

Quality Podcast 2021: Quality management and auditing in the University of Lapland

Saija Halminen: Welcome to listen to the Laatuporinat podcast of University of Lapland where the aim is to go through for example, the quality management and feedback systems of the University. The first episode is about quality management at the University of Lapland and how auditing is done as a part of the development. In this episode we are joined with Satu Uusiautti and Hanna Marttiini. Would you like to introduce yourselves?

Satu Uusiautti: Hello everybody, my name is Satu Uusiautti and I am the Vice-Rector responsible for education at our university. And as a part of my work, my duty is also to ensure quality in our activities and together with Hanna Marttiini I have been doing this and preparing our university for the auditing process.

Hanna Marttiini: Hello everybody, my name is Hanna Marttiini and I'm Head of Quality at the University of Lapland. And I started about one year ago, and I'm operating this University's quality system and now audit process that started last year and it's continued to this year.

Saija Halminen: Yes, so first we have few questions for Satu. What is quality management at the University of Lapland and how does it actually appear in everyday work?

Satu Uusiautti: Well, that's quite wide question to start with. Quality management is a concept that covers quite many sub concepts, if you can say so. It covers all from the quality system and how it's organized to quality work and our quality culture at the university.

Quality management refers to all practices, all processes, resources that we have to ensure that everything we do is quality in nature. At its best, quality goes through all educational activities, research, and art, our collaboration with the environment, the social interaction that university does with its environment, you know, in this ecosystem that we live in. In practice, quality is followed and evaluated at all levels of action and also including our services that is quite topical part of our quality work at the moment since we started new LUC consulting services at the beginning of this year. So, we are developing a new service system and at the same time we are planning how to make these services qualitative and how they would serve us the best. So basically, all university activities are followed and controlled by the quality system.

Saija Halminen: Yes. Then how can we communicate quality management?

Satu Uusiautti: In my opinion, quality is communicated in everything that we do. It is apparent in good and in bad, in all our activities. And it's visible in our quality culture; how we perceive quality, how we talk about it, how we think it as a part of our everyday work, our duties in all what we do. But to be quality communication, it also has to be carefully planned how we communicate quality. How often we inform all our employees and students for example on Intranet or by emails or other means of sharing information. And how we emphasize quality questions, how we bring them forward in our events and meetings and so on. Of course, we have also a quality manual that provides us with basic answers to how we follow quality issues and how we do things. It determines the ways of practices and hierarchies between different parts of our operations. So that's all about quality communication as well.

Saija Halminen: And lastly, quality management is an important part of the University strategy. But what does this actually mean then?

Satu Uusiautti: Well, we have a new strategy that was decided together between University of Lapland and Lapland University of Applied Sciences in late 2019. And our shared vision is to be creative forerunner. And in order to be something like that, we have to make sure that our activities are qualitative and that we implement our strategy in a way that shows quality action in all its phases. We have strategic choices and also enables that make possible to do wise choices too, plan new ways of teaching and doing education, find new innovative artistic and research areas and all these kinds of things that promotes our strategic endeavors in the large scale, of course.

But also, quality goes with our strategy so that we have to carefully plan what we do and how we implement the strategy and how we follow that all that we wanted to do has been done. Or why something has been achieved or has not been achieved and make our adjustments to what we do if needed. And also supervise how we reach our strategic goals. So, all these plans of implementation are also about quality. So that is how it practically goes with the strategy and quality management.

Saija Halminen: Yes, thank you Satu. Then Hanna. How does the quality system support steering and knowledge management?

Hanna Marttiini: Well, good question. Actually, we should ask what is quality system and what does it mean? And I think that the quality system is whole of operations, responsibilities, procedures and resources that we have decided by ourselves at the university. Support services are part of quality system and what and how we offer different services for students, staff and cooperating partners. Services support university's basis operation and activities and also, we describe our university's basic tasks: education, research and artist activity and of course interacting with society. We describe operational processes and quality management.

This quality system is synonym terms to quality management system and quality assurance system. How we manage the quality system and how we assure quality. And of course, this university strategy is very important, or we say starting point for quality work. The university's strategy forms the foundation on which the quality system is built. And I think that also steering and the quality system products information and data to support knowledge management. That means that we get information and data enough that we can do good decisions and development proposals. Document has to be of course released, reliable, easy to read and understand. I think that's a short answer to what is quality system.

Saija Halminen: Yes. And then second question, how can we develop the quality system?

Hanna Marttiini: Well, of course this quality work at the university is guided by shared principle of constant development; planning, doing, checking and acting like Deming cycle called PDCA, a four-step management method used in business for the control and continuous improvement of processes and services. And for example, we have internal evaluation of activities. For example, we have done "Now is time to do something" -report about education and research. And then we have received user feedback how to work on student feedback system. It's important part of our quality system. Based on that we have developed this feedback system.

We participate also in external evaluations and audits. Every six years FINEEC — it's Finnish Education Evaluation Center, called Karvi in Finnish — evaluate universities' quality system. FINNEEC also conducts thematic evaluation in higher education like in field of education. For example, last year the evaluation of higher education in social sciences and this year is in field of law. And we have feedback systems, we do lots of services to students and staff for example on well-being themes. These data are important to make document and reports and it's part of development of our functions.

And we have all university's quality materials in digital form. The quality management documentation has been updated and quality manual handbooks will be replaced with one quality management documentation. And what else we have? Of course, you can find the self-assessment reports and the quality management documentation on this digital platform we call laatuwiki.

Saija Halminen: Yes. And lastly, we have a question about auditing. So, what is audit and why is it done?

Hanna Marttiini: Audit is evaluating our activities. And here in Finland we have this Finnish Education Evaluation Center and they carry out universities' evaluations and they evaluate our quality management, our quality system; how does it work, how we develop that kind of system. And why we do that? Of course, we have a law and the Finnish legislation for universities and University of Applied Sciences contain provisions which oblige higher education institutes to participate in external evaluation of their activities and quality systems.

And quality of education, for example, is important key issue in building global higher education and quality systems that are public contribute to openness between HEIs which helps to build trust within European higher education area. And evaluation's meaning is for example to recognize strength, find and share good practices and enhancement areas. The aim is also to support achievements of our own objectives and also support continuous development of university. I think that's short reply to that.

Saija Halminen: Yes, perfect. Thank you Hanna.