Audit manual for the quality systems of higher education institutions 2011–2017
Foreword

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) has conducted audits of the quality systems of higher education institutions (HEIs) since 2005. The goal of the audits is to support Finnish HEIs in developing their quality systems to correspond to the European quality assurance principles¹ and to demonstrate that Finland has competent and systematic national quality assurance in place for higher education.

Under the Finnish Universities Act and Polytechnics Act, HEIs are responsible for the quality and continuous development of their education and other operations. Legislation also requires them to regularly perform external evaluations of their operations and quality systems and to publish the results of such evaluations. FINHEEC is an independent expert body that organises evaluations of the operations and quality systems of HEIs. It may also take assignments from international parties.

Finnish HEIs decide on their own quality systems, and the comprehensiveness, functioning and effectiveness of the systems are evaluated in the audits. Thus, the audit approach corresponds to the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, which has become a strong tradition in the Finnish evaluation practice. According to the audit reports and feedback received from HEIs, the audits have enhanced the systematic development of quality systems and operating methods. The audits have also led to the creation of exceptionally comprehensive evaluation material on the Finnish higher education system, which also enables comparisons in the field.

All Finnish HEIs will be audited, or at least their audits will begin, by the end of 2011. Since the audits are valid for six years, a second round of audits needs to be launched alongside the first round. Though audits have been felt to be useful, the model needs to be further developed based on the feedback from HEIs and other stakeholders, as well as analyses undertaken by FINHEEC.

The second-round audits will also consist of four stages, with the HEI first carrying out a self-evaluation and preparing the audit material, a team of experts then visiting the institution and the audit results finally being published in a report. Self-evaluation will be given more emphasis in the second round, and clearer guidelines will be available for the compilation of

the material. This is expected to help both HEIs and audit teams and increase the reliability of evaluations. The audit criteria still consist of four development stages, and special attention has been paid to the transparency and intelligibility of the criteria. Audits include an element of pass/fail and thus a possible decision on the need for a re-audit.

In their feedback, HEIs have expressed the wish that second-round audits would go deeper into the operations of HEIs than the first audits and that audits be more closely linked to the strategic goals of individual institutions. Compared to the European quality assurance principles, the Finnish audit model has encompassed nearly all higher education activities. HEIs have also expressed their wish to have a quality label that they could use in international cooperation.

Based on all this, the second-round audit procedure will focus more closely on the quality management of degree education. Samples of degree education will consist of degree programmes, some of which are selected by the institutions themselves, while one is selected by the audit team. Institutions that pass their audit will receive a quality label that is valid for six years. We hope this new method will be a step forward in the development of quality management in higher education and HEIs.

This audit manual will be valid until the end of 2017, unless otherwise decided by FINHEEC.

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Background and objectives of audit

As set out in the relevant Decree, the mission of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is to assist Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences as well as the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to the evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs). FINHEEC supports HEIs and their international competitiveness through evaluations, and by supporting quality work and disseminating good practice. The Evaluation Council consists of twelve members representing universities, universities of applied sciences, students and working life. Decisions made by the Evaluation Council are prepared and implemented by Secretariat, led by Secretary General.

The new Universities Act (558/2009) and Polytechnics Act (564/2009) contain similar binding obligations concerning the participation of HEIs in external evaluations of their operations and quality systems, as well as in the publication of evaluation results. HEIs also have other means of fulfilling their statutory obligation than by participating in audits conducted by FINHEEC. Legislation concerning FINHEEC also enables it to operate outside national borders. Audits are carried out in Finnish, Swedish and English.

The quality of education continues to be a core question in the creation of a competitive, common European Higher Education Area. Education that crosses national borders, mobility, competition as well as the commercialisation and internationalisation of education are reasons why a country’s trust in the level and quality of its own national higher education is no longer sufficient in itself. The challenge is to demonstrate quality in an understandable and reliable way, to the outside world as well.

On 13 November 2010, FINHEEC was accepted as a member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The Register’s main task is to increase mutual trust between European evaluation organisations and HEIs. The Register provides information about evaluation organisations that fulfil European quality requirements for external evaluations of HEIs. The principles of the evaluation of HEIs are described in the publication entitled Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the
European Higher Education Area\(^1\) (also known as ESG), which formed the basis for the evaluation of FINHEEC in 2010. Based on the evaluation, FINHEEC renewed its full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

FINHEEC’s audit model, which fulfils European quality requirements, is based on an institutional review. One of the model’s basic principles is the autonomy of HEIs, according to which each institution develops its quality system based on its own needs and goals. The audit focuses on the procedures that the institution uses to maintain and develop the quality of its operations.

Audits are based on the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, which has become a powerful tradition within FINHEEC. The goal of enhancement-led evaluation is to help HEIs identify the strengths, good practices and areas in need of development in their own operations. The purpose is, thus, to help HEIs achieve their strategic objectives and steer future development activities in order to create a framework for the institutions’ continuous development. The autonomy and strategic development of HEIs are also supported by the institutions’ possibility to select some of the targets of the evaluation in the new audit model.

As concerns the general evaluation of the quality system, audit focuses on quality management procedures and their effectiveness. Part 1 of the ESG is used to review also the impact that quality management procedures have on the results of the operations in connection with the degree programmes, which have been chosen as samples of degree education. However, the results are compared to the targets set by the HEI itself in order to pay more attention to the effectiveness of quality management.

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2 Focus and consequences of audit

2.1 Audit targets and criteria

2.1.1 Targets

Audits focus on the quality system that HEIs develop for themselves based on their own needs and goals. Audits evaluate whether the system meets the national criteria defined in Appendix 1 and whether it corresponds to the European quality assurance principles and recommendations for HEIs. To evaluate the quality system, the audit focuses on:

1. The quality policy of the higher education institution
2. Strategic and operations management
3. Development of the quality system
4. Quality management of the higher education institution’s basic duties:
   a) Degree education (including first-, second- and third-cycle education)\(^1\)
   b) Research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities
   c) The societal impact and regional development work (incl. social responsibility, continuing education, open university and open university of applied sciences education, as well as paid-services education)
   d) Optional audit target
5. Samples of degree education: degree programmes
6. The quality system as a whole.

