers, project managers, project owners or steering group members.

Networked activities (internal and external) are a key form of operational development. As part of

the self-assessment carried out for the audit, the UH community has recognised that the good practices of networks should be used more widely to develop the UH's activities. It is easier to share and use good practices within a faculty or unit than between faculties and units. As the introduction of the project management model proceeds, clearer processes must be created for incorporating good practices and ideas generated by networks into university-level development projects.

A large number of preparatory bodies, groups and forums operate at all university levels, which ensure a wide participation of the UH community in preparing important matters. The preparation processes are as open as possible.

Student, staff and service surveys help to identify strengths and enhancement areas. The results are used in operational planning, but the utilisation of feedback still requires further development. For example, student participation in the processing of student feedback can be increased.

Continuous development of the quality system

The UH's quality system is adapted to support the objectives set in the strategic plan. In addition to the methods of monitoring applied in the operations management process, the quality system includes numerous procedures for identifying development needs.

INTRA-UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES
Regular meetings of the University's management group
Meetings between the University's management group and the University's Student Union
Campus visits by the rector and vice-rectors
Assessments of operations and results
Administrative bodies and committees
Degree programme steering groups
Student feedback surveys and staff workplace wellbeing surveys
University Services feedback surveys as well as YPA-Help
Unit steering groups, administrative bodies and committees
Unit meetings, development seminars and similar unit-level activities
Development networks
Staff target and development discussions

STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION
International Advisory Board (IAB)
Unit-level advisory boards, such as Scientific Advisory Boards (SAB)
Strategic international partnerships
UNA Europa cooperation
National and regional cooperation with stakeholders
Cooperation with policy-makers
Business cooperation
Alumni cooperation

Figure 17. The UH's key methods for identifying development needs

The UH uses structural development to attain objectives related to the continuously updated research and education policies, and to respond to changes occurring both in the internal and external financial operating environments.

The UH employs an internal audit as part of its internal administration and monitoring system. The internal audit is overseen by the University Board and conducted under the rector's supervision. The internal audit, which is mainly based on an annual risk evaluation process, supports the development of the UH's operations and, simultaneously, of its quality system.

Examples of identifying the development needs of the quality system and taking action can be found under the topics of sustainability and responsibility, which are highlighted in the UH's strategic plan. The quality system will be developed during the implementation plan period 2021–2024, particularly by creating a separate policy programme, management system and indicators for the UH's sustainability and responsibility efforts.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the UH has noted that its quality system is capable of responding quickly to changing needs. The UH has conducted surveys on the exceptional circumstances at six-month intervals and used the results to enhance communication and staff training. The results show that the UH has succeeded in its crisis management even though the circumstances have been challenging, especially for students.

University Services develops services comprehensively, ensuring that digitalisation of the services has been taken into account in the most optimal way. Lean and agile methods as well as service design are applied in the development of operations. Personal service supports the use of digital services and assists in the handling of complicated service requests. Where possible, processes are streamlined, using automation. Services are increasingly developed through cooperation with independent institutes providing services.

The service structures and operations of the UH have proved to be capable of changes and continuous improvement. Further development still needs to be done to prioritise services and streamline the administrative processes. Despite all the good progress since the establishment of University Services, the coordination of different administrative sectors and duties as well as related cooperation must still be further enhanced.

Assessments of UH operations are conducted in accordance with the principle of enhancement-led evaluation. The results of external and internal assessments are taken into account in the operational development of the UH and its units. The principle is to avoid implementing more than one university-level assessment at a time. In addition to university-level assessments, many development and assessment projects are ongoing at the UH in different units or themes.

