Audits of Quality Assurance Systems of Finnish Higher Education Institutions

Audit Manual for 2005–2007

FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION
EVALUATION COUNCIL

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Preface

Quality assurance of higher education is seen to constitute one of the key development areas in efforts to construct a European Higher Education Area by 2010. European countries are developing their own national solutions for evaluating and demonstrating the quality of degrees in line with the objectives of the Bologna process.

After consultations with the Finnish Ministry of Education and the universities and polytechnics, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) launched a project for auditing the quality assurance systems of higher education institutions (HEIs) and thereby supporting the HEIs in improving their quality assurance. The purpose of auditing is to ensure that the HEIs have quality assurance systems in support of continuous and systematic improvement of operations, and that such a system works according to stated objectives, brings about change and has international credibility.

In addition to auditing, FINHEEC disseminates related information, organises seminars on the auditing of quality assurance systems in co-operation with the HEIs, and provides auditor training.

The Berlin Conference of Ministers of Education in 2003 invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)[1] and European higher education co-operation bodies to prepare European standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education for the Bergen Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education. The report submitted to the ministerial conference puts forwards proposals for European co-operation, principles of national quality assurance, best practices of HEI quality assurance audits or comparable procedures, and general standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

The auditing and development of quality assurance systems are in the best interest of the HEIs. Quality assurance forms part of management, strategic work and internal performance management in HEIs. Quality assurance generates quality-related information on education and degrees, which benefits society at large, taxpayers and employers, as well as HEI staff, students and applicants. Effective quality assurance, which comprises both quality management and quality enhancement, also contributes to students' rights and their opportunities for participating in the development of education.

[1] In November 2004 the General Assembly transformed the Network into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Analytical description and systematic evaluation of QA systems make it easier for HEIs to convince their national and international partners about the quality of their education provision, also making it more attractive for students.

The audit model presented in this manual, which has been developed in co-operation with representatives of the Finnish universities and polytechnics and their students, is founded in the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, which is the universally accepted approach in Finland. The planning of the model has also been informed by the ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

In spring 2005, FINHEEC piloted the audit methods and criteria. Feedback from the pilot institutions and auditors has been used in the preparation of the audit manual and audit procedure. Audits will be undertaken on the basis of applications from HEIs and within the scope of FINHEEC resources. This audit manual will be effective until the end of 2007 unless otherwise indicated by FINHEEC.

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1 Background to the audits of quality assurance systems in higher education

1.1 European development

International developments, particularly the Bologna process, have brought new challenges for higher education development. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has to compete in the global market. Competition and operation across national borders has led to a situation in which trust in the standard of higher education within a country is no longer enough. Instead, higher education provided by each country should be transparent and credible internationally. In particular, student and labour mobility has heightened the need to substantiate the quality of education and degrees on an international scale.

The European Ministers of Education, convening in Bologna in 1999, set a target to realise a coherent and cohesive EHEA by 2010. Finland is involved in this process along with 44 other countries. Held in Berlin in 2003, the second Bologna follow-up meeting set an intermediate development objective for 2005, with quality assurance of higher education as one of the priorities. According to the European Ministers of Education, the national quality assurance systems of higher education should comprise the following by 2005:

- a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation by students and the publication of the results;
- a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures;
- international participation, co-operation and networking.[1]

[1] Berlin communiqué 2003. The original English text can be found at http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Communique1.pdf

Many European countries have developed a national quality assurance system. The nature of the higher education system, legislation and steering mechanisms determine how a country organises its national quality assurance system as a part of the higher education system. Countries can be divided into three categories based on the solutions made: those that audit, those that accredit, and those that have a combination of the two or a different solution altogether. At the time of writing, England, Ireland, France and Scotland[2] are examples of countries that audit. They use different terms to describe their auditing procedures: institutional audit, quality audit, evaluation of quality assurance systems or enhancement-led institutional review. Some of the countries have confined their auditing to quality assurance of education and degrees, while others audit all quality assurance related to HEI operations.

Countries that accredit include the Netherlands and Germany, which have recently adopted a system of degree programme accreditation. In the initial phase, accreditation applies to new degree programmes and will later be extended to all degree programmes. Norway and Switzerland are examples of countries that use a combination of auditing and accreditation. Examples of another approach are Denmark and Sweden, which systematically evaluate all degree programmes at regular intervals[3]. What all the European countries mentioned above have in common is that they have reformed their national evaluation systems around the turn of the millennium.

European co-operation in higher education evaluation is co-ordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which the Berlin Conference of Ministers of Education invited to develop European standards and guidelines for quality assurance. The ENQA working group also included representatives from the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB). The planning and implementation of the pilot phase of auditing in Finland has been informed by the guidelines proposed by the ENQA working group. The working group's proposals can be divided into: (1) European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance of HEIs, (2) European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance within HEIs, and (3) European standards and guidelines for national and regional bodies responsible for external quality assurance (such as FINHEEC in Finland). The most

[2] Outside Europe, quality assurance is audited for instance in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and South Africa.

[3] Examples of different evaluation and audit models can be found at: www.enqa.net/files/procedures.pdf.

relevant in terms of this manual are the standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance of HEIs.[4]

The ENQA working group defined the standards for internal quality assurance of HEIs as follows:

1. Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality and quality assurance in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for continuous quality enhancement. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

   The policy statement is expected to determine:
   - the relationship between teaching and research in the institution;
   - the institution's strategy for quality and standards;
   - the organisation of the quality assurance system;
   - the responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties and other units and individuals for the assurance of quality;
   - the involvement of students in quality assurance;
   - the ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised.
2. Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.
3. Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.
4. Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that the staff involved in the teaching of students are qualified and competent. Information about procedures should be available to those undertaking external reviews.
5. Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each degree programme.
6. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their degree programmes and other activities.
7. Institutions should regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the degree programmes and degrees they are offering.

[4] The document "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" is available at http://www.enqa.net/files/BergenReport210205.pdf.

The primary focus of quality assurance in these standards is education, in relation to which other operations, such as services which support teaching and studying, are considered. Research is touched upon to the extent it has a bearing on teaching.

