

# Audits of Quality Assurance Systems of Finnish Higher Education Institutions

Audit Manual for 2008–2011



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# Preface

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is now publishing a revised edition of the Audit Manual first released in 2005. The new manual follows the general principles and procedures of the earlier version, but includes certain technical precisions and corrections based on the feedback obtained from the higher education institutions (HEIs) and auditors, as well as on the experience accumulated by FINHEEC in its own work. The practical principles of re-audits are also included in the present manual.

FINHEEC thus implements the audits of the quality assurance (QA) systems of the HEIs in line with the Bologna process. The Finnish HEI system is fairly 'mature' by European standards, and therefore auditing is a suitable procedure for the evaluation of QA in Finland.

During the past two decades, the European higher education system has undergone great changes, and several countries have been faced with serious quality problems and have found it necessary to adopt accreditation procedures, in particular. In accreditation, the minimum quality criteria are set by a party outside the HEI, and the purpose of the evaluation is to provide a 'yes' or 'no' answer as to whether the minimum quality criteria are met or not.

In the Finnish audit model, the HEI can decide on its own QA system, and FINHEEC evaluates its performance. Another benefit of auditing is that it contributes to the enhancement-led evaluation principle adopted by FINHEEC, also recognised by the HEIs as a procedure that supports their own work and autonomy. The HEIs remain responsible for the quality of their own operations.

This audit model was developed in 2005–2007, and the QA systems of 12 HEIs were audited during this period. The HEIs and FINHEEC have agreed on an overall timetable, and each university and polytechnic will undergo an audit by the end of 2011.

According to the feedback and audit reports, the audits have clearly boosted the systematic improvement of QA systems and procedures. Quality assurance has generated tools for the internal management of HEIs, directing the HEIs in their work to develop their operations as a whole. The quality assurance of education seems to be most advanced. The effectiveness of the QA systems and the continuous utilisation of the information generated through the systems are the major development challenges for the HEIs.

The present Audit Manual is, of course, not the final word in the evaluation of HEIs. In the international context, this field never stops developing, and the good results obtained in Finland can also contribute to international development. FINHEEC collaborates closely with other Nordic countries on evaluation issues and has world-wide co-operation contacts, including Africa.

As soon as possible, FINHEEC will have its own operations externally evaluated, thereby becoming eligible for the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), hopefully in 2008.

FINHEEC hopes that the present revised Audit Manual will further promote the national and international quality of Finnish higher education, enhancing its overall competitiveness.

This Audit Manual will remain in force until the end of 2011 or until decided otherwise by FINHEEC.

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Chair of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

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# 1 National and international background to auditing

An improved quality of HEIs is a factor in international and national competition. High quality enhances the competitiveness of Finnish society and the international attractiveness of education provided in the country. A highly educated population as well as more extensive promotion and utilisation of knowledge and competence are defined as the core elements of national competitiveness in the Finnish national innovation strategy.<sup>1</sup> Using various means, the aim is to enhance the Finnish position in the international division of labour. At the same time, internationalisation is a prerequisite for higher quality and improved innovations.

On a European level, the major efforts for improved competitiveness include the Lisbon strategy and the Bologna process. The challenge of the Lisbon strategy is for Europe to become the world's most dynamic economic area. The Bologna process supports this aim in the realm of higher education, and the objective is the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. A signatory country, Finland is committed to the process. An important element of the future EHEA is the quality assurance of higher education.

European higher education competes in the global education market. Competition and the surpassing of national borders have led to a situation where it is no longer sufficient to have national confidence in the uniform level of a country's higher education. Today, higher education must be comprehensible and reliable also internationally. In particular, the mobility of students and labour emphasise the need to be able to demonstrate the quality of education and degrees in international terms. It is up to the HEIs to continuously develop their own operations and improve and assure quality. There are also other national development needs of quality assurance, related to the HEI financiers, students and other stakeholders needing new tools to assess whether the HEIs have suitably efficient and high quality operations. These stakeholders also need to know how these operations are developed.

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<sup>1</sup> Science, Technology, Innovations. Science and Technology Policy Council of Finland. Helsinki 2006.

The national quality assurance of higher education has three components: national higher education policy, the HEIs' own quality assurance and national auditing.

The Ministry of Education is in charge of steering the national higher education policy. In practice, the national steering by the Ministry of Education materialises in the triennial agreements on objectives and performance negotiated between the Ministry and each HEI.

In line with the principle of the autonomy of HEIs, the Finnish system starts with the premise that the HEIs are ultimately responsible for the quality of their own education and other operations. Each HEI can set up a QA system that best suits its own needs. Thus the HEI is responsible for the special QA objectives and methods as well as for their development.

Operating on the basis of respective legislation, FINHEEC has been mainly in charge of the external evaluation of HEIs in Finland. The task of FINHEEC is to assist the HEIs and the Ministry in evaluation-related issues and to organise the HEI evaluations. If they wish, the HEIs can also participate in evaluations organised by other parties. Scientific research is evaluated by the Academy of Finland.