The audit evaluates how well the quality system meets strategic and operations management needs, as well as the quality management of the HEI’s basic duties and the extent to which it is comprehensive and effective. In addition, the audit focuses on the institution’s quality policy and the development of the quality system, as well as on how effective and dynamic an entity the system forms.

\(^1\) First-cycle degrees include bachelor’s degrees and university of applied sciences degrees, while second-cycle degrees include master’s degrees and university of applied sciences master’s degrees. Third-cycle degrees include postgraduate licentiate and doctoral degrees.
Optional audit target

As an optional audit target 4 d, an HEI chooses a function that is central to its strategy or profile and which the institution wants to develop in terms of its quality management. The function may also be an overarching feature of the institution’s basic duties (such as internationalisation, sustainable development, the status and well-being of the staff and students, lifelong learning). The choice must be justified in connection with the audit agreement. The optional audit target is not taken into account when evaluating whether the audit will pass, but it is mentioned in the audit certificate related to the quality label.

Samples of degree education

Audit target 4 a reviews the quality management of degree education at a general level. In turn, audit target 5 takes a more detailed look at primarily three degree programmes chosen as samples of degree education. HEIs choose two of these themselves. Universities of applied sciences choose one programme leading to a bachelor’s degree and one programme leading to a university of applied sciences master’s degree. Universities choose one module leading to a degree that includes both bachelor’s and master’s education, as well as one programme leading to a doctoral degree. The HEI must explain the reasons for its selections and evaluate how representative the quality management of the selected programmes is in relation to other degree education.

Based on the basic audit material supplied by the HEI, the audit team chooses a third degree programme for evaluation at the latest four weeks prior to the audit visit. Programmes used as samples are evaluated as independent audit targets, but they also complement the evaluation of the quality management of education by providing detailed information at the level of degree programmes.

2.1.2 Criteria

Audits employ a set of criteria that is based on a scale of four development stages of quality management (see Appendix 1): absent, emerging, developing and advanced, which are specified for each audit target. The development phase of each audit target is determined individually, including sub-targets 4 a–d. Likewise, the development stage of the quality management of each sample of degree education is also determined individually.
2.2 Results and consequences of audit

2.2.1 Threshold for passing

The audit team presents FINHEEC with its appraisal of whether the HEI should pass the audit or whether a re-audit needs to be conducted. The report contains the team’s evaluation of the development stage of each audit target. The audit team can propose that the institution passes the audit if none of the targets is ‘absent’ and if the quality system as a whole (audit target 6) is at least ‘developing’.

The evaluation of the quality system as a whole focuses on whether quality management procedures form a comprehensive and functioning system and whether the quality culture supports the development of the operations. The features of ‘developing’ and ‘advanced’ systems are characterised below.

The quality system of an HEI is at a developing stage if it displays the following features:

- The quality management procedures constitute a functioning system.
- The system covers the essential parts of the basic duties of the HEI and provides meaningful support for developing the operations.
- There is evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the operations.
- The development of the operations is based on an existing quality culture.

The quality system of an HEI is at an advanced stage if it displays the following features:

- The quality management procedures form a dynamic and comprehensive system.
- The quality system covers all of the basic duties of the HEI and provides excellent support for the institution’s overall strategy and the development of the entire institution’s operations.
- There is clear and continuous evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the operations.
- The well-established quality culture provides excellent support for developing the operations.
2.2.2 Decision-making

The Evaluation Council decides on the audit results on the basis of a proposal by the Secretary General. The Council and the Secretary General are responsible for ensuring that audit decisions are impartial and of equal quality. The Council has access to the audit team’s report when making the decision. In addition, the chair or vice-chair of the audit team gives an oral presentation of the audit’s key results at the decision-making meeting and answers the Council’s questions on the issues presented in the report. Based on the audit report, the Council may also make a different decision from the one proposed by the audit team or the Secretary General.

When preparing and making decisions, FINHEEC complies with the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act concerning the disqualification of Council members and the Secretary General, which, in turn, supports the credibility and objectivity of the decisions.

2.2.3 Quality label

HEIs that pass the audit receive a quality label and are added to the register of audited institutions maintained on FINHEEC’s website. The quality label is valid for six years from the Evaluation Council’s meeting at which the audit decision was made. The audit certificate related to the quality label explains whether the audit was carried out by a Finnish or an international audit team, provides a summary of the key findings and describes the optional audit target.

If the HEI is required to undergo a re-audit, the targets that are in essential need of development and which will be subject to the re-audit are recorded in the Evaluation Council’s decision. The re-audit is conducted two to three years after the decision on the initial audit. The re-audit procedures are described in Chapter 4 of this manual.
3 Audit stages

The audit process consists of the following stages:
1. The HEI’s registration for an audit
2. Agreement negotiation
3. Appointment of the audit team
4. Compilation of audit material by the HEI
5. Auditor training
6. Briefing and discussion event
7. Audit team’s visit to the HEI
8. Audit team’s recommendation regarding the audit result
9. The Evaluation Council’s decision on the result
10. Publication of the report
11. Concluding seminar
12. Feedback to FINHEEC
13. Follow-up seminar.

The stages and time frame of the audits are described in a diagram in Appendix 2.

3.1 Agreement negotiation

FINHEEC signs an agreement on the audit with the HEI. The following issues are recorded in the agreement:
- Audit targets (incl. the optional target)
- Audit procedure and time frame
- The national or international composition of the audit team and the language to be used to carry out the audit (Finnish, Swedish or English)
- Duration of the audit visit (3–5 days)
- Price of the audit
- Commitment to a potential re-audit.
3.2 Audit team

3.2.1 Team composition and selection criteria

HEIs may choose either a Finnish or an international team to carry out the audit. An international audit team always includes Finnish members, who are well acquainted with the domestic higher education system. The role and number of international auditors can be agreed upon on a case-by-case basis.

