



## **Development Report 2015-2016**

The Higher Education Evaluation Unit publishes annually a development report as part of its internal quality management. The report illustrates the various improvements the Unit has done on the basis of the feedback gathered from the evaluations of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and analysed at FINEEC.

This report includes evaluations conducted in 2015-2016 and includes the following audits of quality systems:

- University of Lapland
- Aalto University
- Åbo Akademi University\*
- Tampere University of Applied Sciences
- Savonia University of Applied Sciences
- Turku University of Applied Sciences
- Satakunta University of Applied Sciences
- Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

The online questionnaires were sent to the HEIs and audit team members after the process.

\*ÅÅ audit team's responses were included, but the institution's responses did not arrive on time to be included in the analysis.

### **Utilisation of the feedback**

The staff of the FINEEC Team for Audits analysed the feedback information in a full-day-session in August 2016. The feedback were divided amongst the staff present beforehand so that one person read all of the answers from all audits for a specific question and presented the key findings to the whole group. Another designated person commented and added to the findings to make sure important findings were not left out. Strengths, good practices, new ideas, easy and difficult development issues were raised by the Team. The feedback questionnaires also provide indicator data on the success of the audit processes, which was also included in the analysis. The most important difficult development issues and new ideas were selected for further scrutiny and changes to the Team for Audit's procedures were made on to tackle the issues. Furthermore, indicator targets for the next year were set by the Team.

## Indicators

The feedback questionnaires have many open questions to provide qualitative responses on what worked in the process and how the audits could be improved. These have proved most useful for FINEEC's development purposes. In addition, there are seven statement questions, where the respondent selects the best fitting option from the following options:

- 1 Fully disagree
- 2 Partially disagree
- 3 Partially agree
- 4 Fully agree

The statements for HEIs are:

- The audit report provided us with useful feedback for development.
- FINEEC's audit team performed in a professional manner.
- The chair of the audit team performed in a professional manner.
- FINEEC's project manager communicated well in this audit.
- The timetable of the audit was successful.
- The audit criteria is clear and functional.
- This audit has had a significant impact on the development of our institution.\*
- Higher education institutions are treated equally in FINEEC's evaluations.

\* This statement was included this year for the first time. The intention is to monitor the immediate impact of audit in the institution.

The statements for audit team members are:

- I am satisfied with the audit report produced by my audit team.
- Project manager(s) of the audit team acted in a professional manner.
- The overall scheduling of the audit was successful.
- The audit criteria is clear and functional.
- Higher education institutions are treated equally in FINEEC's evaluations.
- Would you be interested in being part of FINEEC audit teams in the future? (yes/no)

A response of fully disagree resulted in a score of 1 and fully agree in 4. The response rate from HEIs was 100% and 89% from the audit team members.

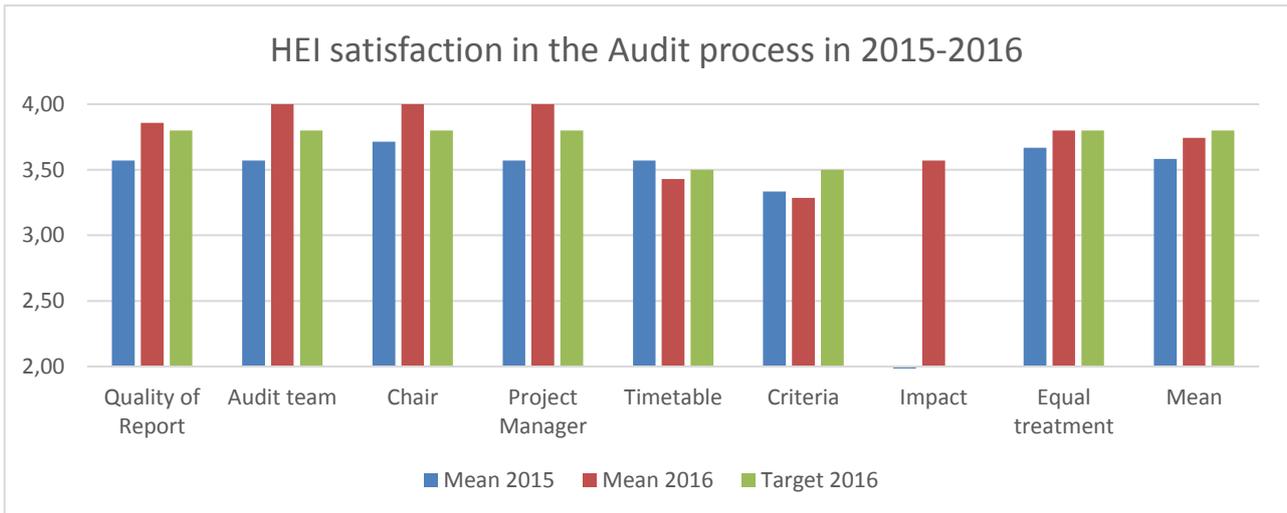


Figure 1: HEI satisfaction in the Audit process in 2015-2016.

Figure 1 illustrates the Likert-scale responses from the Finnish HEIs that took part in FINEEC’s audits in 2015-2016. The themes in question (eg. Quality of Report) correspond to the statements of the feedback questionnaire. The overall satisfaction is very high as all means are well above 3 (Partially agree). There was a strong increase in satisfaction on most issues from 2015. Especially, the Quality of the Report and the views on professionalism of Audit team, the chair and the Project manager all rose to the maximum from last year. The overall mean rose from 3.6 to 3.7. However, one must bear in mind that the N=7.