The auditing of QA systems is one of the evaluations performed by FINHEEC. The audit operations have been developed not only to support the quality work at the HEIs but also to demonstrate that Finland has competent and coherent national quality assurance in place at the level of HEIs.

Built to correspond to the European QA guidelines,<sup>2</sup> the audit model promotes the adoption and application of the European principles in the quality assurance of Finnish HEIs.

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<sup>2</sup> For the European guidelines and recommendations of quality assurance in "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", see [www.enqa.eu/files/BergenReport210205.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/BergenReport210205.pdf).

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## 2 Audits of the quality assurance systems in place in HEIs

### 2.1 Premises

In higher education, quality assurance means the procedures, processes and systems used by the HEI to manage and improve the quality of its education and other activities. The QA system of the HEI must cover all its operations. Each HEI determines the objectives, structure, operating principles, methods used and ways to improve its own QA system.

The FINHEEC audit model for QA systems is based on the corresponding European guidelines and recommendations which underline the importance of the HEI's own quality policy development, the significance of QA systems as management and steering tools, the role played by the students and staff, as well as the commitment of the HEI to the continuous improvement of its QA.

The audits focus on the procedures and processes which the HEI uses to steer and develop the quality of its education and other activities. The aims, operative contents or performance of the HEI are not, *per se*, touched upon in the audits. Result assessment is the domain of the HEI itself and is also performed by the Ministry of Education in the framework of its management by objectives and performance.

The main premise for the audits of the QA systems is the autonomy of the HEIs, comprising the principles of openness and the recognition and identification of the HEIs' social responsibility. An inherent element of the autonomy is to implement the quality assurance in line with the peer review principle. In this context, the HEIs assume the main expert responsibility for the national-level evaluations of quality assurance.

## 2.2 Objectives

The most important aim of the audits is to support the QA system development of the HEIs to meet the European QA principles, thereby promoting the competitiveness of the Finnish HEIs in the global education market.

The aim of the audit of each HEI is:

- to establish the qualitative objectives set by the HEI for its own activities;
- to evaluate what procedures and processes the HEI uses to maintain and develop the quality of its education and other activities;
- to evaluate whether the HEI's quality assurance works as intended, whether the QA system produces useful and relevant information for the improvement of its operations and whether it brings about effective, improvement measures.

The objective of the audits is to collect and disseminate best QA practices and promote their adoption within the HEIs. The aim of the audit processes and public reporting on the HEI system is to activate the debate on quality issues, as well as the interaction between the HEIs and their stakeholders.

## 2.3 Focus and criteria of the audit

Auditing focuses on two levels: the HEI's QA system as a whole and the quality assurance related to the HEI's basic mission. The target of the audit is the HEI's QA system, developed by each HEI starting from its own premises and objectives. Auditing assesses the comprehensiveness, performance, transparency, and effectiveness of the QA system, as well as the way in which the HEI monitors, evaluates and develops its own QA system.

### Auditing targets

1. Definition of the objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities of the HEI's QA system as well as the respective documentation
2. The comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the QA procedures and structures related to the HEI's basic mission

- 
- a) Degree education<sup>3</sup>
  - b) Research/R&D
  - c) Interaction with and impact on society as well as regional development co-operation<sup>4</sup>
  - d) Support services (such as library and information services, career and recruitment services, and international services)
  - e) Staff recruitment and development
3. Interface between the QA system and the management and steering of operations
  4. Participation of HEI staff, students and external stakeholders in quality assurance
  5. Relevance of, and access to, the information generated by the QA system
    - a) within the HEI
    - b) from the perspective of the external stakeholders of the HEI
  6. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of the QA system
  7. The QA system as a whole.

## Criteria

The audits of the QA system employ a set of criteria, with different scales for the four different stages of the development of the system. There are criteria for an absent, emerging, developing and advanced QA system specified by audit target (see Criteria in Appendix 2).

The report shall also include assessments by the audit group on the stage of development of the QA system per each audit target (including sub-targets 2 a–e and 5 a–b). Based on these assessments, the audit group makes a proposal to the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, recommending that the QA system pass the audit or be subjected to a subsequent re-audit.

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<sup>3</sup> Degree education refers to the education leading to the first, second and third cycle degrees. The first cycle degrees include the university and polytechnic BA degrees, while the second cycle refers to the university MA degrees and the post-graduate MA-level polytechnic degrees. The third cycle degrees are the Licentiate and Doctorate (research training).

<sup>4</sup> Societal impact and regional development work also include continuing education (such as professional courses), as well as the open university and polytechnic teaching.

## 3 Audit process

At each HEI, the audit process is composed of the following stages:

1. HEI registration for the audit
2. audit agreement signed between HEI and FINHEEC
3. audit material collected by the HEI
4. preparatory meeting for the audit visit
5. audit group's visit to the HEI
6. audit report
7. publication of results and feedback discussion.