Year	Regular assessments	Assessments concerning operational development projects or changes in the operational environment	The goal of the assessment
2017		Evaluation of the organisation of doctoral education at the University of Helsinki	To assess the functionality of the organisational structures and the management of doctoral education (DE) at the University of Helsinki; to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the 2014 reorganisation of doctoral education in terms of improving the quality and coordination
2017		Beyond the Changes: The effects of, and lessons from, the downsizing and restructuring process of 2015–2017 (assessment chaired by professor Sue Scott)	To help the University to recover and move on from the major changes that occurred in 2015–2016 and from the downsizing in particular
2018-2019	Research assessment 2018–2019 (RAUH)		To produce an overview of the quality and impact of the research conducted at the University, to assist in identifying future research opportunities and to support the renewal of research
2022	Review of the degree programmes		The reviews produce information which helps the relevant faculty to assess the development and reform of degree programmes and their curricula. This information also aids the faculty in establishing, merging or abolishing degree programmes.
2023		Assessment of the operation system and management system of the University of Helsinki	To assess how the operation and management system supports the operations and management of the University of Helsinki, taking the changes in the operational environment into account. To assess the strengths and development targets of the recent changes in the operation system (re-organisation of the administration as University Services in 2016, the reform of the degree programmes in 2017, abolishment of departments under the auspices of the faculties in 2018)
2024	Assessment of the service structure (including assessment of the administration)		To assess the internal and external structure of services to answer the needs of the operations and management of the University; to find targets of development for customer-focused services

Figure 18. The university-level assessments carried out after the previous audit of the quality system and upcoming assessments during the implementation plan for the years 2021–2024

The UH has established a quality management steering group (Laava), headed by a vice-rector, to supervise and coordinate quality management and assessment. The steering group includes members representing the leadership, teaching and research staff, specialist and support staff, the Student Union, and external stakeholders.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Active development networks	Developing the operations management process by strengthening the status of the degree programmes and introducing quality reviews
Continuous improvement of service structures and operations. Good capability for changes. The University Services organisation has harmonised approaches and strengthened the service culture	Clearer processes must be created for incorporating good practices and ideas generated by networks into university-level development
The PDCA method encompasses all of the UH's core duties and related services	Promotion of the prioritisation and streamlining of administrative and service processes, taking the needs of digitalisation, a customer-oriented approach and decreasing public funding into consideration. Enhancement of the coordination of different administrative sectors and duties as well as related cooperation
The methods of enhancement-led evaluation have been successfully applied in operational assessments	The utilisation of the results of the student, staff and service surveys in the development work requires further development

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

PDCA model is well integrated in the activities, but further development is still needed

The university's integrated management system covers education, research and innovation activities, societal engagement and support services. A good development has been to use the PDCA cycle as the guiding principle and describe the different aspects of the core duties according to that logic on Flamma (the quality cycle/navigators). The key processes of research

and teaching at the university are well managed with a set of performance indicators and follow-up of the performance.

The operations planning process ensures a university-level systematic approach to societal engagement (public engagement), which would otherwise be lacking. Better university-level indicators could be used to follow up on the key strategic focus areas, in addition to 'Share of student feedback respondents (Bachelor's Graduate Survey)', 'Share of international students pursuing a master's degree' and 'High-quality and international open-access publications', now used in the annual follow-up of operations plans.

In general, the PDCA model seems to be used well throughout the various levels of operations, but collecting and using feedback information (Check) in recognition of the development needs of the operations (Act) could still be enhanced. In particular, the 'Act' part will need further attention from the university. At the moment, the process from data to actions and the follow-up of the actions could be improved. One reason is that the responsibilities for closing the PDCA or feedback loop, i.e., that actions are taken and followed up, are not always clear enough. The ongoing process of creating process descriptions could bring more clarity to this.

On the other hand, the audit evidenced a reflective quality culture based on an active collection of different types of data in the form of statistics, surveys, annual reviews, audits, periodic evaluations, etc. The university has good, perhaps too many, digital tools in place to facilitate different processes, data collection and monitoring of data. There was evidence that various information was used to identify challenges and development areas in the university's activities and for improvement. Innovative approaches, such as the thematic benchlearning exercise with the University of Edinburgh, which was part of the audit, are welcome and provide tools for the improvement and development of activities and processes.

