I. Introduction

Åbo Akademi is a national university for the Swedish speaking population in Finland. The university has a special responsibility to provide for the university-level research and educational needs of the country’s Swedish language population. It is its task to ensure that research is carried out and higher education offered in those subject fields that are of particular importance for Swedish social and cultural life in Finland. The goal is both to enable its Swedish-speaking students to enjoy freedom of choice in academic pursuits and professional careers on a par with that available to Finnish-speaking students, and to meet the demand from central sectors of society for academically educated staff capable of serving the Finland-Swedish population. In education, a concern to foster the country’s bilingualism is emphasised and Finnish-speaking students are welcomed and supported.

Åbo Akademi University is on the threshold of a new era. The institution has never undergone as many reforms as it is doing right now. Some of the reforms are a consequence of adjusting the Finnish higher education system to the Bologna Process whilst others are a part of a program restructuring the management of universities. The period of transformation reaches a peak in 2005 when several programs are moving from a planning mode to completion. The most overwhelming reforms are:
- a shift to a new salary system based on individual achievements
- the introduction of a two-tier degree system based on the ECTS
- the introduction of an electronic study guidance system
- a large-scale alteration of the institutions management and decision-making structures.

To achieve the goals set in the Bologna Process Åbo Akademi University must reorganize several of its core functions. Taking these facts into consideration it’s easy to understand the institution’s interest in participating in the EUA Quality Culture Project. Åbo Akademi University has come a long way in planning and introducing new structures for degrees, study programs and administrative functions. Still excellent results will only be achieved if the staff and students get behind the reforms. Creating a quality culture is therefore a top priority for the university. The primary objective for taking part in this project was hence to engage in discussions about elements necessary for generating a culture of quality enhancement amongst staff and students. Based on these discussions an action plan for a quality assurance (QA) system was to be made.

Another objective with the project was to get an insight in how universities representing different cultures understand the concept of quality, quality assurance and quality culture. One of the main reasons of creating QA systems is to facilitate and improve international cooperation. Only by knowing how the concept of quality is understood in other countries is it possible to build a QA system that can give the right answers to possible international partners.
II. National and institutional context

New legal structure
All Finnish universities are publicly funded, steered by the Ministry of Education and obliged by national decrees. In 2004 the University Act was amended. The most important reform was to introduce a two-tier degree structure with obligatory bachelor’s degree. The Bologna-compatible system included all fields of study, except medicine and dentistry. The national credit system based on study weeks was replaced by a system based directly on the ECTS. At the same time a new Government Decree on University Degrees was issued, which in detail defines the implications of the University Act for the bachelor, master and doctoral level. The Act and Decree came into force on August 1st, 2005.

Universities must create QA systems
The official statements of the Bologna follow-up meetings have emphasized the role of quality assurance in the procedure of establishing a European Area for Higher Education. Similarly with other nations Finland has invested in developing this sector. As a consequence all universities are obliged to develop quality assurance systems according to the principles stated in the Bologna documents. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) has recently set up a program for auditing the quality assurance systems of all universities. The program starts this year and will be completed before 2010.

Current situation at Åbo Akademi University
During the last two years staff from the university has been engaged in actions preparing the introduction of the two-tier system. Every scientific field has had a national co-ordination group that has created a framework for the degrees. Based on these guidelines the reform has been planned at faculty and departmental level. All courses were re-evaluated with the help of core analysis and the average workload for the students was calculated for all courses. The curriculum for each subject, except psychology, is now planned on a 180 ECTS (bachelor) + 120 ECTS (master) base. An average student should achieve 60 ECTS a year. The academic year is from August 1st, 2005 divided into 4 periods (8-10 weeks) with a one-week long break between periods for examinations. All courses are planned in such a way that an average student will get 15 ECTS per period.

What the university hasn’t developed is a QA system. At present the use of QA measures differs from faculty to faculty and subject to subject. Some have very advanced techniques for evaluating results whilst others haven’t prioritized this sector. Because of the new system with FINHEEC audits the university must ensure that every unit can fulfil certain minimum standards for QA. In other word a system that produce information about the quality of the activities must be introduced on all levels within the university.
III. The SWOT analysis

As described in previous chapters the transformation of the study programs have taken place and now the university is concentrating on improving the structures steering the planning and implementation processes. One of the most important factors in this development is the creation of a QA system without gaps. Therefore the university decided to focus its SWOT-analysis on this sector.

