

# Audit of the University of Graz

## 2013

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## ABSTRACT

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### Abstract

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council has conducted an audit of the University of Graz and has awarded the institution a quality label that is valid for seven years beginning on 27 August 2013. The quality system of the university fulfils the criteria set for the quality management of higher education institutions, and the system corresponds to the European principles and recommendations for the quality management of higher education institutions.

The object of the audit was the quality system that the University of Graz has developed based on its own needs and goals. In terms of the key strengths of the quality system, the following were taken into consideration:

- The University of Graz has developed a comprehensive and user-friendly system for collecting and presenting relevant data concerning its basic activities. The system involves academic staff broadly in the collection of data and presents the leadership and other stakeholders with precise and updated information on the university's performance in relation to set performance targets.
- Quality work at the University of Graz is characterised by a strong commitment to improvement among the leadership and key quality management/support staff, with frequent contact and exchanges of information. Working in close contact with the Rectorate, the quality management offices, the LQM, the LLS, the ZLK and the FMS, are in a position to launch quality-related projects and provide a robust platform for further developments.
- The quality system is strongly linked to institutional management and is well aligned with institutional strategies and development plans.

Among other things, the following recommendations were made for the University of Graz:

- The University of Graz should rethink and strengthen the continuous quality management of its existing educational provision. The audit team would like to make the following suggestions:
  - Course evaluations should be annual and an integrated part of all courses. They should be summed up in brief written reports that feed into *an annual qualitative assessment at the programme level*, where the programme's relative strengths and weaknesses are identified and discussed and where the need for improvement measures is considered.
  - A line of written aggregate analysis/reporting should go from the programmes via departments and/or faculties up to the Rectorate. There is no need for this process to be overly bureaucratic; it should focus only on the main points and the reports may be very short texts.
- There is a need to strengthen the full application of the quality management cycle in most areas, in particular outside the two basic activity fields of education and research, i.e. in the support services. This would entail *formalising* the quality work in these areas in more detail, thus integrating the processes better with the institution's annual cycle of quality management.
- The information that the quality system produces is heavily based on a well-developed design for registering quantitative data. Such data are of vital importance for internal strategic management as well as for external reporting to the ministry. But for the system to be more oriented towards enhancement, the quantitative information needs to be supplemented and developed/interpreted in qualitative terms, which would require that the system provides more regular "spots" for discussion and analysis, resulting in brief analytical reports.

### Keywords

Audit, evaluation, higher education institutions, quality, quality management, quality system, university

## TIIVISTELMÄ

### Julkaisija

Korkeakoulujen arviointineuvosto

### Julkaisun nimi

Audit of the University of Graz 2013 (Karl-Franzens-Universität Grazin auditointi 2013)

### Tekijät

Jon Haakstad, Mark Frederiks, Hannele Keränen, Jacques Lanarès, Kirsi Levä, Anca Prisăcariu ja Kirsi Hiltunen

### Tiivistelmä

Korkeakoulujen arviointineuvosto on toteuttanut Karl-Franzens-Universität Grazin auditoinnin ja on myöntänyt yliopistolle laatuleiman, joka on voimassa seitsemän vuotta 27.8.2013 alkaen. Yliopiston laatujärjestelmä täyttää korkeakoulujen laadunhallinnalle asetetut kriteerit, ja järjestelmä vastaa eurooppalaisia korkeakoulujen laadunhallinnan periaatteita ja suosituksia.