Appendix 3 contains a chart of the various stages of the audit process.

### 3.1 Audit agreement

FINHEEC signs an agreement with the HEI on the audit of the QA system, indicating:

- the way in which audit will be carried out
- timetable of the audit process
- international/domestic composition of the audit group, and the language used in the audit
- duration of the audit visit (2–5 days depending on the size of the HEI)
- division of the audit costs
- commitment of the HEI being audited to a possible re-audit.

### 3.2 Audit material

The HEI involved in an audit process collects the audit material from its own QA system, the purpose being to provide the audit group with sufficient information and evidence to assess the comprehensiveness, performance, effectiveness as well as transparency of the QA system. The HEI must compile the audit material to allow the auditors to get a picture of the HEI organisation, the QA system, its links to the operative steering system, as well as evidence of the QA system performance.

The audit material must include the following documents:

- basic material for the audit, and
- evidence and samples chosen by the HEI to substantiate the performance of the QA system.

An extensive amount of audit material does not guarantee that the audit group gets a clear overall picture of the HEI's QA system. A concise and clearly structured whole is better for the purpose. To describe the comprehensiveness and continuity of the activities, it may be feasible in certain cases to compile a list of evidence and samples related to the audit targets instead of including only one sample per audit target in the audit material. The audit group members should be able to carry all the audit material with them during the audit visit.

The audit materials are compiled in the language used in the audit project. The HEIs who have agreed to an international audit will send their materials in English.

The audit materials are primarily collected from existing sources. The HEI can organise the collecting of the audit materials at it chooses.

## 1. Basic materials for an audit

- A chart or a brief written description of the HEI's organisation, including the number of students and staff (one page)
- A chart or a brief written description of the QA system (max. three pages)
- The quality manual shared by the entire HEI or other quality document in full
- A brief description of the past development of the QA system (one page)
- A chart or a brief written description of the links between the QA system and the management system (one page)
- The HEI's own SWOT analysis of its QA system (one page)
- A summary of the major improvement targets identified with the QA system, as well as the measures started/implemented on that basis (one page)

## 2. Evidence and samples chosen by the HEI to substantiate the performance of the QA system.

The HEI must include evidence and samples providing proof of the performance of the QA system in the audit material for each of the seven audit targets<sup>5</sup> and their sub-targets. The material should indicate which evidence relates to each audit target.

The evidence can include

- samples of evaluation and feedback procedures or indicators used by the HEI to monitor the quality of its degree education and other activities
- samples of the findings from the evaluations or measurements, indicating how they are used to develop the operations
- proof of the improvement of the QA system, and how the respective results are communicated within the HEI and to its external stakeholders
- proof of the impact of the QA system on the development of education and other activities.

The HEI shall submit the audit material in ten (10) copies to FINHEEC, no later than six weeks before the audit visit.

In addition to the above, the audit group may ask the HEI to provide additional materials deemed necessary before the audit visit.

The HEI is also requested to provide the audit group with access to any electronic material relevant to the audit.

### 3.3 Meeting to prepare for the audit visit

About three weeks before the actual audit visit is made, the chair of the audit group and the FINHEEC project manager in charge of the audit coordination will visit the HEI. The purpose is to organise a meeting to inform the HEI staff and students, as well as to provide them with an opportunity to discuss the objectives, targets, criteria and implementation of the audit.

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<sup>5</sup> For audit targets, see Chapter 2.3.

## 3.4 Audit visit

One objective of the audit visit is to verify and complement the picture of the HEI's QA system, obtained on the basis of the audit material. Another is to make the audit visit an interactive event contributing to the development of the HEI's quality assurance.

Depending on the size of the HEI, the duration of an audit visit is two to five days. The first day involves interviews with the representatives of the HEI's management, teaching and other staff, students and other stakeholders. The focus is on the QA system as a whole.

On the second day, the audit group concentrates on the QA of the degree education and other operations in the different units of the HEI. The audit group can visit faculties or individual units to verify the comprehensiveness, performance, impact as well as transparency and communicativeness of the QA in actual operations. The audit group chooses the sites visited based mainly on the audit material. Moreover, the audit group can arrange joint meetings with various staff groups to discuss themes central to quality assurance.

If necessary, the audit visit can extend to three or even five days. It always ends with a meeting with the HEI management.

In addition to interviewing staff and students, the audit group shall acquaint themselves with QA materials.

## 3.5 Audit group

### 3.5.1 Composition of the audit group and criteria imposed on auditors

FINHEEC appoints the audit group. As a rule, the audit group is composed of five members, three of whom are HEI exponents, one a student representative and one a work life representative. In appointing the groups, care is taken to include representatives of both higher education sectors, as well as the expertise of various of the HEI's staff groups (management and administration, teaching and research as well as support services). As applicable, the audit group should also include people with previous audit experience.

