KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF AALTO UNIVERSITY

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3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Strategic management and the quality system are strongly interconnected

Aalto's quality system supports the continuous development of the university's living strategy and core activities (Figure 3). Aalto University's purpose is to shape a sustainable future. Aalto's operations are built on a foundation of high-quality research, education, impact and shared values – responsibility, courage and collaboration. The quality policy sets the principle that everyone works towards this joint purpose. The link between strategic management and the quality system is solid, visible and impactful.

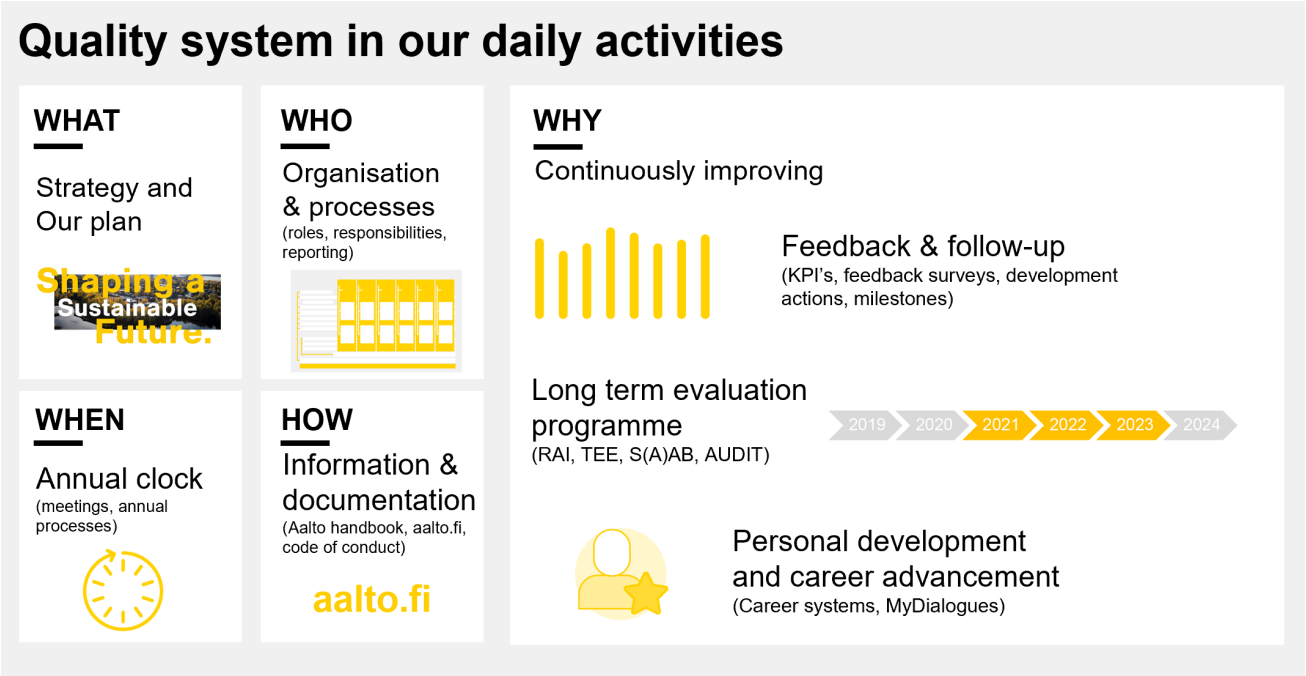

Figure 3. Elements of the quality system at Aalto

Aalto's annual strategic processes, namely the University Preview, University Review and University Dialogue, link the strategy implementation and the quality system together (Figure 4). Aalto's living strategy is continuously developed through these processes. In University Preview, the emerging trends and developments shaping the operating environment are analysed. In University Review, the strategy implementation during the previous year is reviewed. In University Dialogue, targets for the strategy implementation for the upcoming 1+3 years are set. These processes ensure that information from the quality system is used in the management of Aalto. Strategic plans, with indicator targets and development actions, are documented in the university's target agreement, Our plan. The annual clock ensures the timely planning and implementation of key annual management and strategic planning and development actions.