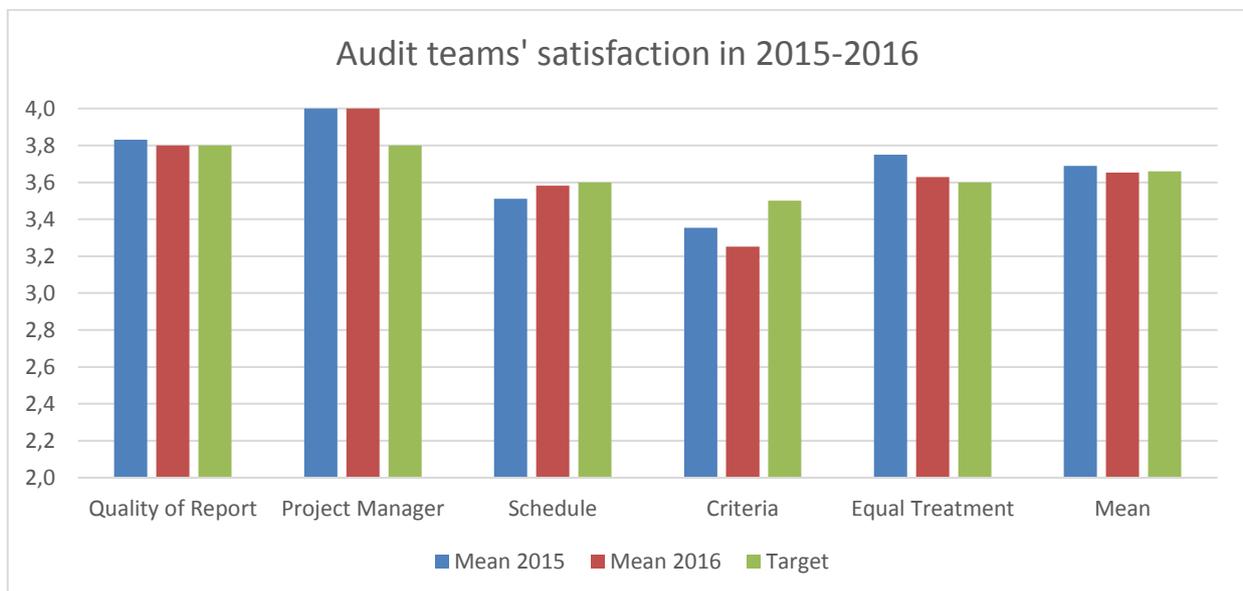


Figure 2: Audit teams’ satisfaction in 2015-2016

Figure 2 presents the level of audit team members’ satisfaction to the audit process. The auditors themselves were very content in the quality of their report and extremely happy with FINEEC project managers. The audit schedule was, however, considered demanding and the audit criteria still was not considered as clear and functional as perhaps it could be. Despite the updated wording of the audit

criteria in 2015, we are still not seeing improvement. However, 30% of respondents fully agreed with the statement and only 9% partly disagreed.

### **Strengths and good practices**

Higher education institutions and audit team members also provided plenty of responses to the open questions, which were read by the FINEEC Team for audits and discussed in the feedback utilisation session in August 2016. Overall, the institutions were very happy with their respective audit projects. The reports were seen to contain useful analysis, which the institutions were able to use in their development work. The report also enabled comparisons to other, similar institutions in Finland. The Audit teams and their chairs were considered extremely professional. The institutions also thanked them for the warm and confidential atmosphere of the interviews. FINEEC's project managers received extremely positive feedback from both higher education institutions for their service mentality, active communication and expertise in evaluation. The audit manual was seen as very useful document for the HEIs contact person.

A few good practices were identified during the feedback session. One suggestion involved rotating chairmanship where each audit team member gets to chair a part of the interview, where he/she asks the questions. This can potentially ease the mechanics of the interview and produce more normal discussion on the topics the audit team member considers most important. Another practice involved a short revision of the auditor training provided by FINEEC in the beginning of meetings of the audit team to remind the team of the contents of the training. In addition, it was noted that the project manager should consult the contact person of the HEI prior finalising the audit visit programme to make sure all of the most relevant groups and individuals are set up for the interview.

### **Easy and difficult development areas**

A number of minor improvements were suggested by the HEIs and audit team members or by the project managers analysing the responses. It appears that the audit teams could use more support in drafting of the interview questions. It was decided that more time should be devoted to drafting questions in the auditor training and in the meetings of the team. It was suggested that the audit teams would be provided with forms with the titles and subtitles of the audit report for writing notes and observations during the audit visit, to better cater for the subsequent writing of the report. Many suggested improvements, for example, relating to the audit criteria will be useful for the planning of the third round of audits but cannot be utilised yet, since the equality between HEIs in the audits would be jeopardised.

Many higher education institutions and especially Finnish audit team members called for a faster audit process, especially after the audit visit. The scheduling of the process was therefore selected as a topic for a workshop by the FINEEC Team for audits. It was decided that project managers could experiment with shorter, three-week deadlines for the audit teams' first drafts of the audit report chapters. It was widely felt that faster the team produces the first draft the better the report ultimately becomes. A plan for speedier process was drafted, but unfortunately number of phases still slows down the audit process after the visit. The project manager and the chair need a few weeks to edit the audit report to be made fit for publication. In international audits, the language must be proofread and the report must go through FINEEC's internal quality control, which takes about 3-5 days. In addition, the report layout takes about 1-2 weeks. Finally the Higher Education Evaluation Committee can only handle two audit decisions (which involves scrutinising two audit reports) per meeting, which sometimes lengthens the process by a month. FINEEC is, however, planning a fully electronic reporting process for the third round audits, which would eliminate the layout process and printing entirely. Ideally, also the drafting of the report would hasten.