The auditors must meet the following criteria:

1. sound knowledge of the higher education field
2. experience in evaluation/auditing
3. knowledge of quality management/QA systems
4. participation in auditor training organised by FINHEEC.

Before the appointment of the audit group, the HEI can comment on its planned composition.

The HEIs have a choice of a national or an international audit group. The role and number of foreign auditors can be determined separately for each audit.

FINHEEC will conclude contracts with the auditors on the following aspects:

- expert tasks
- report writing obligation
- fee
- any other terms and conditions of the assignment.

The secretary of the audit group is one of the Project Managers working in the FINHEEC Secretariat.

### 3.5.2 Disqualification of auditors

A person is disqualified as an auditor if he or she is an interested party or if confidence in his or her impartiality towards the HEI in question is at issue. This may be the case if the person is employed by the HEI under audit or has held a position of trust in its administrative body. The auditor must inform FINHEEC of any likelihood of conflict of interest.

### 3.5.3 Auditor training

All auditors must have participated in the auditor training organised by FINHEEC. The training focuses on the objectives and phases of the audit process, the responsibilities of the audit group, as well as the audit methods and the international and national quality assessment situation. The training can involve 10–20 auditors at a time. The training takes 1.5 working days.

The training includes the following issues:

- the role of FINHEEC as a national and international evaluator
- presentation of the audit premises, objectives and method
- the tasks and operating principles of the audit
- the implementation of the audit visit
- audit techniques and questions
- analysis of audit materials and reporting.

Before the audit visit, the audit group should have at least one preparatory meeting to discuss the audit agreement and the audit materials submitted by the HEI and agree on the group's internal division of labour in view of the audit visit and reporting.

### 3.5.4 Principles and ethical guidelines

The audit group must observe the following principles and ethical guidelines related to auditing:

1. Auditing must be systematic and based on transparent and intelligible methods.
2. Auditing must be based on the material accumulated during the audit process and visit.
3. The auditors must have competence in auditing/evaluation, and be willing to improve that competence.
4. The auditors must be impartial and objective *vis-à-vis* the HEI under review.
5. The auditors must be aware of their potential links with different interests and value systems.

### 3.5.5 Remuneration

The auditors are remunerated according to the criteria established by FINHEEC.

## 3.6 Audit report

After analysing the material accumulated during the audit process, the audit group writes a report. The reports should follow a uniform structure including

- a description of the audit process
- a description of the HEI under review and its QA system
- audit findings, itemised by audit targets
- conclusions
  - strengths and best practices
  - recommendations
  - a proposal of the audit group recommending that the HEI's QA system pass the audit or be subjected to a subsequent re-audit.

The audit report ends with the FINHEEC decision on whether the HEI passes the audit or whether its QA system needs to be re-audited.

The audit report is published in the language used in the audit. The report is to be about 50 pages.

### 3.7 Publication of results and feedback discussion

The HEI audit reports are public documents. They are published in the FINHEEC publication series. In addition, FINHEEC can publish compilation reports in English or Finnish, summarising and analysing past audits.

The findings of the audits are published at a seminar organised by FINHEEC with the HEI under review. This also gives the HEI's staff and students the opportunity to have an open discussion about the audit findings and conclusions with the audit group.

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## 4 Audit conclusions and consequences

Based on the audit targets and criteria, the audit group appraises the fitness for purpose and performance of the QA system, issuing recommendations for its improvement and highlighting best practices.

The audit group issues an appraisal of the development stage of the QA system by each audit target, using this criteria to make a proposal to FINHEEC as to whether the HEI passes the audit or whether a re-audit is needed. The audit group can propose that the HEI passes the audit if all audit targets meet the minimum criteria of an “emerging” system, and that the QA system as a whole (audit target 7) is at least “developing”.

On the basis of the proposal of the audit group, FINHEEC will decide whether the HEI’s QA system passes the audit or whether a re-audit is needed. Further, FINHEEC may decide to deviate from the proposal of the audit group.

If a re-audit of the HEI’s QA is required, it will take place in about two years from the audit proper, and it will focus especially on the improvement proposals made.

FINHEEC maintains a register of HEIs that have undergone an audit on its website. FINHEEC issues an audit certificate to the HEIs passing the audit. The audit of the HEI’s QA system is repeated every six years.

## 5 Re-audits

### 5.1 Targets and criteria of re-audits

If FINHEEC decides to require a re-audit of the HEI's QA system, the relevant decision shall include the essential improvement needs of the QA system focused on in the re-audit. During the re-audit, the HEI is required to provide evidence of progress in the development of its QA system in the areas defined as essential development needs. Furthermore, in the areas focused on in the re-audit, the QA system must meet the criteria of a “developing” system.

In assessing the development areas, the re-audit group uses the set of criteria included in Appendix 2.