Auditoinnin kohteena oli Karl-Franzens-Universität Grazin laatujärjestelmä, jonka yliopisto on kehittänyt omista lähtökohdistaan ja tavoitteidensa mukaisesti. Laatujärjestelmän keskeisinä vahvuuksina pidetään:

- Yliopisto on kehittänyt kattavan ja käyttäjäystävällisen järjestelmän, jolla se kerää ja dokumentoi tarkoituksenmukaista tietoa ydintoiminnoistaan. Järjestelmä osallistaa akateemisen henkilöstön laajasti tiedon keräämiseen sekä tuottaa johdolle ja muille toimijoille täsmällistä ja ajantasaista tietoa toiminnalle asetettujen tavoitteiden saavuttamisesta.
- Yliopiston laatutyölle on tunnusomaista johdon ja keskeisen laatuhenkilöstön jatkuvaan yhteydenpitoon ja tiedonvaihtoon pohjautuva vahva sitoutuminen kehittämiseen.
- Laatujärjestelmä kytkeytyy vahvasti yliopiston johtamiseen ja on hyvin linjassa institutionaalisten strategioiden ja kehittämissuunnitelmien kanssa.

Karl-Franzens-Universität Grazille esitetään muun muassa seuraavia kehittämissuosituksia:

- Yliopiston tulisi arvioida uudelleen ja vahvistaa tutkintotavoitteisen koulutuksen laadunhallintaa. Auditointiryhmä ehdottaa seuraavaa:
  - Kurssiarviointien tulisi olla vuosittaisia ja sisäänrakennettu kaikkiin kursseihin. Niistä tulisi tehdä lyhyet kirjalliset yhteenvedot, jotka palvelisivat *koulutusohjelmien vuosittaista laadullista arviointia*, missä ohjelman vahvuudet ja haasteet identifioitaisiin sekä keskusteltaisiin tarvittavista kehittämistoimenpiteistä.
  - Koulutusohjelmista tulisi laatia kirjallinen yhteenvetoraportti, joka kulkisi laitosten ja/tai tiedekuntien kautta rehtoraatille. Tämän prosessin ei tarvitsisi olla byrokraattinen; sen tulisi keskittyä vain olennaiseen ja raportit voisivat olla hyvin lyhyitä tekstejä.
- Yliopiston laadunhallinnan syklin täyttä soveltamista on tarve vahvistaa useimmilla alueilla, erityisesti koulutukseen ja tutkimukseen liittyvien perustehtävien ulkopuolella tukipalveluissa. Tämä edellyttäisi laatutyön yksityiskohtaisempaa *formalisointia* ja siten prosessien parempaa integroimista instituution laadunhallinnan vuosisykliin.
- Laatujärjestelmän tuottama tieto pohjautuu kehittyneeseen järjestelmään kvantitatiivisen tiedon kirjaamiseksi. Tällainen tieto on välttämätöntä sisäistä strategista johtamista ja ministeriölle tapahtuvaa ulkoista raportointia varten. Mutta jotta järjestelmä olisi kehittämispainotteisempi, määrällistä tietoa tulisi täydentää ja kehittää/tulkita laadulliselta kannalta. Tämä puolestaan edellyttäisi, että järjestelmä tarjoaisi useampia ”pisteitä” keskustelulle ja analysoinnille ja että näistä laadittaisiin lyhyet raportit.

### Avainsanat

Arviointi, auditointi, laadunhallinta, laatu, laatujärjestelmä, korkeakoulut, yliopisto

## SAMMANDRAG

### Utgivare

Rådet för utvärdering av högskolorna

### Publikation

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### Författare

Jon Haakstad, Mark Frederiks, Hannele Keränen, Jacques Lanarès, Kirsi Levä, Anca Prisăcariu och Kirsi Hiltunen

### Sammandrag

Rådet för utvärdering av högskolorna har utfört en auditering av Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz och har beviljat universitetet en kvalitetsstämpel som är i kraft i sju år från och med 27.8.2013. Universitets kvalitetssystem uppfyller de kriterierna för högskolornas kvalitetshantering, och systemet motsvarar de europeiska principerna och rekommendationerna om högskolornas kvalitetshantering.

