

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Högskolans självvärdering

Basis and procedures for quality management

Quality at the University of Eastern Finland refers to the appropriateness of the university's activities to achieve a high level of quality and impact in education and research. Quality work and continuous development are an integral part of strategic management and the university's activities.

The Quality Policy is the university's policy on the objectives, principles, and responsibilities for quality.

The UEF Board is responsible for the university's quality principles and policies. The Leadership Group acts as the university's quality management team and the Rectors are responsible for quality work in line with their own division of labour. Deans of faculties, heads of departments and units, and heads of university services are responsible for the performance and quality of their own functions.

The university's Quality Group is responsible for developing and guiding the practical quality work. The university's quality coordinators and people in charge of quality in the faculties and units work together with staff and students on day-to-day quality work.

The university has long collaborated in quality work with other national and international universities (YUFE) and campus cities, for example through various quality-related projects.

A quality university culture means a university community atmosphere that supports quality. A culture of quality is reflected in the commitment of staff and students to their work and studies, working together in accordance with the values and objectives of the university, and following common practices. Based on feedback from customers and continuous evaluation, the activities are developed and good practices are effectively disseminated within the university.

The development of the university's activities is based on the systematic use and analysis of various indicators and feedback systems describing activities and results, as well as on audits and other evaluations of activities. Quality management is a way of ensuring that the university's practices are appropriate, justified, and managed.

The university's activities and development are based on the principle of continuous development

Plan - Do - Check -Act/Improve.



Figure 8 High-quality activities at UEF

Quality management as part of leadership

One of the overarching themes of the university's strategy is continuous development.

The purpose of strategic management and operational management is to implement the university's strategy and processes and to improve their quality, as well as ensuring that the university's activities are proactive and based on continuous analysis of the operating environment. Quality management is an essential part of strategic management. The quality system ensures that the university's strategic objectives are met. Quality work supports the

achievement of the strategic objectives of the vision defined in the university's strategy and the continuous development of its activities. Leadership Group work is integrated into the university's planning, development, and reporting processes.

The university's management system and organisation have been reformed, for example by clarifying the division of responsibilities within the deanery. In addition to a dean, the faculties have deputy deans for teaching and research, the units have appointed persons responsible for teaching and research, and the division of responsibilities between faculties and departments has been clarified. Strengthening the management system will enable more systematic monitoring of the quality of operations and addressing areas for improvement.

The university's key functions are integrated into the management system. The Deans lead the Faculty Councils and the Academic Rector leads the Council of Teaching and Guidance. The heads of the independent and service institutions are involved in various bodies.

Knowledge management has been improved by developing strategic indicators and their monitoring through the introduction of new monitoring tools. Quality management has been better linked to strategic management through the development of the management review and internal audit processes, and management has been actively involved in their development. The link between strategic and operational management and quality management is described in more detail in the following image.

