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NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE LAPPEENRANTA–LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY LUT

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3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Högskolans självvärdering

QSM integrated into LUT management system supports continuous improvement

The quality management system covers all the university's core operations. It assures that the development targets are recognised and university activities continuously improved. In accordance with the PDCA cycle, the university takes care of

- high-quality goal setting and communication of strategic and operational goals (PLAN)
- common operation models based on shared instructions, guidelines and established procedures (DO)
- intensive and systematic performance monitoring, stakeholder feedback systems, internal and external evaluations (CHECK)
- clear responsibilities and effective decision-making processes enabling the definition and implementation of development priorities (ACT).

Research platforms and sustainable development activities are examples of continuously developed procedures that affect all university units.

Good practices are introduced, refined and applied

The university boldly tests and implements new solutions. Solutions that have proven to work advance into joint discussions, decision-making, possible further elaboration and wider use. Centralised university services contribute to the dissemination of good practices by harmonising support service processes and instructions. Examples of the dissemination of good practices to the entire university are LUT's open science practices and guidelines, degree programme feedback workshops, and Happiness through Health activities originally developed by the LUT Group partner Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. If needed, the university also has the courage to give up practices that no longer provide the desired added value. Internal QMS audits, project partner feedback surveys and the societal interaction steering group are examples of procedures that have been replaced.

Quality culture built by everyone in the LUT community

From the very beginning, the underpinning idea has been to incorporate quality management and continuous improvement into the normal activity of the university. Aligned with that idea and LUT's quality policy, all members of the university community – both personnel and students – bear quality management responsibilities related to their position.

The university's quality culture is based on the university's values – especially on the courage to find new ways of working open-mindedly. The atmosphere at the university is open and the administration easy to approach. All university community members are invited to participate and influence through various channels, e.g. strategy and audit surveys, open discussions on LUT's intranet stream, open feedback and proposals, and a monthly mood tracker.

The student guilds and student union guard students' interests and, if needed, bring issues up with degree programmes or the university management in regular meetings. Course feedback is one of the most important student feedback channels and students are encouraged to give it, as it significantly influences the development of courses. Student guilds play a key role in collecting and processing course feedback in all degree programmes.

External stakeholders are invited to contribute to university activities and development in many ways. Research project partners participate in planning the project in steering group meetings, and thesis employers in the implementation of theses. The University Board and Advisory Board have an important position in the university management. LUT's professors of practice and many other representatives of external stakeholders participate in the university's activities, e.g. through the Junior University and Firmatiimi activities.

QMS in operation and under continuous development

LUT's QMS works well when the university meets its objectives and is able to develop its functions continuously. LUT has improved its performance by several indicators, e.g. research

activities and attractiveness of degree education. At the same time, the operational environment is changing fast and the objectives are to be revised more often. That sets requirements for the QMS, which is continuously developed in close interaction with the functions of the university.

The QMS meets its objectives by being both systematic and flexible. It ensures the systematic implementation of procedures while being revised according to the changes in the operational environment and university functions. The QMS, described in the regularly updated quality manual and on the LUT intranet, has been developed based on

- strategic development
- development of university functions
- good practices disseminated into wider use
- international quality standards applied at LUT
- feedback from external assessments
- requirements of external stakeholders, e.g. MoEC.

For example, doctoral education procedures, monitoring and support of the progress of studies, and career services have been revised according to the latest FINEEC audit recommendations. The Steering Committee of the Quality Management and Environmental Management Systems headed by the Vice-Rector for Education is responsible for the development of the QMS and update of the quality manual. The University Rector finally approves the amendments of the QMS.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Quality management as part of everyday activities at the university	Strengthening the role of external stakeholders in LUT operations and development
A goal-oriented organisational culture supporting quality management	Scattered monitoring data and data availability still largely based on manual work
Commitment to external evaluations to ensure continuous improvement	Decision-making documentation not yet comprehensively transparent and available

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The strong integration of the quality system into the management system contributes effectively to the university's development

The quality system covers the university's core duties and includes prerequisites, responsibilities, routines and processes for quality assurance, assessment and quality development of education, research, societal interaction and university services.

Based on the audit visit, the self-assessment and the information available on the university's intranet, the audit team concludes that the quality system is 'alive' and not a pure administrative product. The university has demonstrably translated the four phases of the PDCA cycle into practical action in the majority of the university's processes. The quality work is characterised by well-described systematics—goal-setting and communication of goals, clear areas of responsibility and routines, description of monitoring and feedback systems (e.g. via the intranet feedback channel) and decision-making processes and the implementation of development priorities.

Important parts of the quality system are the university's routines for internal and external assessment and benchmarking, which also include the international research assessments. Here, the university's work with international accreditations also contributes to the quality assurance and development of a significant number of degree programmes. Furthermore, the audit visit confirmed that the application of the quality system makes it easier for the university to identify development needs in a goal-oriented way.

LUT's quality culture is open, inviting and participatory

During the audit visit, the university's quality culture was often expressed in terms of "improvement culture" and the desire to constantly improve, and that this is a culture that permeates all the university's activities. The quality culture was often referred to as the university's values and the fact that the quality culture was strategy-driven. It was clear that the quality culture could be linked to the staff and students' commitment to the university's profile and strategic development. The general commitment to the quality work and the strategy could not be interpreted by the audit team in any other way than that the quality culture is inviting, participatory and open to both staff and students. On the other hand, the university could stimulate and utilise the commitment even more by systematising the work of sharing and discussing ideas and good practices within the higher education community. Furthermore, the audit team recommends that the university to a greater extent involve the international students in the university's quality work, as discussed in Section 1.1. If LUT aims at attracting more international students, especially for long-term stays in Finland, HEI should more actively encourage this group to participate in shaping their educational institution as well, which could also make integration in Finland easier. The university should enquire systematically about the reasons for the non-participation of international students and act according to the results.

External stakeholders could be more involved in the evaluation and development of the quality system

The maintenance and development of the university's quality system is the responsibility of the rector together with the Steering Committee of the Quality Management and Environmental Management Systems. The quality system is intended to operate for a long time and has so far been updated several times in accordance with operational changes and new external recommendations, such as the latest FINEEC audit recommendations. The quality system as a whole is developed by taking part in FINEEC's recurring national evaluations. The university could, to a greater extent, involve external stakeholders in the continuous development of its quality system.

All in all, the audit team was in many ways impressed by how LUT works in a systematic and target-oriented manner and how it engages its staff, students and stakeholders in the development of the university. LUT knows what it wants to achieve and how, how to measure its success and use the information to further improve its activities.