Objektet för auditeringen var Karl-Franzens-Universität Grazs kvalitetssystem, som universitetet har tagit fram från sina egna utgångspunkter och enligt sina egna mål. Enligt auditeringsgruppen är kvalitetssystemets centrala styrkor:

- Universitetet har utvecklat ett omfattande och användarvänligt system för en ändamålsenlig insamling och dokumentering av data som rör universitetets kärnverksamhet. Systemet engagerar en stor del av den akademiska personalen i datainsamlingen samt ger ledningen och övriga aktörer exakt och aktuell information om hur målen som universitetet ställt upp för sin verksamhet har nåtts.
- Universitetets kvalitetsarbete kännetecknas av kontinuerligt samarbete mellan ledningen och den centrala kvalitetspersonalen och av ett starkt engagemang i utveckling som grundar sig på informationsutbyte.
- Kvalitetssystemet är starkt förknippat med ledandet av universitetet och stämmer bra överens med de institutionella strategierna och utvecklingsplanerna.

Bland annat följande rekommendationer framläggs för Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz:

- Universitetet borde omvärdera och stärka den examensinriktade utbildningens kvalitetshantering. Auditeringsgruppen föreslår följande:
  - Kursutvärderingarna borde göras årligen och vara inbyggda i alla kurser. Av dessa borde göras korta skriftliga sammandrag som skulle vara till nytta för den *årliga kvalitetsbedömningen av utbildningsprogrammet* där programmets styrkor och utmaningar skulle identifieras och nödvändiga utvecklingsåtgärder skulle diskuteras.
  - Av utbildningsprogrammen borde man utarbeta en skriftlig sammandragsrapport som skulle skickas via institutionerna och/eller fakulteterna till rektoratet. Denna process skulle inte nödvändigtvis vara byråkratisk. Den skulle fokusera enbart på det väsentliga och rapporterna kunde vara mycket korta texter.
- Den kompletta tillämpningen av universitetets kvalitetshanteringscykel behöver stärkas på de flesta områden, särskilt inom stödtjänsterna utanför de grundläggande uppgifterna utbildning och forskning. Detta skulle förutsätta en mer detaljerad *formalisering* av kvalitetsarbetet och därmed en bättre integration av processerna i årscykeln som rör institutionens kvalitetshantering.
- Informationen som kvalitetssystemet ger grundar sig i hög grad på ett välutvecklat system för att registrera kvantitativ information. Sådan information är livsviktig för den interna strategiska ledningen och för den externa rapporteringen till ministeriet. Men för att systemet ska vara mer utvecklingsinriktat borde den kvantitativa informationen kompletteras och utvecklas/tolkas utgående från kvaliteten. Detta förutsätter i sin tur att systemet ger fler "poäng" för diskussion och analysering, vilket skulle resultera i korta och analytiska rapporter.

### Nyckelord

Auditering, högskolor, kvalitet, kvalitetshantering, kvalitetssystem, utvärdering, universitet



# Foreword



The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) has been conducting audits of the quality systems of higher education institutions since 2005. The aim of the audits is to support higher education institutions in achieving their strategic objectives and in developing their quality systems to correspond to the European quality assurance principles expressed in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area<sup>1</sup>.

The audit approach corresponds to the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, which has become a strong tradition in the Finnish evaluation practice. The approach also emphasises the autonomy of the universities: universities are themselves responsible for the quality and continuous development of their activities and their quality systems, and audits evaluate the comprehensiveness, functioning and effectiveness of the systems.

All Finnish higher education institutions were audited by 2012, and the second round of audits has begun. According to the audit reports and feedback received from the institutions, the audits have enhanced the systematic development of quality systems and operating methods. The Finnish audit model encompasses nearly all higher education activities, but it focuses more closely on the quality management of degree education. In the audit of the University of Graz, internationalisation is reviewed as an optional audit target.

A common goal for all countries in the European higher education area is to build mutual trust and to make the higher education structures more comparable. Evaluating the quality systems is an important tool in building such trust. According to the Finnish legislation, FINHEEC may also take assignments from international parties. It is also registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the members of which have an aim to

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<sup>1</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* is available at [http://www.enqa.eu/pubs\\_esg.lasso](http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso).

perform their activities across the European higher education area while still complying with national requirements.