### 5.2 Re-audit process

At each HEI, the re-audit process is composed of the following stages:

1. The HEI, the audit group and FINHEEC conducts a negotiation.
2. An audit agreement is signed between the HEI and FINHEEC.
3. The HEI collects the re-audit material.
4. FINHEEC appoints the re-audit group.
5. FINHEEC provides training for the re-audit group.
6. The re-audit group visits the HEI.
7. A re-audit report is prepared.
8. The results are published, followed by a feedback discussion.

#### 5.2.1 Negotiation between the HEI and FINHEEC

As soon as possible after the audit proper, the HEI will have an opportunity to discuss the development plan of its QA system, based on the audit report, with FINHEEC.

The audit group can also be heard during these discussions. In its plan, the HEI shall present the development measures in response to the prioritised development items contained in the FINHEEC decisions as well as to the development recommendations included in the audit report.

The purpose of the negotiation is to agree on the structure of the re-audit material and the overall time schedule of the re-audit. A memo is written detailing the negotiation.

Representatives appointed by the HEI, the Chair and/or members of the original audit group as well as FINHEEC representatives participate in these negotiations.

### 5.2.2 Re-audit agreement

In the audit agreement signed between FINHEEC and the HEI, the latter also committed itself to a possible re-audit. A separate re-audit agreement is to cover the following aspects:

- the re-audit targets, as defined in the FINHEEC decision
- timetable of the re-audit
- international/domestic composition of the re-audit group, and the language used in the re-audit
- duration of the re-audit visit (1–2 days depending on the size of the HEI)
- division of costs
- consequences in case the HEI does not pass the re-audit.

### 5.2.3 Re-audit material

The HEI is to issue a written report (10–20 pages) on the progress made in the development of its QA system. The report should include a cover page, list of contents and a one-page summary of the performance and major outcomes of the development work. After the summary, each re-audit target should be presented on 1–3 pages, focusing on the development work and its implementation as well as the respective results. As applicable, the report may contain subtitles that are more detailed than the development recommendations of the audit report. The appendices should include the development plan drawn up based on the results of the first audit and/or its implementation plan. The report is the preliminary material available to the re-audit group before their visit.

The HEI's report should provide written evidence of Internet links to material indicating the measures taken to improve the QA system. Crucial web-based materials must be printed out and integrated into the written material. The report and documentation must not exceed one binder of 7 cm maximum.

The HEI shall submit the material in ten (10) copies to FINHEEC, no later than six weeks before the re-audit visit.

#### 5.2.4 Appointing the re-audit group

FINHEEC appoints the group for the re-audit. The group includes 3–4 members. At least one of the members represents academia, one students and one the work life outside academia. The composition of the group should reflect the focus of the re-audit decision.

The group chair is one of the members of the original audit group, but not necessarily the original chair. The group is not merely to include members of the original audit group of the HEI, but comprise people who have participated in some earlier audit process.

Before the group is appointed, the HEI shall have a chance to comment on its composition, for example, in relation to conflicts of interest.

FINHEEC will sign an agreement with the auditors on the following aspects:

- expert tasks
- report-writing responsibilities
- fee
- any other terms and conditions of the assignment.

The secretary of the audit group is one of the Project Managers working in the FINHEEC Secretariat.

#### 5.2.5 Training of the re-audit group

FINHEEC provides training for the auditors, repeating the principles of the auditor's role and focusing on the re-audit targets, the HEI's material and on the practical arrangements of the re-audit.

After having acquainted itself with the re-audit material, the group convenes in a preparatory meeting in view of the audit visit.

### 5.2.6 Audit visit

The re-audit visit is made to verify the stage of the development of the QA system, based on the material obtained. As a rule, the visit takes one day but can also last two days depending on the size of the HEI. The visit includes interviews with staff from various levels of the organisation, including students and stakeholders. Site visits to individual units are not necessarily organised.

The practical arrangements of the visit are agreed upon with the HEI.

Since the HEI and FINHEEC organised a pre-audit meeting and information session in the original audit, similar meetings are not necessary for the re-audit.

### 5.2.7 Report

Based on the material accumulated during the evaluation process (documents from the HEI and the visit), the re-audit group writes a report. The report includes the outcome of the re-audit per each audit target, evaluated against the relevant criteria. The report is to contain an evaluation and conclusions, but no development recommendation will be given.

The report is published in the language used in the re-audit.

At the end of its report, the audit group makes a proposal for FINHEEC as to whether the HEI has passed the re-audit.

The final part of the report is the FINHEEC decision on the result of the re-audit, based on the proposal of the re-audit group.

### 5.2.8 Publication of results and feedback discussion

The re-audit reports are public. They are published on the Internet in the FINHEEC publication series. They can also appear in printed form if the HEI pays the printing expenses.

If the HEI so wishes, a publication and discussion event can be arranged at the HEI in collaboration with FINHEEC.

