

# Abstract

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The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre has conducted an audit of the Karelia University of Applied Sciences and has awarded the institution a quality label that is valid for six years from 29 January 2018. The quality management system of the Karelia University of Applied Sciences fulfils the national criteria set for quality management of higher education institutions, and corresponds to European quality assurance principles and recommendations for higher education institutions.

The object of the audit was the quality management system that the institution has developed based on its own needs and goals. The freely selected audit target chosen by the university of applied sciences was security management.

The following were regarded as key strengths of the quality management system:

- The *subsidiarity principle* that overarches the quality system has been operational in the organisation long before the principle even had been given a name. The subsidiarity principle – where issues are tackled at the closest level possible – reduces barriers for acting upon issues, promotes an enhancement-led feedback culture and strengthens the community members' trust in their possibilities to have an impact in the organisation.
- Focusing on the essentials and streamlining the processes have made quality work smoother. Key information is accessible and known to the actors and processes are consistent across the organisation. Quality work forms a relevant and meaningful part of everyday activities.
- The quality system covers all the basic duties of the institution and gives room for taking into account their unique features. The quality system seems fit for purpose for various kinds of educational programmes: both the ones regulated by national and international norms, and those that can have a personal focus with individually tailored learning outcomes. The project management procedures, together with the essential project portfolio tool, give reliable and efficient support for operations management. There is clear evidence of the effectiveness of these procedures. The systematic partnership management model is the backbone of quality management of societal impact and regional development work.

Among others, the following recommendations were given to Karelia University of Applied Sciences:

- Recognising quality deviations is sometimes challenging in a quality system that is based on the subsidiarity principle because of the sensitivity of interaction within a small organisation. The key challenge is that in individual cases feedback may not be given or the feedback may not be channelled forward and acted upon. Another challenge is that the future cannot be anticipated solely based on the feedback gathered from existing operations. The importance of the feedback culture should be further emphasised and supporting procedures should be developed to tackle these situations.
- The students are mainly interested in quality information and quality work that is related specifically to their own study programmes. The challenge is to activate the students to expand their role in quality work from a commentator role to an influential actor. The audit team recommends to develop participatory methods that propagate the work done by the student union POKA within the students in general.
- Internationalisation is strongly present in Karelia's strategy and vision but it is unevenly realised in the quality system and should be made more explicit throughout the system. Student satisfaction with the internationalisation of their studies and with the amount of qualitative feedback received about their studies varied between student groups. Especially the international students would require more support in acquiring working life connections and in integrating to the RDI activities. Special attention should be paid to the internationalisation of the UAS Master's Degrees.

**Keywords**

Audit, evaluation, higher education institutions, quality, quality management, quality system, university of applied sciences