**Strengths**

When trying to carry through a reform of the QA processes at the University there are a number of strengths to take advantage of. Features on national level are the clear structure of the education system, the similar organisation of the Finnish universities and the support from the FINHEEC. A clear structure makes the system easy to comprehend and therefore it’s easier to plan reforms and explain how reforms will affect staff and students. A similar organisation makes it possible to implement good praxis from other universities without a large modification process. FINHEEC has an important role providing information and education, and setting frames for what should be expected from a QA system at a university.

At Åbo Akademi University languages and computers play a key role. Amongst the staff and the students a great majority understands English and there is also a big interest in learning other languages. This gives the University an advantage as news of new development in all areas reach the institution quite fast. When it comes to computers the good knowledge in using them enables the institution to invest in new computer-based systems in education and administration. The cost (money, time) of teaching people to use new systems is low.

Last but not least Åbo Akademi University is a small institution which enables an active flow of information between the different parts. The members of the staff are usually acquainted with each other which result in a fluent and effective administration. Moreover the barrier for students to contact teachers and professors is very low.

**Weaknesses**

There hasn’t been any extra funding from the Ministry of Education for introducing a QA system at the Finnish Universities. Investments in QA are hence only possible by relocating resources from other areas of the administrative body of the institution. To carry through the reform at Åbo Akademi University will be difficult without the possibility of investing in additional personnel.

The other aspect is closely linked to the first problem. Even with additional personnel introducing a new QA structure would demand an effort from the regular staff. The thought of spending more time on administrative tasks is not a popular one. Without additional funding the teachers and professors would have to take an even larger responsibility. The opposition will be more intense right now because of the vast amount of reforms taking place. Another problem concerning the implementation is to get the students actively involved in the assessment process.
Opportunities
The fact that QA has been emphasized in the communiqués of the Bologna Process is important. This has forced the Ministry of Education to regard the area in a more thorough way in the development strategies for the university sector. The possibility that more budget funds are allocated to the area must be considered quite good. At the same time it makes all the actors in the university field realize the importance of developing the internal QA processes. Thereby the attitude towards implementing of a QA system can become more positive.

Cooperation on the international level has developed standards and guidelines in the area of QA. These documents have been of considerable help when planning the QA system for the institution. It is very likely that this cooperation will get even more intense in the future. Hence the universities can count on getting support from the international organisations.

The fact that all the Finnish universities, with similar administrative structure, must create QA systems will facilitate the internal process. Models created at other institutions can be adopted without large scale modifications. Everything mustn’t be created from a clean sheet of paper.

Threats
The amount of reforms in combination with rigid result demands might lead to a situation where the personnel haven’t got the time, the energy or the motivation to engage in developing a QA system. Without the help of the staff and students there is no chance of building a functioning system that would fulfil the conditions stated in the Certificate Audit Handbook.

