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FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- HEI's self-assessment

Developing a quality system

The university’s quality system has been developed based on the university’s own development needs and feedback from internal and external audits. For example development recommendations from previous FINEEC audit in 2016 have been taken into account in development work. The separate quality manuals for different organisational levels have been abandoned and replaced by a university-level description of the overall quality management system, supplemented by process descriptions and operational guidelines. The quality organisation has been reformed to reflect the current organisation and responsibilities, and tasks have been clarified.

The Steering Group, composed of representatives of the different units from the previous audit, was found to be a good coordinating body for quality work and continued its work as the Quality Group, whose task is to steer and develop the university’s quality work. The Group is made up of representatives from faculties, units, and the Student Union. Quality issues are regularly discussed in faculty and unit management groups and quality groups/teams. Meetings of the university’s people in charge of quality in units are held at regular intervals to inform the units and vice versa about current quality issues discussed in the university Quality Group.

The processes and implementation model for internal audits and management reviews have been developed with a focus on continuous development. The aim is for management reviews and

internal audits to be a genuine support to leadership (knowledge management). In addition to quality management, the internal audits examine the units' own areas for development. Audits can also include university-level themes. Diversity has been a university-level theme for 2020-2022. Audit findings are discussed in faculty and unit management groups and staff meetings, and they are also taken into account in the development of activities.

To integrate quality and risk management more closely into strategic and knowledge management, monitoring indicators and reporting will be developed. The university's feedback systems have been developed to increase feedback. The feedback received is processed, for example, in management reviews.

To disseminate good practices, the university participates in benchmarking activities in national and international networks. Benchmarking events on different themes are also organised within the university. The current themes, for example in 2021, as the number of online and distance education increased because of the coronavirus, a benchmarking webinar was held on the topic 'Quality and good practices in online education', in which good practices in online education in faculties and units were presented. In 2022 university has focused on working life cooperation with the theme 'UEF's recipes for working life and entrepreneurship skills', which presented good practices from departments and student organisations on the topics of 'Subject associations and working life – peer tools and sparring', 'Institutions and developing working life skills', and 'Tools for the productisation of expertise and entrepreneurship'. The webinars were summarised and their presentations are available to university staff. In the future, the good practices highlighted in the benchmarking events will also be compiled on the Quality Management pages of the staff intranet.

In particular, during the coronavirus period, effective Yammer and Teams groups were formed within the university to share knowledge, peer support and good practice on different topics such as teaching. This also supports a sense of community.

The university implemented a benchlearning process in partnership with the University of Jyväskylä on the theme of Continuous Learning and Stakeholder Collaboration. During the visits, a wide-ranging exchange of views, experiences, and good practices were shared on the chosen theme. Benchlearning was seen as a good way to go deeper than benchmarking, to share knowledge, and to learn from the good practices of other organisations.

The YUFE project develops and shares common approaches between the participating universities. UEF co-leads Work Package 2 Quality Plan. For example this WP has planned quality measures for upcoming YUFE Minors.

A quality system to support the core tasks

The university's quality system is based on sound organisation, management and decision-making. The quality system is built on the strategy, the strategic programmes based on it, and the defined profile areas for research and education. The objectives of research, education, and

social impact are set out in the strategic programmes. The university's quality system supports the achievement of these objectives.

The university monitors the implementation of the strategy through key performance indicators derived from the strategy, which also serve as indicators for quality management. The university also monitors national common indicators for universities and its position in international rankings.

Quality management assessment procedures are widely used and assessments, audits and feedback systems are linked to the university's strategic management and governance.

Inclusive quality culture

The university's quality management procedures have made more staff and students feel involved and improved awareness of quality work. The Quality Group's role in guiding and supporting practical quality work and its development has extended the scope of quality work to the university level, partly due to its broad composition from faculties, units, and students. The culture has changed to a more collaborative and interdepartmental approach, also in terms of quality. Staff and students are involved in institutional and performance development groups and participate in internal audits as internal auditors, and as interviewees in audits.

Stakeholder participation in quality work

UEF key partners are the cities that our campuses are located in, state research institutes, Kuopio University Hospital, universities of applied sciences, business and industry. Experts of our university participate, together with stakeholders, in the work of various working groups and in the generation of knowledge needed to support decision-making in society. The university promotes and supports broad-based innovation activities and the emergence of business activities especially in Eastern Finland. Cooperation with stakeholders also takes place in various projects relating to education and R&D projects. Studies in several of the university's academic subjects include practical working life training.

Representatives of stakeholders participate in the planning, evaluation and development of the activities of the university's units. Stakeholders are represented in, for example, the university's Board and the University Collegiate Body and in various planning, steering and management groups. Experts representing business, industry and the public sector, as well as the university's alumni, are made use of as experts and trainers.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Management is committed to quality work and its development, and there is a wide range of quality expertise in the services	Developing the use of quality work in immediate supervision
An active and functioning Quality Group, which guides the university's quality work and its development, with a broad representation of the university's faculties, departments and student union	Allocating sufficient resources to quality work in the units alongside other work

Quality management assessment procedures are widely used and assessments, audits, and feedback systems are linked to the university’s strategic management and governance

Expertise and knowledge transfer when staff change or retire

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Assessment of the audit team

UEF’s quality system is participatory and open

The quality culture at UEF is participatory and open, and it is a clear strength of the university. The audit team observed that the quality system functions as a distributed network of individuals. People in charge of quality are located across the university in a diversity of units, integrated into the leadership of each unit, and coordinated via representatives who meet as the quality group. The audit team considers the distributed and integrated nature of the quality system as a strength, as it facilitates engagement by a wide variety of the university community.

Staff, students, and external stakeholders participated in the quality system in a purposeful manner. However, some interviews revealed that there were concerns about how external stakeholders who lacked personal connections to staff at the university could be engaged in the quality system. The audit team suggests both maintaining the current quality system's distributed organizational system while enhancing the ability of external stakeholders to participate in relevant aspects of university operations.

The quality system is in place, but could be improved with increased coordination

The distributed nature of the quality system allows for the system to recognize and adapt to the context-dependent nature of quality work. However, this distributed nature of the quality system runs the risk of having widely divergent standards, applications, and indications. This were observed during the audit visit.

The operation of UEF's quality system could be improved by collecting experiences, identifying common problems, and sharing more good practices. The system should also recognize the diverse nature of the units of the university and work to ensure that there is minimum common standard of practice for all units. The quality group seems like the optimal team at university to take on this call to action. It works as the central meeting point for people in charge of quality in

the faculties and other units. The audit team recommends that the operations of the quality group should be strengthened, they meet more often, and be more involved in facilitating quality work at the university. The quality team could also implement internal and external benchlearning activities by utilizing UEF's existing networks, such as the YUFE network. The quality group could also assist with planning and analysis at the organizational level, which considers UEF’s qualitative and quantitative indicators. The audit team recommends that leadership consider expanding the quality group's role in university strategic planning as well.

The intent of these recommendations is to help the organization further build and enhance its quality system, not convert it to a centralized system strictly controlled by a particular group. The audit team feels that if these recommendations are implemented, the quality system will be better structured to facilitate the development and success of the university in this ever-changing, unpredictable world.