Quality Podcast 2021: Quality management of education

Saija Halminen: Welcome to listen to the Laatuporinat podcast series of the University of Lapland, which aims to go through, for example, the university's quality management, feedback systems and auditing for the operational development. In the second episode, we have the topic of quality management in education today, and we have two quests in this discussion too, Satu Uusiautti, and we also get a little student perspective from Sara. So would you like to tell me a little more about yourselves?

Satu Uusiautti: Well, thank you. I am Vice-Rector for Education, Uusiautti Satu, and perhaps it is this quality management of education that happens to be the core of my job description.

Sara Heikkinen: Hi, I am Sara Heikkinen and I am now a Master's student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland.

Saija Halminen: Satu, where do you think high-quality education comes from?

Satu Renewed: Well, education is, of course, the basic task of the University, which hopefully reflects quality from different perspectives, is systematic and so transparently implemented and planned that it shows the genuine desire to produce high-quality education and to typify the values that we set for education as a university. These values include, firstly, knowledge-based and specifically in education throughout; planning and development of education as such a basic element. But then also the connection of teaching to the research we do and, of course, to research done elsewhere, alias research-based and the connection to our artistic activity because we are a university of science and art. Innovation activity in general. But right there at the core, at the heart of high-quality education, is that student. And student orientation is one of those fundamental values that, in my opinion, embodies high-quality education.

Saija Halminen: Yes. Well, when different educations are planned, how is quality reflected in that work?

Satu Renewed: Well, the quality of the planning work is visible in such a way that even when you consider the objectives of education, the competence objectives for education are clearly defined and considered, also linked to this university strategy; that those objectives are in line with the strategy and that it is possible to carry out versatile high-quality education in this way. But then, if you look forward to the planning of education, the quality is reflected in the fact that the staff, the students, including our external stakeholders, are genuinely involved in the planning of the education, so that it takes into account the multi-perspective and takes into account the different objectives that education also responds to.

From the student's point of view, of course, that quality is also reflected in how we define students' workloads and that the criteria for defining them are transparent, uniform and comprehensive. For example, this European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is one that examines and can be used to ensure that quality, for example in planning. Then that quality is reflected in teaching methods, in the assessment of teaching and learning, in the thinking of learning environments. How they support the achievement of these competence objectives. All in all, quality is also reflected in the fact that feedback is typified in the planning of education. That means looking at our own implementations. We will learn what feedback is received and then take it there to be actively involved in the planning and systematically typified. That kind of things.

Saija Halminen: Yes. Well, then the training has been planned and quality has been taken into account, but then how will that quality be ensured in that practical implementation?

Satu Uusiautti: Well, implementation is a good question in itself. If you start to wonder from when we think that the implementation of education begins, it starts from there — it is not just a teaching event — but it starts when we start planning student selection. So, if the criteria for student selection are applied consistently and transparently at that stage, a reliable, high-quality picture of ourselves as an education organization to apply to is created. And then, from there, the implementation of education involves how we produce that training in a concrete and practical way in the everyday life of education. So that we comply with all the regulations and the criteria that have been set that exist for education. And, of course, in that student-oriented way.

It also involves — that planning of education — the fact that teaching methods are planned there at the planning stage and are applied in an appropriate manner to support the student's activity and learning. But we must also be very flexible in the concrete practical implementation of teaching. And this perspective is very illustrative to us in this recent time, which is what we have encountered during the corona period. And it is perhaps this kind of flexibility that emerges well from the point of view that how to implement teaching, even in such extreme conditions. How are those methods implemented there and what does it look like for a student?

Saija Halminen: Yes. Well, Sara, of course, this is like Satu said. Students are at the center there, so do you have an example or do you have any experience of how such quality has been reflected in some implementation, for example?

Sara Heikkinen: Well, in my opinion, the University of Lapland has responded well to this challenge. I think that distance teaching has been well implemented. Now when most of the teaching takes place remotely, of course it creates challenges. I think that while interactivity is always important in teaching, especially in this distance learning it is really important because how can we ensure that people there don't do anything else. Teaching must be interactive and inclusive. And the teaching materials must be easily accessible and designed for distance work, as the material designed for contact teaching may not be suitable for distance learning at all.

Saija Halminen: Yes, that's true. I can also relate to the fact that, when this came and started last spring, then of course, there was no way to do the planning work and it came so suddenly that no one could prepare for it in any way. That's how you noticed it when you compare it to last spring, for example, now last autumn and now this spring. That's the lessons — I'm sure it's through planning — then we've been able to prepare much better for this now. At least that is where the quality shows that it has improved considerably.

Satu Uusiautti: Yes, it is quite true that we were facing a rather surprising situation. But now that we are still thinking about it from a quality point of view, and we conducted these remote and hybrid work experience surveys of staff and students on how satisfied they are and what kind of experiences they have. So here, the teaching staff's material clearly shows, as the months progress, how they want to invest in that quality and develop it. It also reflects in-depth quality thinking and understanding overall. But also in student responses, these findings about quality; from there emerges and from the point of view of the development and quality management of the quality of education. These surveys also provide information on how we take care of the quality of everyday education, and this, as a concrete example, seems to me to be very much in this way.

Saija Halminen: Yes. Well, how is that quality aspect taken into account in the evaluation and development of education?

Satu Uusiautti: Well, that's actually little bit of what we just discussed. In practice, however, we have a regular system of monitoring education and learning outcomes and related common policies, and a common understanding of what kind of information is needed on the success of education and the results that we get and how it can then be used again to develop education further. In other words systematically utilizing feedback and evaluation data, it is at the core there. And it is the feedback from students, for example, that it is extremely important to typify. Of course, feedback also from our alumni and external stakeholders, for example. With all of them, we can then observe, for example, the quality of education in relation to employment, working life skills, what working life connections look like from an education perspective and so on.

Saija Halminen: Yes. And now the University of Lapland is also involved in this audit, that is going on and coming, then what will be assessed in terms of education in these audits?

Satu Uusiautti: Well, in terms of education, there are actually three areas of auditing: the university that creates competence, the implementation of education and the evaluation and development of education. This first, a university that creates competence, is linked precisely to how we plan education and look at the teaching methods that are used. For example, learning assessment methods, learning environments that support the goals set for competence. And how our goals embody our strategy. The same things I also brought up at the beginning. It then evaluates this implementation of the education. What do we do in practice, what does it look like, what is good there, what are the areas of development? We have produced such self-assessment reports in all these areas in cooperation with the units and identify there those principles of our operations, but also good practices and these areas of development. Similarly, this evaluation and development of education is the subject of an evaluation of how we assess our own activities and how we develop it on that basis.

Then there are also two other aspects of the audit that may not be related to the implementation of the education, but they link to it. So, there is an evaluation area for a learning university and an evaluation area for bench-learning. This evaluation area of a learning university is such an evaluation area chosen by the university itself, which does not in itself affect how we perform auditing there. In other words, it does not affect its pass, but it is the kind of profiling or key area of strategy that we want to get feedback on and then use that knowledge of its success and scalability throughout our education. So our evaluation area of our choice is to link project and research cooperation to the degree program in fine arts education. So that's where we hope to get development ideas that can be pushed through the entire university.

Well then bench-learning evaluation area; we chose a student feedback system as a bench-learning, and we were partnered with the University Pedagogy Centre of the University of Helsinki, where this feedback system has been developed in such a way that it provides a reflective basis for monitoring one's own learning for students, but also for monitoring teaching and developing teaching. In other words, these kind of areas, in total, are evaluated throughout the audit.

Saija Halminen: Yes, thank you so much Satu and Sara for your answers.