The ENQA working group proposes that external quality assurance, such as audits, focus on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance. Furthermore, the aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used. Any formal decisions made as a result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit, published criteria. External quality assurance processes should be designed to ensure that the procedures achieve the aims and objectives set for them. ENQA recommends clear reporting; a predetermined follow-up procedure accompanying recommendations given to HEIs; external quality assurance on a cyclical basis; and summary reports describing and analysing salient findings of audits and reviews.

The ENQA working group also issued European standards concerning the official status, resources and activities of quality assurance agencies. FINHEEC will use these standards in developing its own activities as part of national and European evaluation.

Meeting in Bergen in May 2005, European ministers responsible for higher education in the Bologna process countries adopted the ENQA standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

1.2 The Finnish model

The Finnish response to the aims and objectives set in the Berlin communiqué was deliberated by a committee on quality assurance[5] representing HEIs, their students, the Ministry of Education and FINHEEC.

The committee found that, as regards different components of quality assurance set out in the communiqué, the Finnish system includes a division of responsibilities between various bodies and institutions; the evaluation of HEIs and degree programmes; student participation; and participation in international co-operation. On the other hand, Finland has not used

[5] OPM 2004. Korkeakoulutuksen laadunvarmistus. (Ministry of Education. QA in higher education) Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2004:6. Helsinki:Yliopistopaino. [The report is available in Finnish, with an English abstract, at www.minedu.fi/julkaisut/koulutus/2004/tr06/tr06.pdf]

accreditation as such, certification, or any other clearly demonstrable system as a quality assurance procedure[6].

In its 2004 report, the committee proposed that the universities and polytechnics develop quality assurance systems covering all their operations and that these be regularly evaluated by FINHEEC[7]. With a view to a clearer national system, the committee recommended a system in which 1) the HEIs are responsible for their own quality assurance, 2) the Ministry of Education determines the evaluation criteria and procedure used in instituting or terminating programmes, and, in special cases, evaluating existing education, and 3) FINHEEC is responsible for evaluating the quality of education and institutional performance. Appendix 1 contains a more detailed description of the reformed national quality assurance system.

The committee also recommended that Finland adopt the concepts 'quality assurance' and 'quality assurance system'. The term 'quality assurance system' has two uses: it may refer either to the quality assurance system of an individual HEI or to the national quality assurance system as a whole. The first comprises the quality assurance organisation, the division of responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources within an individual institution. The national quality assurance system is composed of the institutional procedures and processes, FINHEEC's evaluation activities, the Ministry of Education and legislation enacted to assure the quality of higher education.

The report of the quality assurance committee was sent on an extensive consultation round to universities and polytechnics and to major stakeholders in education and higher education policy. The comments showed that the HEIs and other stakeholders were in favour of the proposals, which they found feasible.

In spring 2004, FINHEEC set up a taskforce to plan auditing and write an audit manual setting out the aims and objects of audits, as well as the methods, evaluation criteria, principles of signing up for audits, and follow-up procedures. The members of the taskforce were representatives of HEIs,

[6] However, a procedure comparable to accreditation was used in the evaluations conducted before polytechnics were granted permanent operating licences. These were carried out by FINHEEC from 1997 to 1999. In addition, professional courses have been evaluated on a voluntary basis since 1999, which is a procedure resembling accreditation.

[7] The committee arrived at this solution because it saw that, as a quality assurance procedure, auditing bolsters the autonomy of HEIs and their diversity. The committee also regarded auditing as an evaluation tool implying trust in HEIs (see e.g. Woodhouse, D. 2003. Quality Improvement through Quality Audit. *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 9, No. 2, July 2003, 133–139).

students, employers, and the FINHEEC Secretariat. In the preparatory phase, FINHEEC arranged seminars to introduce the audit model to higher education institutions and other interested parties and to collect their feedback on it with a view to refining the audit procedure and the audit manual.

2 Audits of institutional quality assurance systems

2.1 Premises

In higher education, quality assurance refers to the procedures, processes and systems used by HEIs to manage and improve the quality of their education and other activities. An audit is an independent external process for evaluating a quality assurance system.

The main responsibility for quality assurance rests with the HEI. The quality assurance system must cover all its activities. Each institution determines independently the objectives, organisation, principles, methods and development of its own system. The aim of FINHEEC is not to harmonise the diverse quality assurance systems according to any particular predetermined model. On the other hand, interaction between institutions is useful also in this matter. Further, quality assurance and comparison are at the core of growing international interaction between HEIs.

Audits examine the quality assurance system at two levels: institutional quality assurance as a whole and quality assurance relating to the HEI's main mission[8], with focus on procedures assuring the quality of degree education in line with ENQA standards.

The audit looks at the qualitative aims a HEI has set and at the processes and methods it uses to manage and enhance the quality of its education and other activities. The aim is to determine if the quality assurance system functions as intended, produces information needed to improve operations and leads to effective improvement measures. The HEI is required to provide documentation and otherwise substantiate the performance of its quality assurance system. The audit addresses neither the objectives or the quality assurance system as such nor the content or outcome of activities as such. Performance is evaluated by the HEI itself and, to a certain extent, within the performance management process carried out by the Ministry of Education.

[8] Under Finnish legislation, the mission of universities and polytechnics is three-fold: 1) degree-oriented and other education, 2) research/R&D and 3) interaction with and impact on society and contribution to regional development.

2.2 Objectives

The national aim of FINHEEC audits is to support universities and polytechnics in their quality management and performance enhancement. Auditing processes and public reporting on institutional quality assurance systems stimulate debate on quality assurance and boost interaction between HEIs and their stakeholders. The aim is to share best practices in quality assurance and disseminate them within the higher education system.

The development of quality assurance in Europe is built on several important premises, which are reflected in our national quality assurance system, notably students' vested interest in the quality of higher education and the autonomy of HEIs, which in turn entails that they recognise and accept their responsibilities vis-à-vis society.

The principle of autonomy entails that quality assurance is reviewed by peers. The peer review principle in turn means that HEIs also take on major responsibility as experts in national quality assurance reviews.