FINHEEC appoints the audit team and its chair. An audit team usually consists of five to seven members, selected so that they represent the two higher education sectors, students, as well as working life outside the higher education sector. The team members must also have experience in the activities of different personnel groups, as well as in the basic duties and management of HEIs. The goal is to include a few individuals with prior experience as auditors in the team. An individual with special experience in the optional audit target is also appointed to the team, if required.

The members of the audit team are on an equal footing as evaluators. The audit team selects a vice-chair among its members. The team members are expected to participate in the training arranged by FINHEEC. A project manager from the FINHEEC Secretariat in charge of the audit takes part in the team’s discussions and works as the team’s secretary.

The criteria used in the selection of auditors include:

- Good knowledge of the higher education system
- Experience in evaluation or audits
- Knowledge of quality systems.

Moreover, the chair of the audit team is expected to have:

- Prior experience in the evaluation of HEIs and their operations
- A comprehensive and deep understanding of the higher education system
- Knowledge or experience of higher education management.

A person is disqualified from acting as a member of the audit team if he or she is an interested party or if confidence in his or her impartiality in relation to the HEI subject to the audit comes under question. Disqualification is determined in compliance with the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003, Chapter 5, sections 27–29). According to good administrative procedure, a disqualified person may not in any way participate in the processing or evaluation of a matter. Such situations may arise, for example, if the person is employed by the HEI subject to the audit or has acted in a position of trust in the institution’s decision-making body. Auditors
must also take it upon themselves to inform FINHEEC about any aspects that may have a bearing on their disqualification.

Prior to the appointment of the audit team, the HEI is given the opportunity to comment on the team’s composition, especially from the perspective of disqualification.

FINHEEC and the auditors sign an agreement that specifies the audit-related tasks, fees and any other conditions related to the assignment.

3.2.2 Tasks of the team

Members of the audit team:
- examine the HEI’s audit material
- decide on how to carry out the audit visit and which groups/individuals to interview
- determine any additional material that may need to be requested from the institution
- draw up interview questions for the audit visit
- conduct the audit visit as planned
- draw up the audit report
- present FINHEEC with its appraisal of whether the HEI should pass the audit or whether a re-audit needs to be conducted.

In addition to these tasks, the chair of the audit team has a special role, which involves:
- chairing the audit team’s meetings and audit visits, unless otherwise agreed
- participating with the project manager in the briefing and discussion event arranged at the HEI prior to the audit visit
- taking responsibility for the audit task as a whole and editing the audit report jointly with the project manager
- presenting the audit results at FINHEEC’s meeting and at the concluding seminar at the HEI
- participating in the communication of the results.

The project manager’s tasks include:
- organising the training event for auditors and acting as an instructor
- supporting the audit team’s activities by taking part in the team’s discussions as an expert in audits, and instructing the team as concerns the audit criteria and FINHEEC’s uniform decision policy
- preparing the audit team’s meetings and acting as secretary at the meetings
- being the point of contact between the HEI and the audit team
- organising the audit visit in cooperation with the institution
- editing the audit report
- taking charge of printing the report and communication.

### 3.2.3 Auditor training

Auditors are required to participate in the training arranged by FINHEEC. Among other things, auditors learn about the operations of FINHEEC, the objectives and procedure of the audit, as well as the tasks and operating principles of the audit team. In addition to this, international auditors are familiarised with the Finnish higher education system. The training lasts for one working day. If required, the project manager arranges personal training for the audit team’s chair focusing on his or her special tasks.

### 3.2.4 Auditors’ operating principles and ethical guidelines

The audit team must comply with the following operating principles and ethical guidelines in its work:

- Impartiality and objectivity: Auditors must take an impartial and objective approach towards the HEI subject to the audit, as well as recognise their position of power and the responsibility relating to it.
- Transparent and evidence-based evaluation: The audit must be based on transparent and systematically applied criteria, as well as on material collected in connection with the audit.
- Confidentiality: All of the information acquired during the process, except for that published in the final report, is confidential.
- Interaction: The audit is carried out through good cooperation and interaction with the HEI.

### 3.2.5 Remuneration

The auditors’ fees are determined in accordance with the principles adopted by FINHEEC.
3.3 Audit material

The HEI compiles material for the audit, the goal being to provide the audit team with a sufficient knowledge base and evidence for the evaluation of the quality system. The material consists of basic material and a self-evaluation report drawn up by the institution. The material is prepared in the language of the audit, as agreed in the audit agreement.

3.3.1 Basic material

- An organisation chart and a concise description of the HEI’s organisation, as well as the number of students and staff (max. three pages)
- Overall strategy of the HEI and a description of the strategy process, as well as a summary of the key strategic choices in terms of the institution’s future
- A diagram and concise description of the quality system (max. two pages)
- The HEI’s institution-level quality manual or other corresponding document describing the development of the operations
- For the chosen degree programmes, the total student intake, number of degrees completed, average time of degree completion, statistics on international degree students and exchange students (exchange periods of more than three months) to the degree of accuracy as agreed in the audit agreement; for programmes chosen as samples, the curriculum as well (incl. intended learning outcomes).

3.3.2 Self-evaluation report

The HEI draws up a self-evaluation report on the functioning of its quality system in line with the guidelines provided in Appendix 3. The institution chooses how to carry out its self-evaluation and write the report.

In its report, the institution is expected to carry out as reflective a self-evaluation as possible, identify areas in need of development and provide a concrete description of its practical measures related to the quality work. The report must focus on evaluation rather than description. Identifying the institution’s own strengths, and especially the ability to determine areas in need of development, are proof of a functioning quality system and an established quality culture. The HEI should be prepared to present evidence of the issues brought up in the self-evaluation report during the audit visit.
3.3.3 Submission of material

The HEI must supply the basic material and self-evaluation report to FINHEEC in paper format (ten copies) and as electronic documents at the latest twelve weeks prior to the audit visit. The self-evaluation report drawn up on the third sample of degree education, which is selected by the audit team, must be submitted to FINHEEC at the latest one week prior to the audit visit.