## 5.3 Conclusions and consequences of the re-audit

FINHEEC is to issue an audit certificate to the HEIs passing the audit. The certificate states that the HEI has passed the audit, with no reference to the re-audit.

The HEI passing the re-audit is recorded in the audit register kept by FINHEEC.

The audit is valid for six years from the FINHEEC decision on the passed re-audit.

Should FINHEEC decide that the HEI did not pass the re-audit, a subsequent audit is performed in that HEI in six years from FINHEEC's decision about the result of the re-audit. The subsequent audit will be a normal, full audit.

## 6 Audit follow-up and development of the QA systems

FINHEEC organises audit follow-up seminars to support the development of the HEIs' QA systems. One purpose of the seminars is to provide feedback on the QA system development work to the HEIs within about three years from the latest audit. Another is to exchange experience and best practices of QA work among the HEIs. The seminars are open to all HEIs.

## APPENDIX 1: Audit concepts

This section includes the FINHEEC interpretation of the concepts used in this manual. The definitions are based on established and approved usage by international evaluation organisations, which FINHEEC has adapted to the Finnish higher education and evaluation culture. This means that FINHEEC is not committed to any individual quality assessment method in its audits (such as ISO, EFQM or BSC).

### Evaluation

Evaluation is a systematic appraisal and highlighting of value or a comparison against objectives and targets, as well as a “measurement” of performance (assessment, as in quality assessment) against set criteria. FINHEEC sees evaluation as a process geared to highlight development needs and to putting proposals forward.

### Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria define the conditions for identifying and distinguishing the qualitative characteristics or quantitative indicators of training from each other. The criteria can constitute a threshold value or be scaled. The threshold values have been used in the polytechnic license evaluations and accreditation of the professional programmes of HEIs. Scaled criteria have been used in audits and in the selection of the quality units of polytechnics.

### Evaluation model (method)

In the evaluation of HEIs, the term evaluation model or evaluation method refers to an established international approach comprising four components: 1. a national or other external evaluation organisation; 2. a self-evaluation; 3. a peer evaluation, including audit visits; and 4. a public evaluation report.

### Evaluation type

Evaluation types can be summarised according to use as: 1. evaluation, 2. accreditation, 3. auditing and 4. benchmarking. These different types are used to evaluate three different targets, or organisations, degree programmes and subjects, and they can be used for different purposes, from the development of operations to indicating accountability.

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## Accreditation

The word 'accreditation' (Lat. *ad + credere*) means to prove something is reliable and creditable and to acknowledge its worth publicly in relation to external criteria. Accreditation usually refers to either an official approval through formal decision-making mechanisms of the HEIs or their programmes, or to the awarding of different quality labels to HEIs or their programmes.

## Auditing

An audit is an independent external evaluation to ascertain whether the QA system conforms to its stated objectives, is effective and fits its purpose. The audits do not address objectives or operative results as such, but evaluate the process used by the HEI to manage and improve the quality of its education and other activities.

## Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation means the appraisal of the operations, prerequisites and results by the unit or organisation. Self-evaluation is a means of collecting information about the evaluation target and a tool for the HEIs to improve their activities. Self-evaluation can be undertaken on the organisation's own initiative or at the behest of an external body.

## Enhancement-led evaluation

Enhancement-led evaluation refers to evaluation geared to support the HEIs in improving their education and other activities. FINHEEC sees enhancement-led evaluation as a user-led process where the evaluation method is tailored according to the objectives of the evaluation, its theme and the needs of the participants.

## Criteria

See evaluation criteria.

## Quality assurance

Quality assurance means the procedures, processes and systems used by the HEI to safeguard and improve the quality of its education and other activities.

## Quality assurance system

The concept of 'quality assurance system' (QA system) includes both quality management and quality enhancement. The term can be used in two ways: it may refer to the quality assurance system of an individual HEI or to the national system for assuring the quality of higher education. The quality assurance system of a HEI refers to the entity constituted by the quality assurance organisation, the division of responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources. The national QA system refers to the whole constituted by the procedures and processes of the HEIs, FINHEEC and the Ministry of Education, as well as the legislation enacted to assure the quality of higher education.

## Quality

Quality can be defined in many ways, for instance, in terms of excellence, standard quality, customer quality, cost-efficiency or change brought about by the operations. In the audits of QA system, quality refers to the appropriateness (fitness for purpose) of QA methods, processes and systems in relation to stated objectives or aims. Understood in this way, quality is a verified achievement of objectives.

## Quality culture

Quality culture includes both measures geared to improve quality and individual and collective commitment to maintaining and improving quality.

## Certification

Certification is the verification and validation of an achieved standard or status. Certification often includes a certificate of the status achieved. The certificate can be awarded by a first party (the management of an organisation), a second party (the customer) or a third party (an accredited external certifier).