The point of departure in quality assurance audits is enhancement-led evaluation, which has a robust tradition in Finland. The aim is that audits conducted by FINHEEC can be used by the auditees as part of their own quality assurance and that they cause as little extra work as possible for the auditees.

The goal of the audits of institutional quality assurance systems are:

- to evaluate how well the quality assurance system works as a tool for quality management and enhancement
  - whether the HEI's quality assurance system promotes the attainment of national higher education policy objectives, as well as those set by the HEI itself
  - whether the HEI's quality assurance system produces useful information for the improvement of its operations and engenders improvement measures
- to evaluate the quality assurance system in terms of the audit criteria, to highlight strengths and best practices, to put forward recommendations for the development of quality assurance and to determine whether the HEI passes the audit or needs to undergo a re-audit at a later date.

2.3 Focus and criteria of the audit

Auditing focuses on two levels: the HEI's quality assurance as a whole and quality assurance relating to the HEI's basic mission. Auditing assesses the comprehensiveness, performance, transparency, and effectiveness of the system and determines how the HEI monitors, evaluates and develops it.

Auditing targets:

1. Objectives, overall structure and internal coherence of the quality assurance system
2. Documentation, including the formulation of quality policy and the definition of procedures, actors and responsibilities
3. Comprehensiveness of quality assurance:
   a) Degree education[9]
   b) Research/R&D
   c) Interaction with and impact on society, and contribution to regional development[10]
   d) Support and other services (such as library and information services, career and recruitment services, and international services)
   e) Staff development
4. Participation of staff, students and external stakeholders in quality assurance
5. Interface between the quality assurance system and management/steering
6. Relevance of, and access to, quality assurance information within the HEI
7. Relevance of, and access to, quality assurance information for external stakeholders
8. Efficiency of quality assurance procedures and structures and their effect on the development of activities
9. Use of information produced by the quality assurance system as a tool for quality management and enhancement in education and other activities
10. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous development of the quality assurance system.

[9] Degree education means the first, second and third cycles of education leading to a degree. The first cycle comprises university and polytechnic Bachelor's degrees, and the second cycle university and polytechnic Master's degrees. The third cycle is research training, i.e. in Finland the postgraduate Licentiate and Doctorate degrees.

[10] HEIs' societal and regional mission also includes continuing education, (such as professional courses) and open university and open polytechnic education.

Criteria

Audits of quality assurance systems employ a set of criteria, with different scales for four different stages of development. There are criteria for an absent, emerging, developing and advanced quality assurance system (see Appendix 2).

3 Audit process

The audit process has seven phases:
1. The HEI registers for an audit.
2. An audit agreement is signed between the HEI and FINHEEC.
3. The HEI collects the audit data and other material.
4. A meeting is arranged to prepare an audit visit.
5. The audit group visits the HEI.
6. An audit report is prepared.
7. The results are published, followed by a feedback meeting.

Appendix 4 contains a table describing the phases of the audit process in chronological order.

3.1 The HEI registers for an audit

Each year, FINHEEC undertakes four to eight audits, depending on requests and the resources available. FINHEEC works with the HEIs to build an overall timetable for the audits, so that all parties know well in advance of an upcoming audit.

3.2 Audit agreement

FINHEEC and the HEI sign an audit agreement indicating:
- how the audit will be carried out
- in what timetable
- whether the audit group will be international or domestic and what language will be used
- how long the audit visit will be (2–3 days depending on the size of the HEI)
- how the audit will be financed
- the commitment of the auditee to a possible re-audit.

3.3 Collecting the audit material

The HEI to be audited collects data and other material needed for the audit from its own quality assurance system. The material should provide a sufficient information base for the auditors to assess the comprehensiveness, performance, transparency and effectiveness of the quality assurance system. The audit material must also outline the HEI's organisation, describe the structure of the quality assurance system and its links with the management system and provide evidence of the performance of the system.

The audit material should include the following two documents:

- basic material for the audit and
- material and samples chosen by the HEI in order to substantiate the performance of the quality assurance system.

The audit materials should be in the language of the audit project; Swedish-speaking HEIs submit their material in Swedish. In an international audit, the material is in English.

Audit materials are primarily collected from existing sources at the HEI's discretion. This preparation process is intended to support HEIs in quality management and enhancement.

1. Basic materials for an audit

- a chart, a table or other brief description of the organisation of the institution and the number of students and staff (one page)
- a brief description of the quality assurance system (max. three pages)
- the HEI's quality manual or other quality documentation in full
- a short history of the quality assurance system (one page)
- a brief description of how the quality assurance system is linked to the management system (one page)
- the HEI's SWOT analysis of its quality assurance system (one page)
- the HEI's summary of major development targets indicated by the quality assurance system, and projected measures (one page).

2. Material substantiating the performance of the quality assurance system

In substantiating the performance of its quality assurance system, the HEI should provide proof concerning each of the ten auditing targets[11]. The material should indicate clearly what evidence relates to what target.

[11] The auditing targets are listed in section 2.3.

The proof can be examples showing

- how review procedures, indicators or feedback systems are used to monitor the quality of degree education and other activities
- how evaluation findings or indicator data are used to develop operations
- how the quality assurance system has evolved over time and how the results are communicated within the HEI and to external stakeholders
- how the quality assurance system has influenced the development of education and other activities.

The HEI submits ten copies of the audit material to FINHEEC approximately four weeks before the audit visit.

The audit group may ask the HEI to provide any additional information it deems necessary before the audit visit.

The HEI is also requested to give the audit group access to any electronic material relevant to the audit.

3.4 Meeting to prepare the audit visit

About three weeks before the audit visit, the chair of the audit group and the FINHEEC project manager co-ordinating the audit pay a visit to the HEI. The purpose is to give the HEI staff and students a chance to discuss the objectives, targets, criteria and implementation of the audit.

3.5 Audit visit

The aim of the audit 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 quality assurance system.

The duration of the visit is two or three days. On the first day the audit group interviews representatives of the management, teaching and other staff, students, and other stakeholders. The focus is on the quality assurance system as a whole.