In addition to the materials mentioned above, the audit team is allowed to request the HEI to provide other materials deemed necessary prior to or during the audit visit.

The institution is also requested to give members of the audit team the opportunity to access electronic materials that are key to quality management and which may provide additional information to the team.

3.4 Briefing and discussion event

Around four weeks prior to the audit visit, the chair of the audit team and FINHEEC’s project manager visit the HEI to be audited. The purpose of the visit is to arrange an open event for the institution’s staff and students at which the objectives and implementation of the audit can be discussed.

3.5 Audit visit

The purpose of the audit visit is to verify and supplement the observations made of the HEI’s quality system based on the audit material. The goal is to make the visit an interactive event that supports the development of the institution’s operations. In addition to conducting interviews during the visit, the audit team examines any other material it may have requested from the institution.

The visit lasts from three to five days. During the first day, the team interviews representatives of the institution’s management, teaching and other staff groups, students and external stakeholders. At this stage, the focus is on the quality system as a whole. During the other days, the evaluation focuses in particular on the quality management of degree programmes and the optional audit target in the institution’s various units. The audit team may also conduct evaluation visits to individual faculties, departments or units to verify the practical functioning of quality management.

The audit team selects the targets for visits mainly on the basis of the audit material. The selection of one of the targets may be postponed until
the actual visit. The selection must be announced at the latest on the day preceding the interview. The audit team may also arrange joint discussions for various actors within the institution concerning key topics in terms of quality management. The visit concludes with a meeting with the management, where the audit team has the opportunity to ask more specific questions about the institution’s quality system. At the end of the meeting, the audit team gives the institution preliminary feedback on the functioning of its quality system based on the observations made during the visit.

3.6 Report and notification of results

The audit team draws up a report based on the material accumulated during the evaluation and on the analysis of that material. In accordance with the principle of continuous enhancement, the report points out the strengths and good practices of the HEI’s quality system, in addition to giving the institution recommendations for further development. The reports follow a standardised structure:

- Description of the audit process
- Concise description of the HEI subject to the audit and its quality system
- Results by audit target
- Strengths, good practices and recommendations for further development
- The audit team’s appraisal of whether the institution should pass the audit or whether a re-audit is needed; in the latter case, the team lists in its report what it considers to be the essential shortcomings of the quality system.

The Evaluation Council’s decision on whether the institution passes the audit or must be subject to a re-audit is recorded at the end of the report. If the HEI is required to undergo a re-audit, the targets that are in essential need of development and will be subject to the re-audit are recorded in the report.

The report is published in FINHEEC’s publication series in both paper and electronic format in the language specified in the audit agreement. The length of the report is approximately 50 pages.

The audit result is communicated to the HEI immediately after the Evaluation Council’s decision-making meeting. The report and an information bulletin are published on FINHEEC’s website within three working days of the decision.
3.7 Concluding seminar

FINHEEC and the HEI that was subject to the audit arrange a joint seminar, usually within one month of the audit decision. The seminar gives the institution’s staff and students the opportunity to openly discuss the audit results and conclusions with representatives of FINHEEC and the audit team.

3.8 Feedback to FINHEEC

FINHEEC collects feedback from all of the audited HEIs and the auditors in order to develop its activities.

3.9 Follow-up

FINHEEC organises national follow-up seminars to support the development of quality systems in HEIs. One of the key goals of the seminars is to give feedback on post-audit development work to HEIs whose audits have been performed around three years earlier. Another goal is to offer institutions the opportunity to discuss the development of quality systems and exchange experiences and good practices related to quality work. HEIs prepare a short report on their post-audit development work for the seminar.
4 Re-audit

4.1 Focus and criteria of re-audit

If the Evaluation Council requires an HEI to undergo a re-audit of its quality system, the targets that are in essential need of development and will be subject to the re-audit are recorded in the Council’s decision. In the re-audit, the institution is expected to present evidence showing that it has improved its quality system so that the audit targets evaluated in the re-audit as a whole have progressed to at least the level of ‘developing’.

Re-audits use the same criteria as the actual audits (see Appendix 1). Re-audits apply the same principles and ethical guidelines in the appointment of the audit team, as well as in its operations and decision-making as in the actual audits.

4.2 Re-audit stages

The re-audit process consists of the following stages:
1. Negotiation between the HEI and FINHEEC
2. Drawing up of the audit agreement
3. Appointment of the audit team
4. Compilation of audit material by the HEI
5. Auditor training
6. Audit team’s visit to the HEI
7. Audit team’s recommendation regarding the re-audit result
8. The Evaluation Council’s decision on the result
9. Publication of the report
10. Concluding seminar
11. Feedback to FINHEEC.
4.2.1 Negotiation

The HEI draws up a plan for developing its quality system, the aim being to satisfy the development needs listed in the Evaluation Council's decision. The plan serves as background material for the re-audit negotiation that the institution and FINHEEC conduct usually within six months of the conclusion of the initial audit. Participants at the negotiations include representatives selected by the HEI, representatives of the original audit team, as well as representatives of FINHEEC.

The negotiation result in an agreement on the overall time frame and materials for the re-audit.

4.2.2 Audit agreement

A re-audit agreement containing the following issues is concluded:

- Re-audit targets in compliance with the Evaluation Council’s decision
- Re-audit time frame
- The national or international composition of the audit team and the language to be used to carry out the audit (Finnish, Swedish or English)
- Duration of the audit visit (usually two days)
- Price of the re-audit
- Consequences if the HEI does not pass the re-audit.

4.2.3 Audit material

The HEI draws up a written report, which starts with a short summary of the general improvements to the quality system carried out after the initial audit. This is followed by a description and evaluation of the development work and its results of the agreed re-audit targets. The HEI must present as robust evidence as possible of the improvement in the quality system and of current quality procedures. The quality system development plan presented to FINHEEC is also appended to the report. HEIs should be prepared to present evidence of the issues brought up in the report during the visit.

The HEI must supply the material to FINHEEC in paper format (six copies) and as electronic documents at the latest eight weeks prior to the audit visit.