The other threat is if the university has to cut costs. If such a situation occurs the funding would have to be allocated to the institutions primary missions.
**ACTION PLAN 2005-2007**  
**ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Timetable</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Measures of success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Introducing a QA system that fulfil the requirements for the FINHEEC Certificate Audit and hence make it possible for Åbo Akademi University to be an even more active player on the international field of higher education. | 2005-2007 | Current situation:  
The system must be developed using existing human and monetary resources.  
At the annual budget negotiations rector has allocated funds for QA. One person from the administration has been assigned to plan and coordinate measures taken in this area.  
A Quality Board with students, teachers and administrators as members has been working with QA matters since 1997.  
The responsibility for monitoring and developing quality in all sectors is officially assigned to the first Vice Rector. Vice Rector is the chair of the Quality Board.  
The responsibility of the Faculty Board regarding quality and QA is defined in the regulations of the university.  
Changes to be introduced:  
The responsibility of the Faculty regarding QA to be more emphasized. Vice Dean designated to manage the introduction of standardized QA measures.  
Faculty Evaluation Board to monitor quality on subject level.  
Students to take more responsibility for developing the courses and study programmes. | External indicators:  
Passing the FINHEEC Certificate Audit  
Good reviews in other external evaluations  
Increasing number of joint programmes and joint degrees with other European universities.  
Increasing number of international BA, MA or PhD level students  
More funding from the Ministry of Education and FINHEEC to engage in international benchmarking projects. |
## IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2005-2007
**ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Steps to overcome obstacles</th>
<th>Financial and human resources</th>
<th>Indicators for measuring results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improve the quality of all courses given at the university.</td>
<td>Give the students better possibilities to take part in course development by introducing electronic course evaluation for every course they participate in. Some of the questions will be the same for the entire university.</td>
<td>The technical development of a system demands expert knowledge. To obtain experts necessary the university will have to allocate resources for this project.</td>
<td>The Quality Board included the expenses for the project in the Board’s yearly request for budget funds.</td>
<td>Rector has allocated additional funding in the budget negotiations.</td>
<td>Reviews of the average results from the standardized questions in the course evaluation form. Results from student polls especially measuring student involvement in developing courses and study programs. Evaluation results from the Faculty Evaluation Boards and from external evaluation panels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing Faculty Evaluation Boards for continuous monitoring of course evaluation results.</td>
<td>Fading interest from students to take part in course evaluations.</td>
<td>To incorporate the idea of evaluating selected courses will require the students to fill in a course evaluation. No evaluation, no ECTS from the specific course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance from teachers against giving others than the staff involved in the course the right to examine the course evaluations.</td>
<td>Creating an atmosphere which inspires the teachers to discuss pedagogic and didactic topics. A reduced number of people get the right to read evaluations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Faculty and Student Union to name Board members.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## IMROVEMENT PLAN 2005-2007
ÁBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Steps to overcome obstacles</th>
<th>Financial and human resources</th>
<th>Indicators for measuring results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve the routines for internal development within all units of the university. The goal is to have units, which planning and decision-making processes are transparent, democratic and where everybody knows their responsibilities.</td>
<td>A web-based matrix will be introduced for each unit. In the matrix the unit’s performance and working methods will be presented. The matrix shall also include a list of ongoing projects with the aim of improving the unit. In the matrix there will be a short presentation of the project, a timetable and the name of the project coordinator.</td>
<td>Realization of the project requires a considerable input from the staff, which already is under a great deal of pressure. Lack of engagement from unit leaders. Lack of democracy when the matrix is created.</td>
<td>The document must be implemented gradually. The unit leaders must be convinced of the benefits of having a up-to-date document. The instructions on how to create the document must ensure that all members of the unit can contribute and influence the outcome.</td>
<td>The Quality Board will design the matrix. Vice Deans will monitor the development in each of the faculties. Rector can stimulate the development by granting extra funding to units with well documented processes.</td>
<td>The strategy document for the university defines goals for a long list of activities. External evaluation focusing on transparency in planning and decision-making. The university is performing staff polls every second year asking about e.g. work place democracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2005-2007
### ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Steps to overcome obstacles</th>
<th>Financial and human resources</th>
<th>Indicators for measuring results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Creating a new management structure to better incorporate QA as a</td>
<td>Enhanced role for Vice Deans as they will become in charge of QA activities within the Faculty.</td>
<td>A reform of the administrative structure within the university (spring 2005) became more radical than expected and created a situation of uncertainty for the further development of the QA plan.</td>
<td>There must be a decision within the University to clarify if the selected plan of action still should be put into practice or if there should be some changes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is still possible for Vice Deans to take the strategic position planned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility for the administrative leaders of the Faculty.</td>
<td>Vice deans will also form the core of a new Management Board with the task of creating a long-term strategy for QA activities at the University.</td>
<td>Faculty Evaluation Boards are to fulfil their mission by examining the electronic course evaluations and the matrixes. If these projects are not implemented successfully, the work of the Boards will be more difficult and probably less effective.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internal and external evaluations focusing on strategic planning and management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2005-2007
**ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Steps to overcome obstacles</th>
<th>Financial and human resources</th>
<th>Indicators for measuring results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. A University should have a vivid debate on questions concerning quality. One goal is to increase the involvement of the staff and the students in processes where the quality aspect gets attention.</td>
<td>The University will, in addition to external evaluations ordered by the Ministry of Education and the FINHEEC, continue to initiate external evaluations of its own. Evaluation panels will be appointed to carry out small-scale assignments where interviews and group discussions should be an emphasized working method. The units will get the opportunity to engage in benchmarking projects with one or several national or international partners.</td>
<td>With the current level of the performance agreement, the opportunities for the staff to really engage in quality projects are limited. The amended University Act introduced a restriction of the length of the studies at a Finnish University. The time limit can reduce the willingness of students to engage in quality enhancing projects.</td>
<td>A long-term strategy must be developed and given publicity. It’s essential that information about the evaluation process and a schedule for each evaluation can be presented well in advance. Thereby the unit’s staff and students can prepare for the event and participate more actively. QA officials must make an extra effort to secure that benchmarking initiatives from the units can be fulfilled.</td>
<td>The funding granted to the Quality Board make it possible to carry out 1-2 small-scale, external evaluations per year. Rector will allocate funding for 1-2 national or international benchmarking projects per year.</td>
<td>The amount of internal development projects generated from benchmarking projects or evaluation rapports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>