## Stakeholder

Stakeholders are groups or organisations with a vested interest in a matter. The stakeholders of a HEI are its staff, students, the students' parents and other tax payers, employers, the government, society, trade unions and higher education graduates.

## SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a method used, for example, in the evaluation and development of activities. A SWOT analysis lists the organisation's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

## APPENDIX 2: Audit criteria

AUDITING TARGETS	CRITERIA		
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING
1. Definition of the objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities of the HEI's QA system and relevant documentation	The objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities of the QA system have not been defined or documented.	The objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities are inadequately defined and documented. The division of responsibilities is only partly organised.	The objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities are defined and documented in a clear and concrete manner. The responsibilities are defined and organised.
	The documentation and division of responsibilities are very well organised and functional, promoting the QA system as a whole.		
2. The comprehensiveness and efficiency of QA procedures and structures related to the HEI's basic mission			
2 a) Degree education	There is no QA procedures related to the HEI's basic mission.	The system covers individual procedures related to the HEI's basic mission.	The system covers several procedures related to the HEI's basic mission.
2 b) Research / R&D2	The information generated by the QA system is not used as a tool to develop quality management and to develop other activities.	The information is used unsystematically and/or it is accumulated as an end <i>per se</i> .	The information is utilised in a systematic manner, and there is clear and continuous evidence of the sufficient use of the information to develop education and other activities.
2 c) Interaction with and impact on the society as well as regional development co-operation	Inadequate quality is not identified with the QA procedures	QA aims at maintaining the quality level reached so far. The QA processes work satisfactorily to identify inadequate quality.	Special attention is paid to procedures and structures geared to inspire and implement new ideas. The operational culture supports innovation. Inadequate quality is identified in an efficient manner.
2 d) Support services (such as library and information services, career and recruitment services, and international services)			
2 e) Staff recruitment and development			

AUDITING TARGETS	CRITERIA		
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING
3. Interface between the QA system and the HEI's management and steering of operations	QA is not linked to management and steering of operations.	The interface between the QA system and the HEI's operative steering as well as the monitoring and improving of its results is inadequate.	The system links to the HEI activities and steering of operations. The information generated through the QA system is utilised in development work. There is evidence of the existing links between the QA system and the steering of operations as well as monitoring and improving of results.
4. Participation of HEI staff, students and external stakeholders in QA	The HEI staff, students and external stakeholders do not participate in QA.	Some of the following actors remain external to QA operations: - students - academic staff - support services - researchers - administration - management - external stakeholders	The staff groups and students are active participants in the system. External stakeholders also play an active role in the QA.  The various staff groups are very active and committed to the QA system not only in theory but also in practice. The external stakeholders are also involved and play a meaningful role in the activities.
5. Relevance of, and access to, the information generated by the QA system			
5 a) within the HEI	The QA does not take HEI's various staff groups or students into consideration, and there is no exchange of information within the HEI.	Information is generated without a plan, and it is disseminated unsystematically. The information needs of various actors within the HEI have not been taken into consideration in a sufficient manner.	The system generates relevant information for the HEI actors, and the main results are available to the various staff groups and students. The HEI focuses actively on QA issues in its internal communications.
			The HEI has systematic procedures for the production and analysis of the information targeted at different staff groups.

AUDITING TARGETS	CRITERIA			
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	
5 b) for the external stakeholders	<p>The HEI's external stakeholders' perspective is not considered in the QA system, and they do not receive any information.</p>	<p>The perspective of the external stakeholders has not been considered sufficiently in the planning and continuous improvement of the QA system. Dissemination of information to external stakeholders is unsystematic.</p>	<p>The external stakeholders have been defined, and their information needs have been clearly considered. The performance of the QA system and its main results are available to the major co-operation partners and stakeholders.</p>	<p>The HEI focuses actively on QA issues in its external communications. Information is given in a targeted and purposeful manner to the external stakeholders.</p>
6. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous development of the QA system	<p>The HEI does not have a clear conception regarding the functioning of its QA system which is not monitored or developed.</p>	<p>The HEI has a poor overall conception of the operation of its QA system. There is hardly any monitoring, and there is no plan to develop it.</p>	<p>The HEI monitors the operation of the QA system, and the development takes place according to plan and is documented.</p>	<p>The HEI monitors, evaluates and develops the operation of the QA system in a systematic manner, and is comprehensively aware of its impacts and consequences.</p>
7. QA system as a whole	<p>The HEI activities consist of individual and isolated QA procedures only.</p>	<p>Some of the HEI activities include QA procedures.</p> <p>There is some evidence of the effectiveness of the QA system on the development of the activities.</p> <p>The QA procedures do not constitute a well-functioning and uniform system.</p>	<p>The QA system covers most of the HEI's activities.</p> <p>There is clear evidence of the effectiveness of the QA system on the development of the activities.</p> <p>The QA procedures constitute a fairly well-functioning whole.</p>	<p>The QA system covers all activities of the HEI.</p> <p>There is systematic and continuous evidence of the effectiveness of the QA system on the development of the activities.</p> <p>The QA procedures constitute a dynamic whole.</p>

## APPENDIX 3: The phases and chronological order of the audit process

### The HEI registers for an audit

- The audits are done on a registration basis. FINHEEC sets an audit timetable together with the HEIs that have signed up.



