

# AUDIT (FINNISH MODEL)

- Quality Assurance of higher education is one of **the key development areas** in efforts to construct a European Higher Education Area by 2010.
- In Finland the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council has task to audit the Quality assurance system of HEIs and supports HEIs in improvement their quality assurance.

## Purpose of audit

- to ensure that the HEIs have QAS in support of continuous and systematic improvement of operations, that such a system works in according to stated objectives brings about changes and has international credibility.

# The Finnish model

- The Finnish system includes a division of responsibilities between various bodies and institutions,
  - the evaluations of HEIs and degree programmes;
  - student participations, and
  - participation in international co-operation.
- **the HEIs are responsible for their own QA;**
- the Ministry of Education determines the evaluation criteria and procedures used in institutions;
- FINHEEC is responsible for evaluation the quality of education and institutional performance.

# Plan of Audit and Audit manual

Defined (in 2004):

- the aim and objectives of audit,
  - methods,
  - evaluation criteria and
  - follow up procedures.
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- seminars to introduce the audit model to HEIs and other parties
    - to collect their feedback on it with a view to refining the audit procedures and audit manual

## Audit examine the QAS at two levels:

- institutional QA as a whole and;
- QA relating to the HEI's main mission with focus on procedures assuring the quality of degree education in line with ENQA standards.

The main aim of FINHEEC audit is to support universities and polytechnics in their quality management and performance enhancement.

## Objectives

- Supports higher education institutions while they design their own quality assurance and evaluation systems;
- Produces national data enabling international comparison of higher education institutions for policy makers, students, trade and industry; and
- Ascertains legal protection for students through evaluation.

# Evaluation

The evaluations conducted by FINHEEC can be divided into three rough categories:

1. Evaluations of higher education institutions: audits of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, and evaluations for the accreditation of the polytechnics
2. Programme and thematic evaluations
3. Accreditation of professional courses offered by higher education institutions

# Evaluation Processes

The following outline, however, is a basic pattern that most evaluation projects follow:

1. The Council makes a decision on an evaluation and appoints a steering committee.
2. The steering committee makes a proposition to the Council about the composition of an external evaluation team and prepares both a review and project plan.
3. The Council appoints the external evaluation team and approves the project plan.
4. The higher education institution(s) under review compile(s) self-evaluation reports to the external evaluation team.
5. The external evaluation team visits the higher education institutions involved and writes a review report.
6. The review report is published.

# Evaluation Methods

FINHEEC uses a basic evaluation method, which is commonly used in international higher education evaluations, and which corresponds with the Recommendation by the Council of Europe (98/561/EC) of 24 September 1998.

The method consists of four phases:

1. National coordinating body (in Finland FINHEEC)
2. Self-evaluation
3. External evaluation team, including an evaluation Visit
4. Public final report.

# Evaluation Criteria

- Evaluation criteria determine the conditions upon which qualitative characteristics or quantitative parameters are separated from each other. When formulating the criteria, the target of evaluation is divided into smaller components to receive the most multi-faceted and reliable image of the target as possible.
- Evaluation criteria can have **threshold conditions** or be scaled. Threshold conditions have been used in the accreditation of polytechnics and professional courses, while scaled criteria are used in the selection of quality units and centers of excellence.

# Audit process has seven phases:

1. **The HEI registers for an audit.** Each year FINHEEC undertakes four to eight audit. It works with the HEIs to build an overall timetable for audits.
2. **An audit agreement is signed between the HEI and FINHEEC** i.e. how to audit will be carried out, in what time, whether the audit group will be international or domestics and determine the language, how long the audit visit will be; how the audit will be financed and commitment of the auditee to a possible re-audit.
3. **The HEI collects the audit data and other material needed for the audit from its own QAS.** i.e. two basic documents: - basic material for the audit; - material and samples chosen by the HEI in order to substantiate the performance of QAS.
4. **A meeting is arranged to prepare an audit visit.** Three weeks before the audit visit the chair of the audit group and the FINHEEC project manager co-operating the audit pay to visit to the HEI