The second day centres on quality assurance in degree education and other activities of the departments and units. The audit group can visit faculties or departments to verify how comprehensive, effective and transparent the quality assurance system is in practice at the operational level. The audit group generally chooses the sites they visit on the basis of the audit material. In addition, they can arrange meetings with different staff and student groups to discuss themes central to quality assurance.

If necessary, the visit can be extended to three days, but it always ends with a meeting with the HEI leadership and management.

Alongside interviews, the auditors acquaint themselves with written material relating to the quality assurance system.

Appendix 5 gives the outline of an audit visit, which can be modified according to need.

3.6 Audit group

3.6.1 Composition and criteria

FINHEEC appoints each audit group separately. As a rule, the group comprises five members: three representing HEIs, one students and one external stakeholders. In their selection, care is taken to ensure that the auditors also represent different higher education sectors (universities and polytechnics) and different staff groups (management and administration, teaching and research and support services).

The auditors must meet the following criteria:

1. solid knowledge of the higher education field
2. experience of evaluation/auditing
3. knowledge of quality management/quality assurance systems
4. participation in auditor training organised by FINHEEC.

Before the appointment of the audit group, the HEI has an opportunity to give its opinion of its composition.

HEIs have the choice of a domestic or international audit group. The role and number of international auditors is determined on a case by case basis.

3.6.2 Disqualification

A person is disqualified as an auditor if he or she is an interested party or if confidence in his or her impartiality towards the HEI under review is at issue. This may happen, for instance, if the person is employed by the HEI concerned or has held a position of trust in its executive body. Auditors have an obligation to inform FINHEEC about anything that might disqualify them.

3.6.3 Recruitment

FINHEEC mainly invites experts suggested by HEIs and student organisations to take part in an audit, but may also consult the FINHEEC database of experts, which contains the names and fields of expertise of all those who have participated in FINHEEC evaluations. Recruitment entails participation in

auditor training organised by FINHEEC, unless otherwise decided in individual cases.

The aim is that each auditor participates in at least two audit projects.

3.6.4 Auditor training

Special training is arranged for the auditors, with the focus on the objectives and different phases of the audit process, the responsibilities of the audit group, audit methods and the situation in quality assurance in Finland and abroad. The course can be arranged for 10–15 persons and takes 1.5 working days.

The training focuses on the following matters:

- the Finnish higher education system and the current policy situation
- current situation in international quality assessment
- objectives, methods and criteria of audits
- the ethical and social dimensions of auditing
- the roles of the chair and members
- the implementation of the audit visit
- auditing techniques and questions
- analysis of audit materials and reporting.

Before the audit visit, the audit group meets at least once to discuss the audit agreement and the audit materials submitted by the HEI and to agree on their respective responsibilities regarding the visit and reporting.

3.6.5 Principles and ethical guidelines

The audit group should observe the following ethical guidelines:

1. Auditing must be systematic and based on transparent and intelligible methods.
2. Auditors must have competence in auditing/evaluation and be willing to improve it.
3. Auditors must act impartially and objectively towards the HEI.
4. The audit must be based on material accumulated during the audit process and visit.
5. An auditor must be aware of his or her own connections with different interest and value systems.

3.6.6 Remuneration

Auditors are remunerated according to a schedule of fees approved by FINHEEC.

3.7 Audit report

The audit group writes a report based on the analyses made and materials collected during the audit process. By and large, the reports should follow to a uniform structure, including

- a description of the audit process
- a description of the HEI and its quality assurance system
- audit findings, itemised by auditing targets
- the strengths and best practices of the quality assurance system
- recommendations for improvement
- an overall assessment of the quality assurance system.

Additionally, the report records FINHEEC's decision that the HEI has passed the audit or that a re-audit is needed.

The audit report, which should be approximately 50 pages, is published in the language of the audit process.

3.8 Publication of results and feedback discussion

The audit reports are public and published in the FINHEEC publication series. In addition, FINHEEC may publish compilation reports which summarise audit findings and analyse audits in Finnish or English.

The results of an audit are published at a seminar jointly organised by FINHEEC and the HEI under review. This offers students and staff an opportunity to discuss the findings and conclusions with the auditors.

4 Audit conclusions and follow-up

Based on the stated audit criteria and principles, the audit group appraises the fitness for purpose and performance of the quality assurance system, issuing recommendations for its improvement and highlighting best practices. Moreover, 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 or quality assurance relating to its basic mission had some major shortcomings, which necessitate development measures and subsequent re-auditing. In this case, the report indicates the measures needed.

Based on the auditors' proposal, FINHEEC formally decides that the HEI's quality assurance system passes the audit or that a re-audit is needed. A successful HEI is awarded an audit certificate indicating that its quality assurance system has been audited. FINHEEC keeps a register of HEIs that have signed up for an audit and those that have passed an audit.

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

If the audit group decides to propose a re-audit, the HEI is offered a chance to discuss the proposed improvements and their order of priority with FINHEEC and the audit group. The re-audit, which will be conducted two years after the audit, will concentrate on the proposed improvement measures.

5 Development of the audit model

The audit system was piloted at Kymenlaakso and Pirkanmaa Polytechnics in the spring of 2005. Feedback collected during the pilot phase has been used in the design of the audit model and in the drafting of this manual, which will be valid until the end of 2007, unless otherwise decided before it.

The audit 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. This feedback will inform the conclusions on the further development of the audit model in 2007.

APPENDIX 1:
Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions in Finland

According to the quality assurance committee[12], Finnish national quality assurance in higher education has three components: national policy steering, the institutions' own quality assurance, and national auditing. Additionally, national quality assurance is increasingly influenced by a growing need to substantiate quality in the international market and by international policy lines.