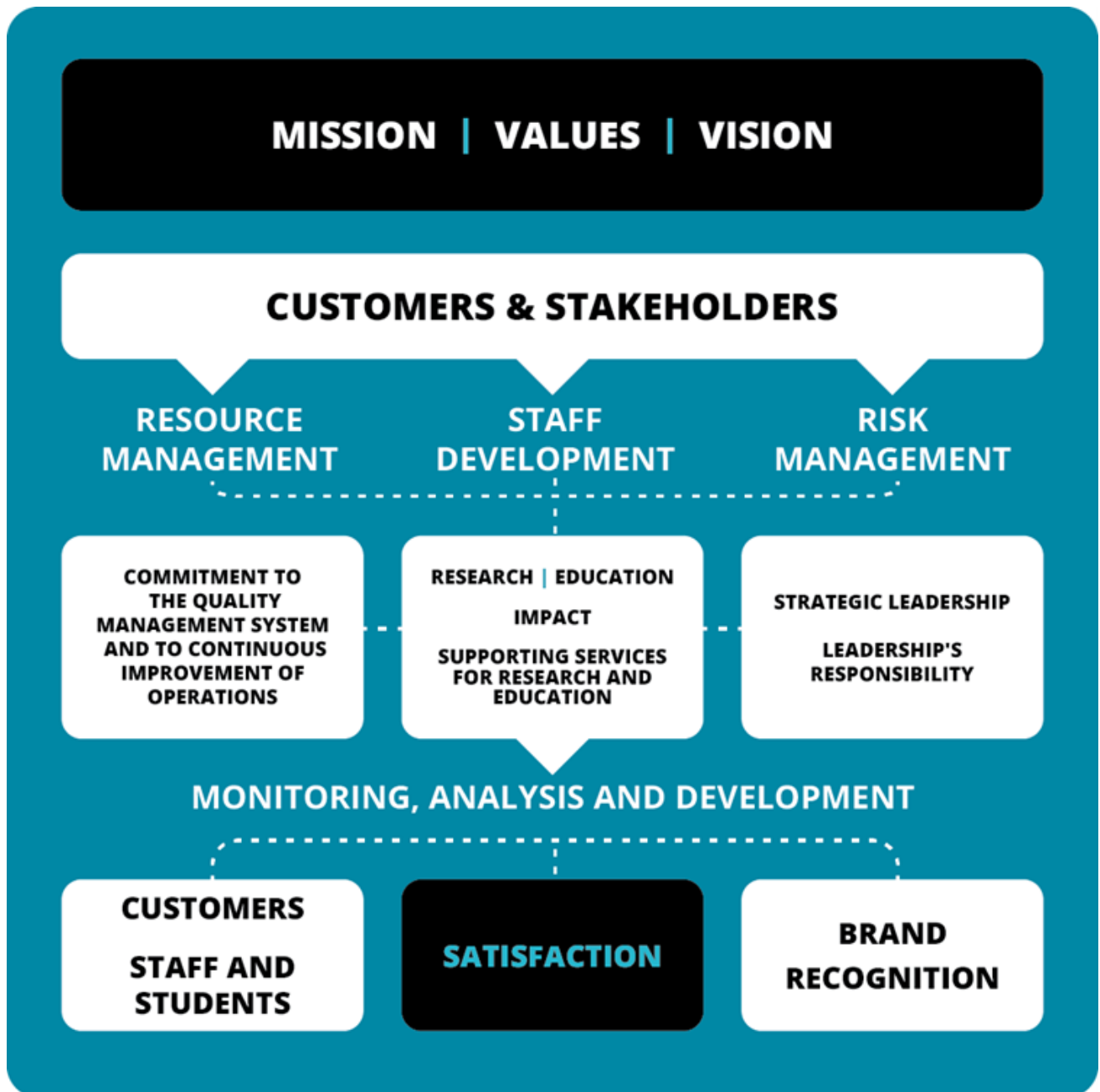


Figure 9 Strategic leadership, performance management and quality

The Quality Group includes staff representation from faculties and departments and student representation from the Student Union. Students are involved in quality management in various institutions and development projects. The university’s management meets regularly with the Student Union and student associations. Doctoral researchers have representatives on the Doctoral School’s management team. Students and post-doctoral researchers have the opportunity to provide feedback on activities and processes through a variety of channels.

University services carry out a service survey approximately every two years. The feedback from the survey is used to develop activities. For example, in the 2022 survey, the majority of feedback was about the findability of information in both the Heimo Services and Yammer. Based on feedback, a Yammer newsletter was piloted during spring 2022 to find relevant information in

the Current News and Students groups.

Strengths

Quality management is part of the university's strategic management and governance

Developing management reviews and internal audits to support management, and the university's leadership has actively participated in their development

A network of quality managers and quality actors at different levels with clear responsibilities and tasks. Information flows quickly from one level to another.

Enhancement areas

Developing strategic indicators and reporting on quality and risk management to support strategic management

Closer integration of quality management documentation with other documentation of the university's activities (knowledge management)

Making quality work more visible, what it means in everyday life for both staff and students, including through the development of communication about quality work and better dissemination of good practice.

3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Quality management is an essential part of UEF's strategic management

UEF's quality system functions with a well-documented, thoughtful procedure for planning and decision making in place. The UEF quality policy is described with key principles and published on the UEF intranet and its public web pages both in Finnish and English. The idea of UEF as an organization that works in a quality manner, evaluating practices with data and using those evaluations to drive future practices, was evident across multiple units through different interviews. The UEF board is responsible for the university's quality principles and policies.

Based on the interviews, university staff recognize the connection of their own work with the goals and strategy of UEF. The audit team heard several times of staff knowing the strategic goals and how they are related to their work. All interviewed groups were able to discuss the university strategy, which was very impressive.

The audit team considers it to be a strength that UEF has based the development of the quality system on feedback from the previous FINEEC audit (2016) together with the university's own development needs. A positive view emerged from the SAR and interviews on how the university included feedback into the quality management system. One example is how UEF reformed the quality organisation to reflect the current organisation, and another is the steps to streamlining the quality system. The quality system being based on plan-do-check-act/improve cycle to ensure continuous development is a well-functioning model for a university's quality management

system. The audit team recognizes the enhancement activities listed in the SAR as strengths, and in the interviews a picture of visible leadership that was engaged with the university environment emerged.

UEF's integrated quality management model shows that quality management is an essential part of strategic management at all levels within the university. The quality system is not run as a top-down structure, but instead integrated into the structure of the university. Each level of the organization has staff that recognizes their responsibilities for quality work in their area. At UEF, the integration of quality management into the whole organization was emphasized, and the audit team considers this structure a strength. At the same time, it was shared in interviews that quality work could be made more visible. For example, the university could more often describe how the loop is closed in the plan-do-check-act/improve cycle. In particular, the part "improve" of the loop could be made more visible. This way the staff, students, and external stakeholders could see that quality work has an effect on making changes. The audit team thus encourages UEF to make quality work related to quality assurance more visible, including its results and usage in improvement.

Leaders from the rectorate to departments use both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate core activities and make data-based decisions in a knowledge-management informed framework. This work is largely performed independently within each unit but is guided at the university level through the quality group. Given the distributed nature of the quality system, having a group that can facilitate coordination and perform quality assurance work on quality analyses is important. The quality group is composed of the people responsible for quality work in units across campus. The role and responsibility of the quality group will be further discussed in section 3.3.

The quality system supports the implementation of UEF's strategy

With a well-known strategy and a strong will and engagement for its implementation, a solid basis is formed for a more strategic approach for the university to steer and guide the university towards its vision. The audit visit observed that a culture among staff and students striving for quality permeates the organization. Internal audits with strong leadership engagement were cited as being useful for quality work and linked to strategic management. Individuals were able to cite examples of using data, often a mix of qualitative and quantitative, to make decisions and strive for quality. While data is used by people in charge of quality in the faculties and units, more systematic use of strategic indicators, either quantitative or qualitative, would ensure a more effective implementation of the strategy and facilitate the university community moving in a common direction.

To expand on the recommendation to make quality work more visible, the audit team recommends developing strategic indicators supporting the profile of the university and using these indicators in strategic management – an idea already mentioned in the SAR as an

enhancement area. These strategic indicators will need to be carefully crafted to support the multidisciplinary approach and varied units of the university. The audit team suggests that the indicators should be collaboratively developed so they will be better accepted by the university community and more widely known.