Postdocs represent a crucial group for long-term development of research environments

Audit interviews provided a strong indication of a systematic and professional approach in the development of research and innovation activities. For instance, the staff recognised the great developments that have taken place at the university in developing innovation services and support for building research cultures. It was recognised in discussions with staff that the development and renewal of science often begins with projects with PhD students and postdocs. There was a strong agreement among several staff members that the single thing that would best support the university in advancing its research would be to focus the support on its postdocs. Sustainable and flexible solutions for their employment, such as 50/50 contracts with companies, would be needed to 'keep the best brains' at the university.

A quality culture is well on its way

The quality culture at the university is open and there are many opportunities for members of the university community to get engaged in the development of the university. The audit team appreciated the self-critical and open culture for discussion and collaboration, which was also highlighted especially by staff members. In general, opportunities for staff to influence and participate in the development of the university were considered good. However, from the faculty staff point of view, the quality work of the university is not that visible to everyone. There seems to be ambiguity in the concept of the university's quality system, which perhaps could be explained by the relatively recent developments in renewing the system and by how the system is presented.

One challenge, which is also discussed in Chapter 4, is that the international staff do not have the same opportunities to participate at the university. This was brought up as a challenge in some discussions with staff. While the university is to be commended for being very good at producing information and materials in Finnish, Swedish and English, for instance on the Flamma website, the main administrative language of the university is still Finnish. The challenge in terms of languages does create unequal opportunities among its staff. The university seems to be well aware of this challenge. For instance, the issue of 'active and full community participation regardless of language or cultural background' has been addressed in the annual operations plans.

Student representation is at a good level at the university. A general challenge, which does not concern only the University of Helsinki, is that it is sometimes hard to find student representatives. There are many programmes at the university and sometimes it is difficult to get positions filled, especially in fields with a small number of students. The university has tried to boost student engagement by clarifying from what kinds of duties students can get credits and be paid when contributing to the university. The student representatives are appointed by the student union and play an important role in providing the student perspective on many different issues. The rectorate interacts with student representatives regularly. The student union seems more distant to students than the student associations, which play an important but informal role in relation to channelling student experiences and needs. One area where the university could improve is the representation of doctoral students, which is good at the level of doctoral schools and doctoral programmes, but perhaps could be strengthened at the faculty and university levels. There also appears to be a need for more information among the doctoral students concerning the division of responsibilities between the doctoral schools and faculties.

The identification of external stakeholders seems to mainly arise from traditional partners of the units through a bottom-up approach. To some extent there seems to be a lack of systematic analysis and identification of the key national and international stakeholders, resulting in building on tradition and to a certain degree in a sometimes haphazard community engagement. A more systematic stakeholder analysis would enable the university to identify its key stakeholders for the entire university and its various units as well as the type of cooperation with each of the

stakeholder groups. This would also help monitoring the effectivity of community engagement.

The feedback culture will need to be strengthened

Apart from the formal participation of the student representatives, there seems to be a culture of good informal contact with teachers where it is relatively easy for students to talk to or email lecturers about their needs. Although several channels for student feedback are used and have a central role in the quality management and development of teaching and learning, as discussed in Section 1.3, the system is not working as well as it could. Several students, including international and doctoral students, met by the audit team were uncertain whether their feedback had an impact, and when they were heard, if their views were considered. Although the audit gave the impression that the university and most of the staff value student feedback and student engagement highly, there seems to be pockets at the university where the feedback culture does not reach all the way. There is a need for the university to strengthen the feedback culture and close the feedback loop.

In addition, the university could better use opportunities in collecting and taking advantage of external views on university operations. In the fields of education of professionals, such as medical doctors, primary and secondary school teachers, veterinarians and lawyers, communication and cooperation are active with hospitals, schools and other employers of the professionals. But in the fields where employment places for graduates are not so obvious, there could be more room for active outreach and feedback collection from well-defined external parties.

There is evidence of systematic development of the system, but efforts are still needed by the university to simplify the integrated management system and forming it into one holistic system without separate components. The audit team was pleased to note that several of the improvement areas identified in the audit have already been identified as action points in connection to the strategic focus areas. This indicates a good awareness of the university of its challenges, a well-functioning system to gather information on the university's activities, and a capability of the institution to take the actions required for further improvement.