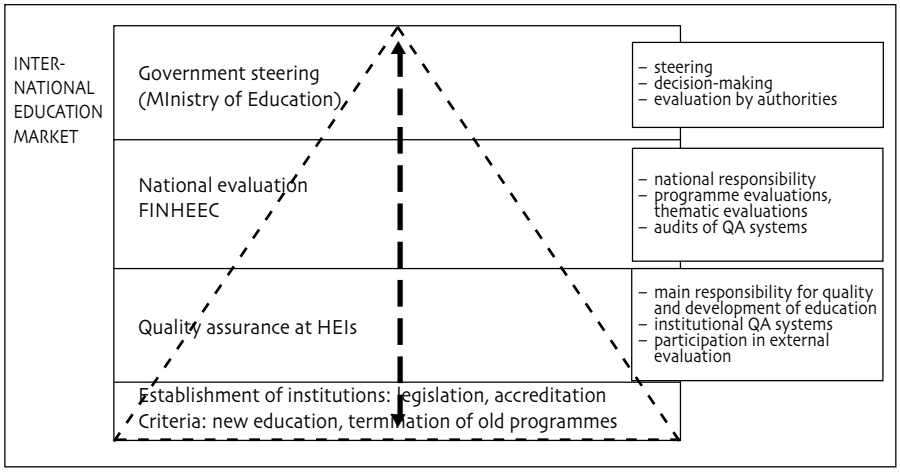


Figure 1. National system of quality assurance in higher education

1. National education policy steering

Within the Government, the Ministry of Education prepares matters relating to national education policy, ensures appropriate administration and oversees the sector. Government steering in the higher education sector is based on legislation, notably on the Universities Act and the Polytechnics Act and the relevant Decrees.

The factor determining the steering system and the status of HEIs is that both of the Finnish higher education sectors have been established by official decisions and according to uniform criteria respectively: the universities by legislation and the polytechnics by means of operating licences granted by the Government. In order to obtain operating licences, the polytechnics had to meet 14 statutory criteria. The pre-licensing evaluations in 1997–1999 can be seen to represent the accreditation model, which has been gaining ground in Europe over the past few years.

The Government is responsible for the core funding of the HEIs. All universities are state-funded. Polytechnics are run by municipalities, municipal consortia or

foundations, but the Government pays a significant part of their operating expenditure and they are largely steered according to policy outlined by the Ministry.

Finnish higher education policy is based on the Government Programme and on the Development Plan for Education and Research, which complements it and is adopted by the Government every four years. In practice, national steering takes the form of performance agreements negotiated and signed by the Ministry and each HEI every three years. The written agreements, which govern the performance management of polytechnics and universities, determine major target outcomes and outline the development of operations for the coming years. The agreements are reviewed annually as regards resources and student intakes. The university database (KOTA) and the polytechnic database (AMKOTA) play an important part in the monitoring included in performance-based steering.

Decisions concerning new education policy openings are taken by the Ministry of Education on the initiative of HEIs or important social partners. New university programmes are established by Government Decrees. As regards polytechnics, the Ministry approves their degree programmes and possible changes in operating licences, such as teaching languages and changes of location. Other licence-related questions are decided by the Government. The quality assurance committee also proposed that the Ministry of Education set out criteria and evaluation procedures for instituting new degree programmes and terminating old ones and for reviewing existing education in special cases.

Performance management in higher education has evolved into a year-round process, with emphasis not only on quantitative objectives but increasingly also on qualitative and strategic objectives. For the Ministry, the national objectives common to all the HEIs are an important tool for implementing national policy, while the institutional objectives promote the strategic aims of an individual institution and its profilisation in its particular situation.

2. National evaluation

In Finland, external evaluations of HEIs are primarily the duty of FINHEEC. Under the Decree on the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (1320/1995, as amended by 465/1998 and 641/2005), FINHEEC assists HEIs and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation. Assigning the responsibility for external evaluation in higher education to FINHEEC, the Decree clearly gives FINHEEC the status of a national quality assurance agency. Universities and polytechnics can also participate in evaluations organised by other parties, if they so wish. Science policy and research are evaluated by the Academy of Finland, which is also an important source of research funding. The Academy's mission is to improve the quality and prestige of basic research by means of competitive research funding.

[12] OPM 2004. Korkeakoulutuksen laadunvarmistus. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2004:6. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino [The report is available in Finnish, with an English abstract, at www.minedu.fi/julkaisut/koulutus/2004/tr06/tr06.pdf]

FINHEEC is an autonomous expert body, which means that in deciding on and undertaking evaluations it is entirely independent of the HEIs and the Ministry of Education, which finances its operations. At the beginning of each four-year term, FINHEEC determines its evaluation targets, objectives and methods. Its policy is naturally informed by general development needs in Finnish society and in the international context.

In its operations, FINHEEC has always emphasised the principle of enhancement-led evaluation. This means that the evaluations produce information about higher education and its quality which can be used in institutional development. The information is also used by the Ministry of Education, for example, in performance management and decision-making.

FINHEEC evaluations fall into four categories: 1) institutional evaluations; 2) programme evaluations; 3) evaluations relating to national higher education policy objectives and other thematic evaluations; and 4) accreditation of professional courses offered by HEIs. In addition to these, the Ministry of Education commissions evaluations before designating Centres of Excellence in Education. FINHEEC also provides fee-charging services.

Since 2004, FINHEEC has prioritised quality assurance audits, which have replaced other institutional evaluations.

3. Responsibilities of the HEIs

Under legislation, all HEIs are autonomous, and thereby also responsible for the educational arrangements and for their quality. Under Section 4 of the Universities Act (645/97), the universities must organise their activities with a view to attaining a high international level in their research, education and teaching and follow ethical principles and good scientific practice in their activities. According to Section 5, universities must evaluate their education, research and artistic activities and their impact. Universities must also take part in external evaluations of their operations and publish the results. Similarly, Section 9 of the Polytechnics Act (351/03) assigns polytechnics the responsibility for the quality and continuous development of their education or other operations and for regularly participating in external quality assessment.

The premise in Finland is that each university and polytechnic can construct a quality assurance system that best meets its needs. Thus, each HEI is responsible for its own quality assurance objectives, methods and development. From the perspective of education quality, it is vital that the HEIs define the objectives of quality work, the procedures and processes for achieving the objectives, and the mechanisms for assuring quality. This entails extensive public debate and a shared understanding of education quality within each HEI.

APPENDIX 2: Auditing criteria

The criteria are used as an indicative tool in assessing the stage of development in institutional quality assurance.

