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**Managing Diversity: Sustainable quality assurance processes**

**Sub-Theme 3: Impact of QA and the effects of external and internal QA: regional perspectives to a shared issue**

Saarilammi, Marja-Liisa & Kekäläinen, Helka  
Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)

**The impact of the first audit round in Finland**

**”Quality does not improve by increasing control, but through the common values”**

**Abstract**

In this paper, we reflect the impact of the QA practices on the operations of HEIs in Finland. FINHEEC has audited all the 49 Finnish Higher Education Institutions by the end on 2011. Prior to the audit, institutions documented and developed comprehensive internal QA systems. Several studies and meta-analysis have been published on the effects the first Finnish audit round. The main data in paper consists of the independent analyses of universities (Ala-Vähälä 2011, Haapakorpi 2011), the meta-analyses of FINHEEC (Moitus 2010, Talvinen 2012) and the follow-up reports of the HEIs where they answer the question: "*How do the effects of QA system show in the activities of the school?*" In addition, we use expert panel -method. The claims have been formulated based on the results of the studies and follow-up reports. We analyse the results of these accounts and discuss what can be learned from the experiences of impact studies from the point of view in the HEIs in Finland.

**Outline**

*The background studies*

All 49 Higher Education Institutions in Finland have been audited once. The Finnish audit model is broad and comprehensive. It includes participation of staff, students and external stakeholders in QA, management of steering of operations, and all basic duties in the institution: degree education, research and arts, interaction with society and support services.

In the midpoint of the first audit round 2005–2011, Moitus (2010) conducted an analysis of all the 19 audits implemented between 2005 and 2008. The analysis showed that the audit reports had a particular focus on management and functional operations. Information about decision making, planning and management have become transparent to all university staff, faculty, students and

other stakeholders. All the HEIs that participated in the audits have improved their strategy work, indicators and management.

The audits have also expanded the quality culture in HEIs. However, the developing a quality culture takes time because it is closely related to values and beliefs which cannot be changed quickly. Combining strategic management and QA processes is one of the key success factors in sustaining quality culture (Loukola & Zhang, 2010, 28). Generally speaking, the attitude of university management towards quality work is usually favourable, while the most critical voices come from the researchers of the universities (Ala-Vähälä 2011). This is one reason, why it is important to pay attention to QA system which provides equal opportunity for all and for different groups within institution to participate and influence the development work of the institution (Talvinen 2012, 74, 75).

According to Haapakorpi (2011), the first cycle audit process affected Finnish HEIs in both positive and negative ways. Operations in the HEIs became more visible and more systematic and the feeling of community grew. This reinforces the culture of continuous quality monitoring and emphasises institutional responsibility for assuring academic standards. On the other hand there has been much evaluation activity over the last few years and therefore, the significance of quality work started to fade during the last stages of auditing first round. Evaluations have also increased the workload of staff and stakeholders in HEIs.

### *Impact in the HEI's QA processes as a result of the audits*

Three years after of every institutional audit FINHEEC sends a request to the institution and asks it to reflect what has happened after the external review. The institutions answers the question: "*How do the effects of QA system show in the activities of the school?*" Based on the follow-up reports, we present in this paper the preliminary results.

It seems that the main categories of the changes as a results of the follow-up inquiry are 1) clarification of management, 2) student participation, 3) relations to stakeholders and 4) developing of the staff and creating a quality culture. The results are as follows:

#### **Clarification of Management**

- Management and steering of operations are integrated
- Management responsibilities have been clarified
- The strategy is more goal oriented
- The management meets the staff regularly
- Common quality policy and values in the HEI
- Indicators has been reduced and simplified

#### **Students participation**

- Students are members of the quality teams
- Wellbeing of the students have received special attention
- Students have an opportunity to perform exams more easily, for example *exam aquarium*, which allows to write exam at the appropriate moment
- Course feedback has been improved (electronic inquiries, self-evaluation of learning and face to face discussions with a teacher)
- The intranet to doctoral students of their own has been created

- Alumni co-operation has developed
- Targeted communication for international students has strengthened

### **Relations with stakeholders**

- Communication with stakeholders has deepened
- Working life feedback has been introduced
- Co-operation with other HEIs has increased
- Sharing of the best practices

### **The development of the staff and creating quality culture**

- Quality training for the staff
- Best initiatives awarded annually
- Collective strategic thinking has developed
- Working together and trust between different actors has increased
- Development and learning culture has improved

### *Conclusions*

It seems that enhancement-led evaluation approach has been accepted and applied very well by the HEIs in Finland. One reason for this might be the fact that HEIs have been involved in planning of the audit model from the start as well as in carrying out the audits as peer review evaluations (Talvinen 2012, 75). In Finland the regional policy stresses the profiling of the HEIs and at the same time there is going on large mergers between the universities and the universities of applied sciences. The structural development likely means increasing co-operation between HEIs in the quality assurance in Finland. In the long run, may be that the QA system will become more uniform also internationally.

According to follow-up reports of the Finnish higher education institutions the external reviews have had a major impact to HEI's development work. Quality work is no more an alien part from the normal actions. It has integrated to all actions taking place in the institution at all levels. Quality assurance has become synonymous with developing operations. Many HEIs emphasize that quality assurance does not improve by increasing control, but through common values. Responsibility, trust and creativity in daily activities are the key values to balanced quality assurance in HEIs.

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Affiliation:

Dr Marja-Liisa Saarilammi

Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)

Dr Helka Kekäläinen

Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)