# Audit process has seven phases:

- 5. The audit group visits the HEI.** The duration of visit is two or three days. The aim of the visit is to verify and complement the information provided by the audit material. The visit is intended as an interactive event contributing to the development of the QAS. The audit group comprises five members (three representing HEIs, one student and one external stakeholder).
- 6. An audit report is prepared.** The report is based on the analyses made and materials collected during the audit process by audit group.
- 7. The results are published, followed by a feedback meeting.** The audit report summarized audit findings and analyze audits in Finnish and English.

# Principles

To ensure quality, FINHEEC has formulated the following six principles to guide all its operations:

1. **Independence:** FINHEEC is independent of educational administration and institutions of higher education when selecting evaluation targets and methods.
2. **Expertise:** The best available Finnish and foreign experts are used in evaluations. Planning and implementation utilize existing evaluation materials and research data. Peer review emblematic of higher education institutions is one way of ensuring expertise. External evaluation groups are independently responsible for the content of the evaluation reports.
3. **Diversity:** Evaluation targets embrace diverse organizations and phenomena and this is reflected in the evaluation approach: methods, which describe the target from various viewpoints, and evaluation strategies, are used. The definition of quality is determined with a view to different disciplines and training sectors. With the help of evaluation by many experts, FINHEEC seeks to utilize the profit gained from shared expertise.

# Principles

- 4. Interaction:** Institutions can influence the selection of targets, methods, and focus of evaluation. People at different evaluation sites and from different interest groups are invited into a dialogue. Thus, evaluation is regarded as a forum where different views and experiences are exchanged.
- 5. Transparency:** Evaluation aims, methods and results are public information and they are recorded in project plans and other documents.
- 6. Impact:** The aim is to provide institutions of higher education and educational policy-makers with tools to understand and improve their policies so that evaluations are seen as useful.

# Responsibility

- The duties and policies of FINHEEC are governed by the Decree 1320/1995 on the Higher Education Evaluation Council and its amendment 465/1998, which stipulate the following duties for the Council:
  1. Assisting institutions of higher education and the Ministry of Education in evaluation.
  2. Conducting evaluation for the accreditation of the polytechnics.
  3. Organizing evaluations of the activities of higher education institutions and evaluations related to higher education policy.
  4. Initiating evaluations of higher education and promote its development.
  5. Engaging in international cooperation in evaluation.
  6. Promoting research on evaluation of higher education, and
  7. Evaluation and recognition of professional courses offered by higher education institutions, and keeping a registry of them.

# Criteria

- Audit of quality assurance system employ a **set of criteria**, with different scales for four different stages of development. There are criteria for an absent, emerging, developing and advances quality assurance system.

## **QA MANUAL**

→ documents: **Organization, Structure and Vision, Mission and Strategies**

- main strategy
- pedagogical strategy
- Research & Development strategy
- IT strategy - information and communication technology for teaching purpose
- Communication strategy
- IT operation strategy

# Main strategy emphasis the following value:

- Cooperativeness
- Professionalism
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- University environmental
- Innovativeness
- Internationality

Instruments and indicators can be:

- Quality description
- External evaluations
- Internal peer review based on the own assessment criteria

# Audit conclusions and follow-up

- Based on the stated audit criteria and principles, the audit team appraises the fitness for purpose and performance of the QAS, issuing recommendations for its improvement and highlighting best practices.

The report records the auditors' conclusion:

- That the auditee has passed the audit; or
- That measured against the audit criteria, the auditee's overall quality assurance system relating to its basic mission had some major shortcoming, which necessitate development measures and subsequent re-auditing.

As a rule, the audits are conducted **at six-year intervals.**

# Development of the audit model

- This model will be under development up to 2007.
- From 2005 to 2007 each auditor and participating HEI will be requested to give feedback on the audit methods and criteria.
- FINHEEC will also discuss the audit model with its international partners.