AUDITING TARGETS	**CRITERIA**			
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ADVANCED
1. Objectives, overall structure and internal coherence o fthe quality assurance system	The HEI has no QA procedures in place relating to its activities.	There are QA procedures relating to some HEI activities, but they are neither systematic in structure nor interlinked.	QA covers many of the HEI's activities and the QA procedures form a fairly efficient system.	QA covers all or nearly all activities, and QA procedures processes form a dynamic whole.
2. Documentation, including the formulation of quality policy and the definition of procedures, actors and responsibilities	Quality policy, procedures, actors and responsibilities have not been defined or documented.	The definition and document-ation of responsibilities and procedures included in the QA system are inadequate, and the QA procedures are inadequately organised.	Procedures, actors and respons-ibilities are clearly, comprehensibly and concretely defined, and the documentation is easily available to all. The QA organisation is well-designed.	The procedures and division of labour manifestly comply with the documented processes. The QA organisation is extremely well-designed and reinforces QA.
3. Comprehensiveness of QA	No QA in the activities and processes relating to basic mission.	The system covers isolated activities and processes mainly relating to degree education.	The system covers many activities and processes relating to basic mission.	In the main, the system covers activities and procedures relating to the basic mission.
3 a) Degree education	No QA in degree education.	QA covers some isolated aspects of the planning, implementation and evaluation of degree education.	QA covers several aspects of the planning, implementation and evaluation of degree education.	QA covers all salient aspects of the planning, implementation and evaluation of degree education.
3 b) Research / R&D	No QA in research/R&D.	QA covers some isolated aspects of research/R&D	QA covers several aspects of research/R&D	QA covers all salient aspects of research/R&D
3 c) Interaction with and impact on society; and contribution to regional development	No QA relating to interaction with and impact on society or to regional development	QA covers some isolated aspects of interaction with and impact on society, and of regional development	QA covers several aspects of interaction with and impact on society, and of regional development	QA covers all salient aspects of interaction with and impact on society, and of regional development.

AUDITING TARGETS	CRITERIA			
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ADVANCED
3 d) Support and other services (e.g. library and information services, career and recruitment services, and international services)	No QA in support and other services.	QA covers some isolated aspects of support and other services.	QA covers several aspects of support and other services.	QA covers all salient aspects of support and other services.
3 e) Staff development	No QA in staff development.	QA covers some isolated aspects of staff development.	QA covers several aspects of staff development.	QA covers all salient aspects of staff development.
4. Participation of staff, students external stakeholders in QA	Staff, students and external stakeholders are not involved in QA.	Some of the following groups are excluded from QA: – students – teachers – support services staff – researchers – administrative staff – management – external stakeholders	The aforementioned staff groups and students play an active part in the QA system. External stakeholders are involved in QA.	External stakeholders are meaningfully involved in evaluation. The different staff groups are manifestly committed to and active in practical QA. Participation is supported by common values and a culture based on trust and equality.
5. Interface between the QA system and management/steering	No linkages between QA and the leadership and management.	QA consists of procedures and processes that are separate from other operations. The linkages between the QA system and management/steering are inadequate.	The QA system is an intrinsic part of the operations and the direction of operations. Information produced in QA is used in development, with manifest linkages between the QA system and the management, performance monitoring and development.	QA is a natural part of the operations and the direction of operations. The management are committed to the system and take responsibility for it. Information is systematically used and there is clear and constant evidence of its effective use in the management, performance monitoring and development. Information produced by the QA system gives an overall picture of the quality of education and other activities.

AUDITING TARGETS	CRITERIA			
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ADVANCED
6. Relevance of, and access to, quality assurance information	QA does not cater for internal stakeholders and information is not communicated within the HEI.	The production of information is not systematic and does not sufficiently cater for internal stakeholders.	The activities and key results of the QA system are known to internal stakeholders. The QA system produces information relevant to them.	The operation of the QA system is overt and transparent. Internal communication relating to QA is active and information is systematically communicated and targeted to different parties within the HEI. The relevance of information to internal stakeholders is an important consideration in the planning and continuous development of the QA system.
7. Relevance of, and access to, quality assurance information for external stakeholders	QA does not cater for external stakeholders. Information is not communicated to external stakeholders.	External stakeholders are not sufficiently taken into account in the planning and development of the QA system. Information is only sporadically communicated to external stakeholders.	External interest groups are defined and their information needs clearly taken into account. Information about the activities and key results of the QA system is accessible to major partners and stakeholders.	External communication relating to QA is active and information is systematically communicated and targeted to different external stakeholders. The relevance of information to external stakeholders is an important consideration in the planning and development of the QA system. The system produces information which also has relevance to external interest groups.

AUDITING TARGETS	CRITERIA			
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ADVANCED
8. Efficiency of QA procedures and structures and their effect on the development of activities	QA procedures are unable to identify sub-standard quality.	QA aims at maintaining the present level of quality. QA procedures are able to identify sub-standard quality satisfactorily.	QA procedures promote the development of activities and generate change. Sub-standard quality is efficiently identified.	Special attention is paid to methods and structures conducive to new ideas and their implementation. The operational culture encourages innovation. Sub-standard quality is efficiently identified.
9. Use of information produced by the QA system as a tool for quality management and enhancement in education and other activities	Information relating to QA is no used as a tool for quality management and enhancement in education or other activities.	Use of QA information is sporadic and/or its collection is an end in itself.	QA information is used as a tool in quality management and enhancement relating to education and other activities. Most feedback is put to use.	The use of information is systematic and there is clear and constant evidence of its effective use in the development of education and other activities.
10. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous development of the QA system	The HEI has no overall idea of the QA activities; they are not monitored or developed.	The HEI has only a faint idea of the overall performance of the QA system. Its activities are barely monitored, and the development of the QA system is unplanned.	The HEI monitors the performance of the QA system and is conscious of its major effects and outcomes. Development of the QA system is planned and documented.	The HEI monitors the performance o fthe QA system and is largely aware of its effects and outcomes. The development of the QA system is planned and documented and the HEI can clearly demonstrate its direction and concrete effects.