In addition to the materials mentioned above, the audit team is allowed to request that the HEI provide other materials deemed necessary prior to or during the audit visit. The institution is also requested to give members of the audit team the opportunity to access electronic materials that are key to quality management and which may provide additional information to the team.
4.2.4 Audit team

FINHEEC appoints an audit team with three to four members for the re-audit. The national or international composition of the audit team and the language of the re-audit is specified in compliance with the procedure used for the institution’s initial audit. One of the members of the initial audit team is appointed as the chair of the re-audit team. The team’s composition depends on the areas of the quality system that received special attention in the re-audit decision.

The audit team may not merely comprise auditors from the initial audit, but should mainly comprise people who have participated as auditors in FINHEEC’s previous audits. A project manager from the FINHEEC Secretariat in charge of the re-audit takes part in the team’s discussions as an expert and works as the team’s secretary.

Prior to the appointment of the team, the HEI is given the opportunity to comment on the team’s composition, especially from the perspective of disqualification.

FINHEEC and the auditors sign an agreement that specifies the tasks, remuneration and any other conditions related to the audit assignment.

4.2.5 Auditor training

FINHEEC organises a training event for auditors to review the tasks and operating principles of auditors, as well as to focus on the HEI subject to the re-audit, the report drawn up by the HEI and the practical implementation of the re-audit.

4.2.6 Audit visit

The purpose of the re-audit visit is to verify and supplement the observations made of the development of the quality system based on the re-audit material. The visit normally lasts for two days, but may take longer depending on the size of the institution and on the targets of the re-audit. The visit includes interviews with people from different organisational levels, students and external stakeholders. Decisions on the practical implementation of the visit are made jointly with the institution.

4.2.7 Report and notification of results

The audit team draws up a report based on the material accumulated during the evaluation and on the analysis of that material. The report presents the results of the re-audit by audit target. To conclude its report, the audit team
presents an overall evaluation and an appraisal of whether the HEI should pass the re-audit. The Evaluation Council’s decision on the re-audit result is recorded at the end of the report.

The audit report is published online in FINHEEC’s publication series in the language specified in the re-audit agreement. It can also be published as a print version, if the HEI pays for the printing expenses.

The audit result is communicated to the HEI immediately after the Evaluation Council’s decision-making meeting. The report and an information bulletin are published on FINHEEC’s website within three working days of the decision.

A concluding seminar may be jointly arranged by FINHEEC and the institution, if the institution wishes.

4.3 Consequences of re-audit

HEIs that pass the re-audit receive a quality label and are added to the register of audited institutions maintained on FINHEEC’s website. The quality label is valid for six years from the Evaluation Council’s meeting at which the re-audit decision was made. The audit certificate related to the quality label explains whether the audit was carried out by a Finnish or international audit team and provides a summary of the key findings of the re-audit.

Should the Evaluation Council decide that the HEI has failed the re-audit, decisions about the following audit will be made together with the HEI on a case-by-case basis.
Appendices

1: Audit criteria
2: Audit stages and time frame
3: Guidelines for the self-evaluation report
4: Audit concepts
**APPENDIX 1: Audit criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGETS</th>
<th>ABSENT</th>
<th>EMERGING</th>
<th>DEVELOPING</th>
<th>ADVANCED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. The quality policy of the higher education institution | The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:  
- definition of the system’s objectives and responsibilities  
- knowledge and commitment of those responsible  
- documentation of the system and the information it produces or suitable communication.  
- links to strategic planning, management and operations management  
- ability to meet the needs of strategic and operations management or commitment to quality work of managers involved in operations management. | The quality system’s objectives and responsibilities have not been clearly defined. The division of responsibility works only partially, and those responsible for the operations exhibit widely differing skill levels and commitment to their duties.  
- The quality system and the information it produces are inadequately documented. The information needs of the HEI’s personnel groups, students or external stakeholders are not adequately addressed in the documentation. Information produced by the system is not systematically communicated within the institution or to external stakeholders.  
- The quality system is not sufficiently well linked to the HEI’s strategic planning, management and operations management. The system and the information it produces do not serve the needs of strategic and operations management in an appropriate manner.  
- The system does not serve as a meaningful management tool at all organisational levels, and managers involved in operations management show a lack of commitment to joint quality work. | The quality system’s objectives and responsibilities are clearly defined. The goal-setting process is an inclusive one. The division of responsibility functions well. The key people responsible for the operations are committed to their duties and have sufficient skills to undertake them.  
- The quality system and the information it produces is documented in a clear and appropriate manner. For the most part, the information needs of the HEI’s personnel groups, students and external stakeholders are taken into account in the documentation. The information produced by the system is documented in a systematic and targeted manner within the institution and to external stakeholders.  
- The quality system is quite well linked to the HEI’s strategic planning, management and operations management. The system and the information it produces serve strategic and operations management, and there is evidence that the information is put to use.  
- In terms of management, the system works at different organisational levels, and the managers involved in operations management are committed to joint quality work. | The objectives of the quality system are defined in a very clear and inclusive manner. The objectives and division of responsibility provide excellent support for the development of the institution’s operations. There is clear and continuous evidence of the skill level and commitment of those responsible for the operations.  
- The HEI has systematic and well-established procedures for documenting the quality system and the information it produces so that the documentation satisfies the information needs of various parties. The institution has excellent and well-established procedures for communicating information to different personnel groups, students and external stakeholders. Communication is active and up-to-date. |  
| 2. Strategic and operations management | The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:  
- links to strategic planning, management and operations management  
- ability to meet the needs of strategic and operations management or commitment to quality work of managers involved in operations management. | The quality system is not sufficiently well linked to the HEI’s strategic planning, management and operations management. The system and the information it produces do not serve the needs of strategic and operations management in an appropriate manner.  
- The system does not serve as a meaningful management tool at all organisational levels, and managers involved in operations management show a lack of commitment to joint quality work. | Quality management is a natural part of the HEI’s strategic planning, management and operations management. The institution has systematic, well-established and excellent procedures that produce information for strategic and operations management needs, and there is clear and continuous evidence that information is put to systematic and wide use. |  
| | | | | |
### 3. Development of the quality system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The HEI shows a complete absence of major shortcomings in the:</th>
<th>The HEI has inadequate procedures for evaluating and developing the quality system. It has a weak overall view of the functioning of the quality system. System development is not systematic.</th>
<th>The HEI has well functioning procedures for evaluating and developing the quality system. It is able to identify the system’s strengths and areas in need of development, and system development is systematic.</th>
<th>The HEI has well-established and systematic procedures for evaluating and developing the system. It is able to efficiently identify the system’s strengths and areas in need of development, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the system. There is clear and continuous evidence of the system’s successful development work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- procedures for evaluating or developing the quality system or - overall view of the functioning of the quality system.</td>
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</table>