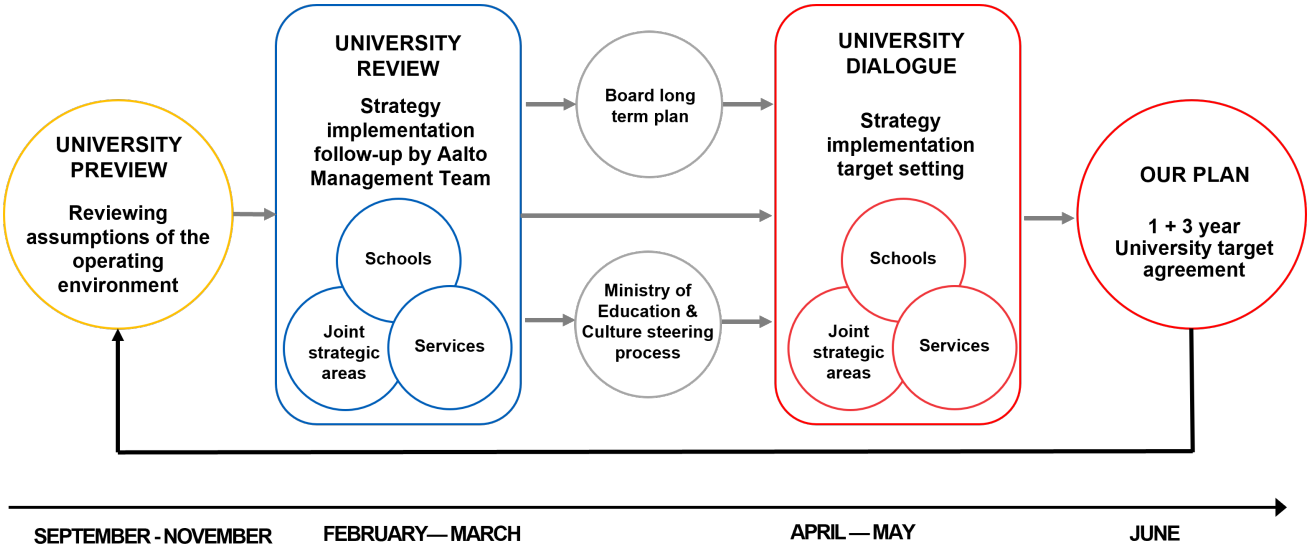

Figure 4. Annual strategic management processes and their interconnections

The implementation of recommendations and feedback from quality evaluations, conducted based on Aalto's long-term evaluation plan, is carefully followed up on through annual strategic processes.

Strategy implementation is monitored based on evidence from the quality system

Based on the recommendations in the latest quality audit (in 2016), the university has made substantial progress in the use of indicators and data in monitoring the implementation of its strategy. For example, in 2019 Aalto adopted a novel living strategy approach that is tailored for a world in motion through an inclusive process in which target setting and review of performance against indicators are integrated into the strategy process.

Clearly defined and systematically maintained Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are used to evaluate research, education, impact and enablers. Aalto's performance at all levels is monitored using accurate, timely and openly accessible data from the KPI dashboard and Aalto Key Information reports, both available on the Power BI cloud service since 2018. This tool is also used to monitor Aalto's human resources and finances. Aalto's KPI Handbook is updated annually during the University Review process based on input from the Aalto community. KPI dashboards are used by the Aalto Management Team (AMT) for trimesterly follow ups (T1, T2, T3) and in schools and steering groups throughout the year.

Aalto has decided to monitor the cross-cutting approaches of its strategy not with numeric metrics but based on milestones. Work is still on-going to improve the interconnections between the strategic cross-cutting approaches and to follow up their implementation in schools and steering groups.

Systematic mechanisms link individual work and Aalto's strategic objectives

The 'My Dialogue' process links the strategic targets of Aalto with the targets of individual staff. This well-functioning process integrates goals, wellbeing and competence development to achieve Aalto's strategic goals. Employees develop personal goals and specify how they are linked to Aalto's priorities, mainly by using the Workday system. Feedback from supervisors ensures that employees receive support during this vital process.

As part of a systematic onboarding process, new employees review their tasks and the goals of their job, get to know Aalto University's way of working and work community, and familiarise themselves with the guidelines linked with their work. The Workday system, a structured onboarding guide and onboarding buddies support this process.