### The audit agreement is drawn up

- When initiating the audit process, FINHEEC and the HEI conclude an agreement which sets forth the audit method, the international or national composition of the audit group (language), the duration of the audit visit, the timetable for the audit process, the costs and the auditee's commitment to a possible re-audit.



### The audit group is appointed

- FINHEEC appoints the audit group, generally composed of five members, to audit each HEI.



### The HEI collects audit material

- The HEI involved in the audit process collects the audit material from its own QA system; the purpose of the material is to provide the audit group with sufficient information and evidence for the evaluation of the performance of the QA system. The audit materials are primarily collected from existing sources.



### Meeting to prepare for the audit visit

- Before the actual audit visit, the chair of the audit group and the FINHEEC project manager coordinating the audit visits the HEI. The purpose is to inform the HEI staff and students about the audit and discuss its implementation.



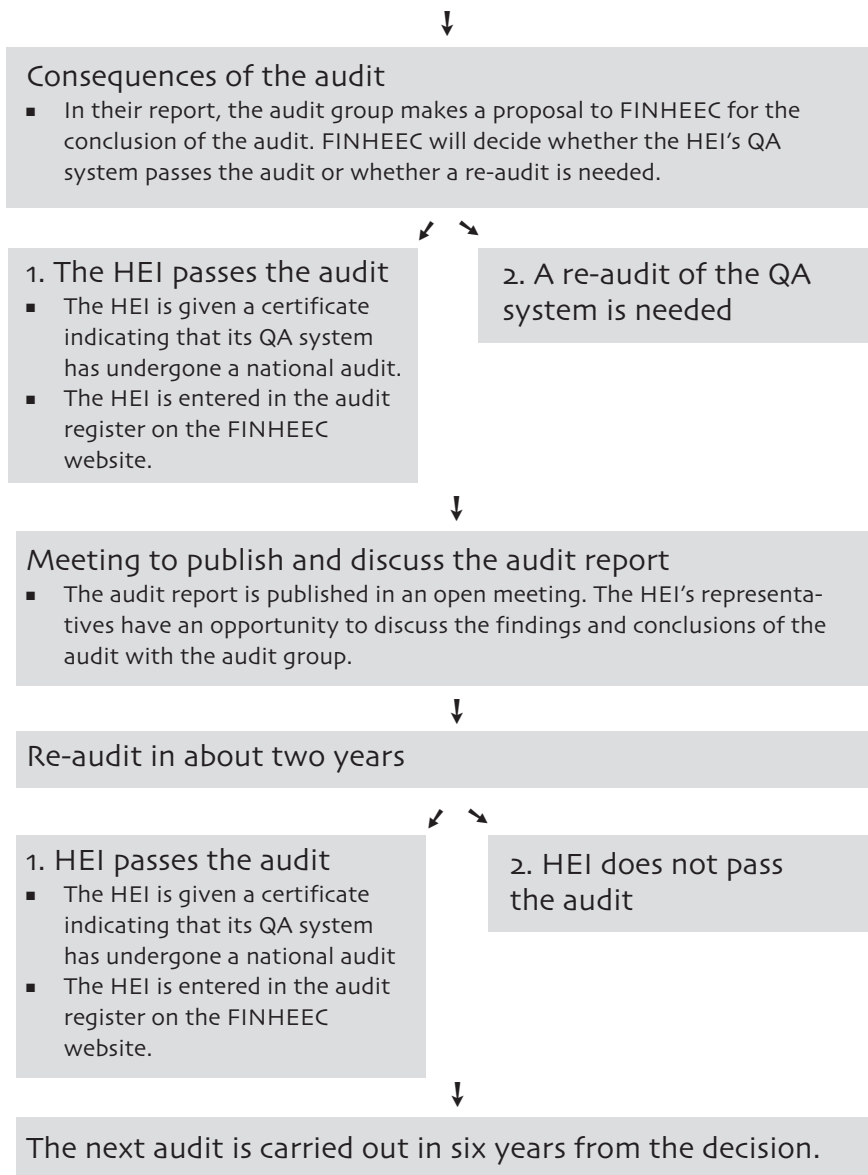
### Audit visit

- The visit of the audit group to the HEI lasts 2-5 days. During the visit, the audit group interviews various HEI stakeholder groups, visits various units and studies materials related to the QA system of the HEI.



### Audit report

- The audit group writes an audit report based on materials accumulated during the audit process. The report includes the findings of the QA audit and points out improvement recommendations, strengths and best practices.



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