#### Follow-up section for the HEIs subject to the second RINHEEC audit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The HEI shows a complete absence of major shortcomings in:</th>
<th>The development of the quality system after the first audit has not been systematic or effective.</th>
<th>The development of the quality system after the first audit has been systematic. The system works better than before.</th>
<th>After the first audit, the HEI has systematically improved the functionality and fitness for purpose of the quality system. Special attention has been given to the workload produced by the system. The system has been developed in a very successful and effective manner.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- the development work following the first audit.</td>
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</table>
4. Quality management of the higher education institution’s basic duties

4a) Degree education

The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:
- quality management procedures used to achieve the goals set for the operations
- links between goals set for the activities and the HEI’s overall strategy
- participation of the institution’s personnel groups, students or external stakeholders in the development of the operations or
- quality management of support services that are key to the operations.

4b) Research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities

The quality management procedures are not fully functional and do not support the achievement of goals set for the operations in a meaningful manner.
- The goals are not linked to the HEI’s overall strategy.
- The quality system provides insufficient information for the quality management of the operations, and information use is sporadic and/or information collection is an end in itself.
- The personnel groups, students and external stakeholders are not involved in the development of the operations or in a meaningful manner.
- The quality management of key support services is not functional.

4c) Societal impact and regional development work (incl. social responsibility, continuing education, open university and open university of applied sciences education, as well as paid-services education)

Functional quality management procedures advance the development of the operations and the achievement of goals set for the operations. The objectives are mostly linked to the overall strategy of the HEI.
- The quality system produces relevant information for the quality management of the operations, and the information is used to develop the HEI’s operations in a meaningful manner.
- Personnel groups and students are involved in the development of the operations in a meaningful manner. External stakeholders also participate in the development work.
- The quality management of key support services functions relatively well.

4d) Optional audit target

The HEI has systematic and well-established quality management procedures that provide excellent support for the development of the operations and the implementation of the institution’s overall strategy. There is clear and continuous evidence of the system’s effectiveness in achieving the goals set for the operations.
- The HEI has systematic and excellent procedures used to produce information for the quality management of the operations. Information is used systematically, and there is clear and continuous evidence to show that it is successfully used to develop the operations.
- Personnel groups and students are committed and very actively involved in developing the operations. Special attention has been given to the workload generated by the quality management procedures. External stakeholders are involved in the development work in a meaningful manner.
- The HEI has systematic and well-established procedures for the quality management of key support services. There is clear and continuous evidence that the procedures function well.
The quality management procedures related to the planning of education are systematic and well-established and provide excellent support for planning. The quality management procedures related to the implementation of education are systematic and well-established and provide excellent support for implementation. Personnel groups and students are committed and very actively involved in the development of the operations. External stakeholders are also involved in the development work in a meaningful manner. There is clear and continuous evidence of the effectiveness of the quality work.

### 5. Samples of degree education: degree programmes

**Planning of education**
- Curricula and their preparation
- Intended learning outcomes and their definition
- Links between research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities, and education
- Lifelong learning
- Relevance of degrees to working life
- Participation of different personnel groups, students and external stakeholders.

**Implementation of education**
- Teaching methods and learning environments
- Methods used to assess learning
- Students’ learning and well-being
- Teachers’ competence and occupational well-being
- Participation of different personnel groups, students and external stakeholders.

**Effectiveness of quality work**
- Suitability of key evaluation methods and follow-up indicators and their impact on the achievement of goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:</th>
<th>The quality management procedures related to the planning of education are not fully functional and do not support the planning of education in a meaningful manner.</th>
<th>The quality management procedures related to the planning of education enhance the quality of planning and support planning itself.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>quality management procedures related to the planning of education</td>
<td>quality management procedures related to the implementation of education</td>
<td>The quality management procedures related to the implementation of education enhance the quality of the implementation and support implementation itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation of the institution’s personnel groups, students or external stakeholders in the development of the operations</td>
<td>The personnel groups, students and external stakeholders are not involved in developing the operations in a meaningful manner.</td>
<td>Personnel groups and students are involved in developing the operations in a meaningful manner. External stakeholders also participate in the development work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectiveness of the quality work.</td>
<td>There is little evidence of the effectiveness of the quality work.</td>
<td>There is clear evidence of the effectiveness of the quality work.</td>
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</table>

The quality management procedures related to the planning of education enhance the quality of planning and support planning itself. The quality management procedures related to the implementation of education enhance the quality of the implementation and support implementation itself. Personnel groups and students are committed and very actively involved in the development of the operations. External stakeholders are also involved in the development work in a meaningful manner. There is clear and continuous evidence of the effectiveness of the quality work.
### 6. The quality system as a whole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The HEI has only individual and unrelated quality management procedures that do not form a structured system.</td>
<td>There is no evidence of the procedures' impact on the development of the operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality management procedures do not form a functioning and unified system.</td>
<td>The quality system encompasses some of the HEI's basic duties but does not provide meaningful support for the development of the operations. There is little evidence of the system's impact on the development of the operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development of the operations is based on an existing quality culture.</td>
<td>The quality system covers all of the basic duties of the HEI and provides excellent support for the development of the operations. There is clear and continuous evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The well-established quality culture provides excellent support for the development of the operations.</td>
<td>The quality system as a whole</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2:
Audit stages and time frame

The HEI registers for an audit
- The institution and FINHEEC agree on a preliminary audit time frame based on the registration.