APPENDIX 3:
Audit concepts

This section gives the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council's (FINHEEC's) interpretation of the concepts used in this manual. The definitions are based on established usage and interpretation by international evaluation organisations, which FINHEEC has adapted for Finnish higher education and evaluation culture. This means that FINHEEC is not committed to the concepts and terminology of any individual quality assessment method (e.g. ISO, EFQM or BSC).

Accreditation

The word 'accreditation' (Latin *ad* + *credere*) means to prove something creditable and publicly acknowledge its worth in relation to external criteria. Accreditation usually refers either to an official approval of HEIs or their programmes or to the awarding of different quality labels to HEIs or their programmes.

Auditing

Auditing is independent external evaluation to ascertain whether a QA system conforms to its stated objectives, is effective and fits its purpose. Auditing does not address the objectives or the results of operations as such but evaluates the processes that the HEI uses to manage and improve the quality of its education and other activities.

Certification

Certification is the verification and validation of an achieved standard or status. It often includes a certificate of the standard or status achieved. The certificate can be awarded by a first party (the management of an organisation), a second party (the customer) or a third party (an accredited external certifier).

Criteria

See evaluation criteria.

Enhancement-led evaluation

Enhancement-led evaluation refers to evaluation geared to support HEIs in improving their education and other activities. FINHEEC sees enhancement-led evaluation as a user-led process in which the evaluation method is tailored according to the objectives of the evaluation, its theme and the needs of the participants.

Evaluation

Evaluation is systematic appraisal and highlighting of value or comparison against objectives and targets, and "measurement" of performance (assessment, as in quality assessment) against set criteria. FINHEEC sees evaluation as a process geared to highlight development needs and putting forward proposals.

Evaluation model (method)

In the evaluation of higher education institutions, the evaluation model or evaluation method refers to an established European approach comprising four components: (1) a national or other external evaluation organisation; (2) a self-evaluation; (3) a peer evaluation, including audit visits; and (4) a public evaluation report.

Evaluation types

Evaluation types can be summarised according to use as: 1. evaluation, 2. accreditation, 3. auditing and 4. benchmarking. These different approaches are used to evaluate three different targets (organisations, degree programmes and subjects) and they can be used for different purposes, from the development of operations to indicating accountability.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance refers to the procedures, processes and systems that safeguard and improve the quality of a HEI, its education and other activities. The Finnish term *laatutyö* (quality work) often means the same as quality assurance, but is sometimes also used to refer to the development of QA systems.

Quality assurance system

FINHEEC's concept 'quality assurance system' is based on a concept that has become established in European quality evaluation. The concept includes both quality management and quality enhancement. It can be used in two ways: it may refer to the QA system of an individual HEI or to the national system for assuring higher education quality. The institutional QA system refers to the entity composed of the quality assurance organisation, respective responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources. The national QA system refers to the procedures and processes of the HEIs, FINHEEC and the Ministry of Education as a whole and to legislation enacted to assure higher education quality.

Quality

Quality can be defined in many ways, for instance, quality as exception, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money, and as transformative[13]. In the auditing of QA systems, quality refers to the appropriateness (fitness for purpose) of quality assurance methods, processes and systems in relation to stated objectives or aims. Understood in this way, quality is verified achievement of objectives.

Quality culture

Quality culture includes both measures geared to improve quality and individual and collective commitment to maintaining and improving quality.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation means that a unit or an organisation appraises its own activities, their prerequisites and outcomes. Self-evaluation is a way of collecting information on the evaluation target and a tool for HEIs to improve their activities. Self-evaluation can be undertaken on the organisation's own initiative or at the behest of an external body.

Stakeholder /interest group

Stakeholders are groups or organisations with vested interests in the matter. The stakeholders of a HEI are its staff, students, the students' parents and other taxpayers, employers, the Government, society, trade unions, and higher education graduates.

SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a method used in the evaluation and development of activities. A SWOT analysis lists the organisation's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

[13] Harvey, L. and Green, D., 1993, 'Defining quality', Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 18, no. 1, pp. 9–34.

APPENDIX 4:
The phases of the audit process and their chronological order

HEIs register for an audit

- Audits are undertaken on the basis of registration. FINHEEC devises an audit timetable together with the HEIs that have signed up.

↓

The audit agreement is drawn up

- When initiating the audit process, FINHEEC and the HEI conclude an agreement, which indicates the auditing method, the international or domestic composition of the audit group (the language), the duration of the audit visit, the timetable for the auditing process, the costs and the auditee's commitment to implementing recommended development measures and to a possible re-audit.

↓

The audit group is appointed

- FINHEEC appoints a five-member group to audit each HEI.

↓

The HEI collects audit material

- The HEI under review collects data and other material about its own QA system which provides sufficient information and evidence for the auditors to assess the performance of the QA system. The audit material is primarily collected from existing sources.

↓

Meeting to prepare the audit visit

- Before the actual audit visit, the chair of the audit group and the FINHEEC project manager co-ordinating the audit visit the HEI. The purpose of the visit is to inform the HEI staff and students about the audit and to discuss its implementation.