The annually updated Aalto Handbook contains information on the university's shared way of managing and organising its core activities in a uniform manner that meets high standards. The

consistent practical guidelines, operating principles and process descriptions for everyday work constitute the basis for quality work and serve as orientation material for new employees and students.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Annual strategic processes ensure the effective implementation and continuous development of Aalto's living strategy. These processes also foster participatory, transparent and dialogic approaches.	Development work is still needed to better incorporate the planning of services at large into the annual University Dialogue.
Strong commitment of the Aalto community to realising the university's strategy and excellence in its core activities.	Linking structured feedback from the schools and departments to services, as well as KPIs for services, is still needed.
Resource planning and strategic planning are connected in the University Dialogue, where joint plans, targets and resourcing are set for the upcoming 1+3 year period.	Better utilisation of all available digital tools and platforms for more effective community discussion and communication.

3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

The quality system is closely linked with the strategic management

Aalto University's quality policy is public, described on Aalto's intranet and open internet pages. The policy encompasses four themes: 1) pursuit of excellence in all activities, 2) broad community participation towards a common purpose, 3) continuous review and improvement of activities and management and 4) systematic and shared ways to deliver quality and effective activities.

The quality system is the set of electronic tools Aalto uses to implement their quality policy. The senior leadership team and Board demonstrated their strong commitment to the quality policy through their daily implementation of the quality system in strategic management.

Aalto University's annual strategic processes, i.e. University Preview, University Review and University Dialogue, combine the strategy and quality system implementation. Aalto University's living strategy is constantly being developed through these processes. In University Preview,

emerging and development trends shaping the operating environment are analysed. In University Review, strategy implementation during the previous year is examined. In the final phase, University Dialogue, the goals for implementing the strategy are set for the next 1 + 3 (+ 10) years. This process ensures that the information produced by the quality system is used in the university's management.

The SER describes utilising the information produced by the quality system in the higher education institution's management and strategy implementation. Clearly defined and systematically maintained Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are used to evaluate research, education, impact and enablers. Aalto's KPI manual is updated annually in connection with the University Review process based on feedback from the Aalto community.

The quality policy is promoted by utilising the quality system in all daily activities within teaching and learning, research, cross-cutting approaches, impact and enablers across the university. There is good evidence of how Aalto's quality system supports successfully implementing its core duties. Within education, for example, qualitative programme reviews at the school level and quantitative indicators – such as numbers of graduates and postgraduates – are used to feed into objectives for the next four years and future development processes.

The senior leadership team expressed that the University Preview of the annual clock is the most valuable aspect of the quality system for implementing the university's living strategy because it allows them to understand the changes needed by the Aalto community. Similarly, the University Review phase permits the team to reflect on and evaluate how they achieved their plans in the previous year.

Based on the interview with the Board, they monitor Aalto's strategy implementation through a president's review in each of their meetings, in which they learn what is working well and not so well and the performance of core activities. An example of an area that needed improvement was the services resource model, which was brought to the Board's attention. A revised model was devised and ultimately approved. This regular and open communication of information amongst leadership is another key aspect of the successful management of the university.

After the annual Review phase, Aalto management summarises the results using a university template and prepares a tailored package for dissemination to individual schools and departments. This informs the topics that need to be discussed in the University Dialogue phase. It allows staff members to review feedback, including programme reviews. Schools can decide how they will update their action plan, target setting and infrastructure investments.

Numerous measures are in operation to ensure staff members know the connection between their own work and Aalto's strategic objectives

Indeed, there was broad awareness among staff throughout the university of their responsibilities and roles. The predominant mechanism is through Aalto University's biannual My Dialogue

process. This process ensures that community members recognise the connection of their individual goals, well-being and competence development to the university's goals.

Aalto has devised other well-functioning approaches to increase broad awareness of the synergy between their work and the university's strategic objectives. For example, some schools have 'Meet the dean' events five times a year, which provides frequent opportunities for staff to reflect on how their activities and efforts align with Aalto's objectives or how they should be modified accordingly. Another measure is the Aalto Handbook, which details the universal quality system across campus. Individual schools supplement the handbook by providing their own specific information for staff on their webpages.

During audit interviews discussing EDI issues, both students and staff members brought up the need for more systematic measures facilitating a sense of integration and inclusion of more diverse groups into the university operations and culture. This includes international students and points to a need for Aalto to differentiate this large and heterogenous group to ensure their needs are met.