Agreement negotiation between the HEI and FINHEEC
- FINHEEC and the HEI sign an agreement on the audit. The agreement specifies the audit targets, procedure and time frame, national or international composition of the audit team and language to be used to carry out the audit, duration of the audit visit, price of the audit and commitment to a potential re-audit.

Appointment of the audit team
- FINHEEC usually appoints an audit team with five to seven members.

Compilation of audit material and preparation of the self-evaluation report
- The HEI compiles audit material, the goal being to provide the audit team with a sufficient knowledge base and evidence for the evaluation of the quality system. The material consists of basic material and a self-evaluation report drawn up by the institution. The material is submitted to FINHEEC at the latest 12 weeks prior to the audit visit.

Briefing and discussion event
- Around four weeks prior to the audit visit, the chair of the audit team and the FINHEEC project manager visit the HEI subject to the audit. The purpose of the visit is to arrange an open event for the institution’s staff and students at which the objectives and implementation of the audit can be discussed.

Audit visit
- The audit team’s visit to the HEI lasts from three to five days, depending on the size of the institution and on the audit task.

Audit report
- The audit team draws up a report based on the material accumulated during the evaluation and on the analysis of that material. In accordance with the principle of continuous enhancement, the report points out the strengths and good practices in the HEI’s quality system, in addition to giving the institution recommendations for further development.
Consequences of audit
- In its report, the audit team presents its appraisal of whether the HEI should pass the audit or whether a re-audit needs to be conducted. The Evaluation Council decides on the audit result on the basis of the appraisal.

The HEI passes the audit
- The institution receives a quality label and is added to the register of audited institutions maintained on FINHEEC’s website.
- The quality label is valid for six years.

The HEI does not pass the audit and must undergo a re-audit
- The institution does not receive a quality label.

Re-audit in two to three years
- If the HEI passes the re-audit, it is added to the register of audited HEIs and receives a quality label that is valid for six years.

Follow-up
- Around three years after the audit, the HEI takes part in a national seminar arranged by FINHEEC. The seminar’s main objective is to provide feedback on post-audit development work and enable parties in the field of higher education to discuss the development of quality systems and share experiences and good practices related to the quality work. HEIs prepare a short report on their post-audit development work for the seminar.
APPENDIX 3: Guidelines for the self-evaluation report

GUIDELINES:

- The HEI chooses how to carry out its self-evaluation and write the report.
- The report must be structured according to the headings listed below. The institution may freely decide on the use of any sub-headings.
- In its report, the institution is expected to carry out as reflective a self-evaluation as possible, identify areas in need of development and provide a concrete description of its practical measures related to the quality work. The report must focus on evaluation rather than description.
- The HEI should be prepared to present evidence of the issues presented in the report during the audit visit.
- The self-evaluation report is 50–70 pages long in total.
- The layout of the text is as follows: page size: A4, margins: 2.5 cm, spacing: 1, and font: ARIAL 11 pt or similar. Texts exceeding the maximum length are not taken into consideration. The report may not include links to internet pages.

CONTENT AND HEADINGS OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT:

1. THE QUALITY POLICY OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

a) Objectives of the quality system

Description: What are the key objectives of your quality system and how are they set?

Evaluation: Assess the clarity of the objectives, as well as how successful and inclusive the procedure for setting them is.

b) Division of responsibility related to the quality system

Description: Describe the responsibilities in your quality system.

Evaluation: Assess the functioning of the division of responsibility (e.g. the clarity, suitability and workload of the division). Assess the skill level and commitment of the people responsible for quality management.

c) Documentation and communicativeness of the quality system

Description: How is the quality system and the information produced by it documented? How are the information needs of user groups determined and taken into account? How are users notified about the information produced by the system?

Evaluation: Assess the clarity and usability of the documentation from the perspective of different parties and their needs. Assess the suitability, activeness and success of communication.
d) Quality culture of the higher education institution

**Description:** Describe the quality culture of your higher education institution. What concrete measures does your institution use to advance the emergence and development of a quality culture?

**Evaluation:** Assess the quality culture and its stage of development in your institution.

e) **Summary:** Summarise, in table format, the key strengths and areas in need of development related to audit target 1.

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Areas in need of development</th>
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2. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

a) Linking of the quality system to strategic and operations management

**Description:** How is the quality system linked to strategic planning, management and operations management? What information does the quality system produce for the needs of strategic and operations management?

**Evaluation:** Assess how well the quality system and the information produced by it serve the needs of strategic and operations management. Assess also the significance of the information produced by the system for the overall evaluation of the quality of the operations.

b) Functioning of the quality system at different organisational levels

**Description:** How is the quality system used in management at different organisational levels?

**Evaluation:** Assess the system’s functioning, effectiveness and workload in terms of management at different organisational levels, as well as the commitment to joint quality work of managers involved in operations management.

c) **Summary:** Summarise, in table format, the key strengths and areas in need of development related to audit target 2.

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<th>Strengths</th>
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</table>
3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUALITY SYSTEM

a) Procedures for developing the quality system

**Description:** Describe the procedures for evaluating and developing the quality system.

**Evaluation:** Assess the system’s ability to meet the objectives set for it and how systematic the system development is.

Summarise, in table format, the key strengths and areas in need of development related to the procedures for developing the quality system.

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Areas in need of development</th>
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b) Development stages of the quality system

**Description:** Describe the key development stages of the quality system. Higher education institutions subject to second audit must also explain which of the essential recommendations given in the first audit they have reacted to and how.

**Evaluation:** Assess the success of the system’s development and describe further development needs of the system.

4. QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION’S BASIC DUTIES

The higher education institution prepares a self-evaluation of the quality management related to audit targets 4 a–d. A separate section is drawn up for each sub-target, including descriptive and evaluative sections in accordance with the following guidelines.

**Description:** What goals have been set for the operations and what are the key quality management procedures used to achieve them? How do different parties (personnel groups, students, external stakeholders) participate in the quality work and how is participation supported?