↓

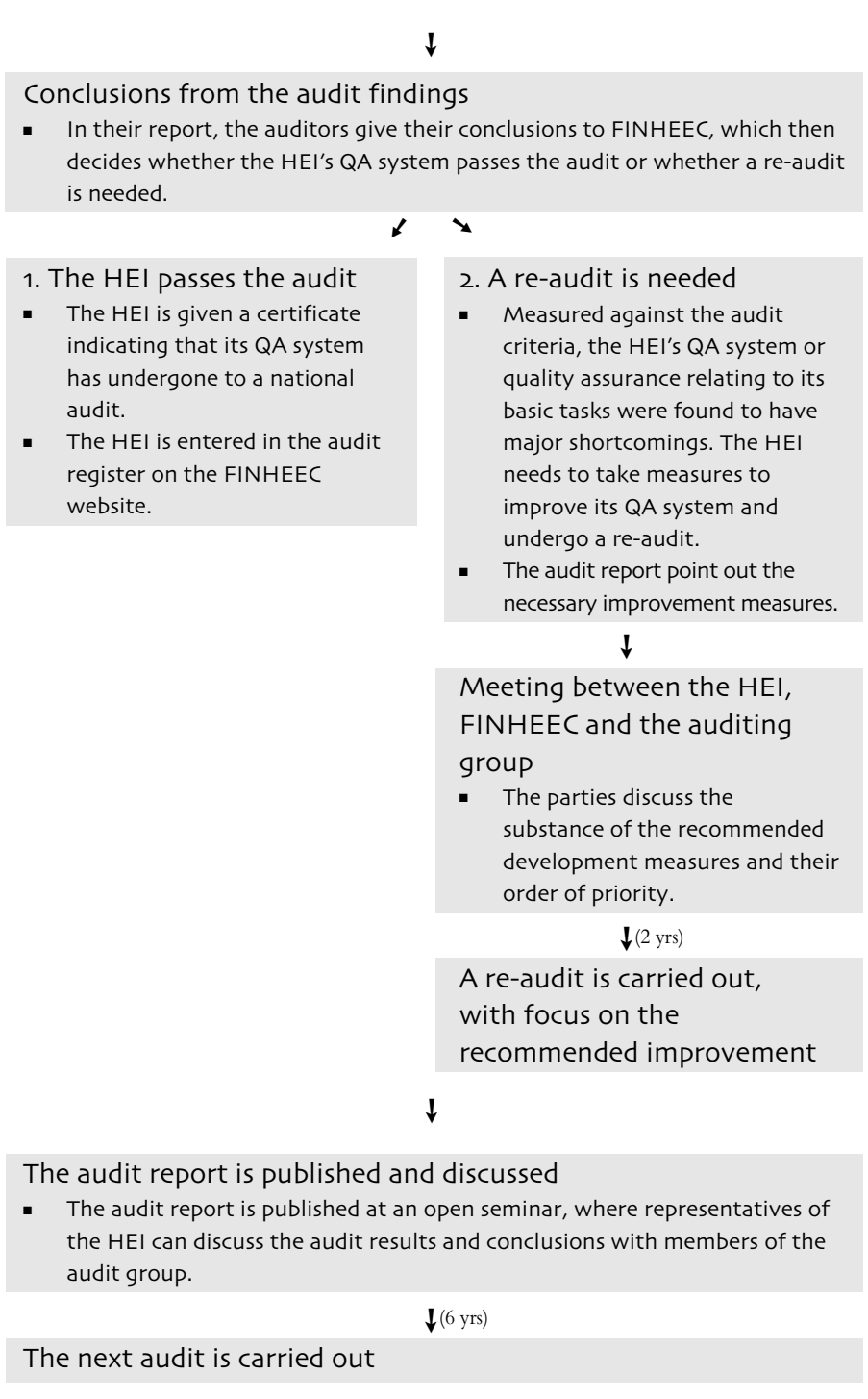
Auditors visit the HEI

- During the audit visit, which lasts 2 to 3 days, the audit group interviews various stakeholders, visits different units for evaluation purposes and studies materials relating to the QA system.

↓

The audit report is written

- The audit group writes an audit report based on materials accumulated during the audit process. In it the auditors record the findings of the audit, point out strengths and best practices and give their recommendations for further development.


Conclusions from the audit findings
In their report, the auditors give their conclusions to FINHEEC, which then decides whether the HEI's QA system passes the audit or whether a re-audit is needed.
1. The HEI passes the audit
The HEI is given a certificate indicating that its QA system has undergone to a national audit.
The HEI is entered in the audit register on the FINHEEC website.
2. A re-audit is needed
Measured against the audit criteria, the HEI's QA system or quality assurance relating to its basic tasks were found to have major shortcomings. The HEI needs to take measures to improve its QA system and undergo a re-audit.
The audit report point out the necessary improvement measures.
Meeting between the HEI, FINHEEC and the auditing group
The parties discuss the substance of the recommended development measures and their order of priority.
(2 yrs)
A re-audit is carried out, with focus on the recommended improvement
The audit report is published and discussed
The audit report is published at an open seminar, where representatives of the HEI can discuss the audit results and conclusions with members of the audit group.
(6 yrs)
The next audit is carried out

APPENDIX 5:
An example of an audit visit programme

First day

The first day includes an opening session and interviews with the representatives of the HEI's management, staff groups, students and stakeholders. The visit starts with a brief presentation of the HEI's QA system and relevant documents.

Time	Programme
9.00–9.30	The audit group's own meeting
9.30–9.50	Presentation of the QA system
10.00–11.00	Interview with the HEI leadership and the quality/development manager
11.10–12.10	Interview with the deans/heads of fields of study
12.10–13.00	Lunch
13.00–14.00	Interview with teaching staff
14.10–15.10	Interview with students
15.20–16.20	Interview with representatives of support and other services
16.30–17.30	Interview with representatives of external stakeholders
17.30–18.00	Meeting of the audit group

Second day

On the second day, the audit group visits faculties, departments or degree programmes and studies quality assurance materials. The auditors themselves decide on the programme of the second, and a possible third day. They choose the units they will visit on the basis of the audit materials. Some of the visits may be decided on site. The audit group also determines the people to be interviewed and the interview methods.

The auditors may break up into smaller groups to visit the units. It is also possible to arrange discussion sessions for different staff groups around themes arising from the audit materials provided by the HEI.

Time	Programme
8.30–9.30	Perusal of the quality assurance materials
9.30–12.00	Visits to specific units/Discussions on chosen themes
12.15–13.00	Lunch
13.00–15.30	Visits to specific units/Discussions on chosen themes
16.00–16.30	Meeting of the audit group

Third day

If the HEI under review is large or if the audit is otherwise particularly laborious, the audit visit may be extended to 2.5 or three days. The third day continues with visits to specific units. The audit group ends its visit by including session where the audit group gives a brief summary of the most important observations they have made during the visit.

Time	Programme
9.00–10.45	Visits to specific units
11.00–12.00	Interview with the management
12.15–13.00	Lunch and concluding session

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