**Evaluation:** Assess:
1) the achievement of the objectives and how the objectives are linked to the institution’s overall strategy
2) the functioning of quality management procedures and their impact on the development of the operations
3) the comprehensiveness, usability and utilisation of the information produced by the quality system
4) the roles, involvement and commitment of different parties in terms of quality work, as well as the workload created by the procedures

1 Support services include e.g. library and information services, personnel services, IT services, financial administration, career and recruitment services, student services, communication services, facilities management and international services.
5) the functioning, workload and effectiveness of the quality management of support services’ that are key to the operations.

**Summary:** Summarise, in table format, the key strengths and areas in need of development in quality management.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Areas in need of development</th>
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</table>

4a) **Degree education** (including first-, second- and third-cycle education)

4b) **Research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities**

4c) **Societal impact and regional development work** (incl. social responsibility, continuing education, open university and open university of applied sciences education, as well as paid-services education)

4d) **Optional audit target**

5. **SAMPLES OF DEGREE EDUCATION: DEGREE PROGRAMMES**

Under item 4a, the higher education institution is requested to provide a self-evaluation of the quality management of degree education at a general level. Under item 5, the institution provides a self-evaluation of the quality management of primarily two degree programmes chosen as samples of degree education.

Universities of applied sciences choose one programme leading to a bachelor’s degree and one programme leading to a university of applied sciences master’s degree. Universities choose one module leading to a degree that includes both bachelor’s and master’s education, as well as one programme leading to a doctoral degree. The institution is requested to explain the reasons for its selections and evaluate how representative the quality management of the selected programmes is in relation to other degree education. Programmes used as samples are evaluated as independent audit targets, but they also complement the evaluation of the quality management of education by providing detailed information at the level of degree programmes.

The institution prepares separate self-evaluations of both degree programmes according to the guidelines and headings listed below.

Based on the basic audit material supplied by the institution, the audit team chooses a third degree programme for evaluation at the latest four weeks prior to the audit visit. The self-evaluation report drawn up on this programme in accordance with the guidelines must be submitted to FINHEEC at the latest one week prior to the audit visit.
a) Planning of education

**Description:** Describe how the quality of the following matters is ensured:
- Curricula and their preparation
- Intended learning outcomes and their definition, as well as the assessment of learning that supports the intended learning outcomes
- Links between research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities, and education
- Lifelong learning
- Relevance of degrees to working life.
Describe also how personnel groups, students and external stakeholders participate in the quality work related to the planning of education.

**Evaluation:** Assess the functioning, workload and impact of the procedures used for planning education, as well as how different parties participate in the quality work.

b) Implementation of education

**Description:** Describe how the quality of the following matters is ensured:
- Teaching methods and learning environments
- Methods used to assess learning
- Students’ learning and well-being
- Teachers’ competence and occupational well-being.
Describe also how personnel groups, students and external stakeholders participate in the quality work related to the implementation of education.

**Evaluation:** Assess the functioning, workload and impact of the procedures used for implementing education, as well as how different parties participate in the quality work.

c) Effectiveness of quality work

**Description:** Describe:
- the key evaluation methods and follow-up indicators in terms of development at the level of degree programmes
- the development of operations in the past three to five years, using indicators
- the measures currently in progress for improving the quality of education.

**Evaluation:** Assess:
- the impact of the quality work on the achievement of the objectives set for the programme.

d) Summary: Summarise, in table format, the key strengths and areas in need of development related to the quality management of the degree programme.

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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Areas in need of development</th>
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</table>
6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SELF-EVALUATION

Describe how your institution carried out the self-evaluation and prepared the self-evaluation report. What ideas did the evaluation process bring up? Evaluate the success of the process.
APPENDIX 4:
Audit concepts

The following list contains FINHEEC’s interpretation of the concepts used in this manual.

Audit
An audit is an independent and systematic external evaluation. It assesses whether the quality system of a higher education institution is fit for purpose and functioning and whether it complies with the agreed criteria. An audit focuses on the procedures that the institution uses to maintain and develop the quality of its operations.

Enhancement-led evaluation
The goal of enhancement-led evaluation is to help higher education institutions identify the strengths, good practices and areas in need of development in their own operations. The purpose is, thus, to help higher education institutions achieve their strategic objectives and steer future development activities in order to create a framework for the institutions’ continuous development.

External stakeholder
An external stakeholder is a party outside the higher education institution that cooperates and is involved with the institution. It is an organisation or party that is affected by the institution’s operations or that can affect the institution.

Good practice
Good practice is a form of high-quality operation carried out by a higher education institution. In principle, such a practice can also be identified in other organisations. Good practice is, thus, an exemplary and innovative procedure the dissemination and implementation of which is desirable also in other higher education institutions.

Quality culture
Among other things, quality culture describes the environment and atmosphere in which the operations are developed, as well as the individual and collective commitment to the quality work. Higher education institutions themselves define in concrete terms what quality culture means in their context of operation.

Quality label
A quality label indicates that the quality system of a higher education institution has passed FINHEEC’s audit. Institutions may, if they so require, use the label when describing their operations to internal and external stakeholders.
**Quality management**

Quality management refers to the procedures, processes or systems that the higher education institution uses to maintain and develop the quality of its activities.

**Quality policy**

The quality policy of a higher education institution encompasses the goals of the quality system, the division of responsibility, documentation of the system and the information produced by it as well as the communicativeness of the system.

**Quality system**

A quality system encompasses the quality management organisation, division of responsibility, procedures and resources, which all contribute to the development of the operations. Each higher education institution decides on the objectives, structure and operating principles of its quality system, as well as the procedures used and the development of quality management.

**Self-evaluation**

Self-evaluation refers to an evaluation that a higher education institution performs of its own operations and their development. In accordance with the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, self-evaluation primarily functions as a tool that the institution can use to develop its operations, even though it is required by an external party in an audit. Identifying the institution’s own strengths, and especially the ability to determine areas in need of development, are proof that the institution has a functioning quality system and an established quality culture.