The audit of the University of Graz is the first institutional audit conducted by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council in another European country. On behalf of the Council, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the University of Graz for taking the unprejudiced step of choosing an international quality assurance agency. The process has been a true learning experience both for the university and for the agency, and I hope that it will serve as an example for the further internationalisation of quality assurance for higher education in Europe. My warmest thanks also go out to the audit team for their high level of professionalism and commitment.

*Riitta Pyykkö*, Professor

Chair of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council



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# Audit process

## 1.1 Audit targets

FINHEEC's audit model is based on an institutional review. The target of the audit is the quality system that the University of Graz (*Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz*) has developed based on its own needs and goals. One of the audit model's underlying principles is the autonomy of higher education institutions, according to which each institution decides on the objectives, structure and operating principles of its quality system, as well as on the procedures used. The audit focuses on the procedures and processes that the institution uses to maintain and enhance the quality of its operations. In accordance with the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, the objective of the audit is to produce information to assist institutions in developing their activities by identifying the strengths, good practices and areas in need of improvement in their quality systems.

The audit evaluates whether the quality system meets the FINHEEC audit criteria defined in Appendix 1 and whether it corresponds to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area<sup>1</sup> (also known as ESG). Furthermore, the audit evaluates how well the quality system meets strategic and operations management needs, as well as the quality management of the institution'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 is.

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<sup>1</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area is available at [http://www.enqa.eu/pubs\\_esg.lasso](http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso).

FINHEEC actively strives to take into consideration the special characteristics of higher education institutions under review in order to provide a coherent evaluation framework that serves the institutions' needs in the best possible way. Thus, FINHEEC's audit model can be adapted according to the needs of the institution. The FINHEEC audit targets defined in the Audit Manual for the quality systems of higher education institutions 2011–2017 and the assessment areas defined in the Austrian framework law on the external evaluation of higher education institutions (§ 22 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education) are quite compatible. The quality management of internationalisation is the only assessment area not included in the FINHEEC audit criteria as such, and, thus, it was reviewed as an optional audit target 4 d.

The audit targets for the University of Graz were as follows:

1. The quality policy of the University of Graz
2. Strategic and operations management
3. Development of the quality system
4. Quality management of basic duties:
  - a. Degree education (including first-, second- and third-cycle education)
  - b. Research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities
  - c. Societal impact and regional development work<sup>2</sup>
  - d. Optional audit target: Internationalisation
5. The quality system as a whole.

The audit employs a set of criteria that is based on a scale of four development stages for quality management (absent, emerging, developing and advanced), which have been specified for each audit target in the Audit Manual. In the audit, the development stage of each audit target is determined individually, including sub-targets 4 a–d. The optional audit target 4 d is not normally taken into account when evaluating whether or not the audit will be successful. However, in this case target 4 d was taken into account since internationalisation is one of the assessment areas defined in the Austrian framework law as an obligatory assessment area.

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<sup>2</sup> Including social responsibility, continuing education and open university education, as well as paid-services education.

## 1.2 Implementation of the audit

The audit is based on the basic material and self-evaluation report submitted by the University of Graz as well as an audit visit to the university on 11–14 March 2013. The audit team also had access to electronic materials that were important for quality management. The main phases and time frame of the audit process are included in Appendix 2.

The audit was carried out in English by an international audit team. Prior to the appointment of the audit team, the university was given the opportunity to comment on the team's composition, especially from the perspective of disqualification.

The audit team:

Senior Advisor **Jon Haakstad**, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norway (chair)

Vice Rector **Hannele Keränen**, Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, Finland (vice chair)

Vice Rector, Professor **Jacques Lanarès**, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Chief Engineer, Dr **Kirsi Levä**, Finnish Safety and Chemicals Agency (Tukes)

Coordinator of the international policy department, Dr **Mark Frederiks**, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Netherlands

Doctoral student **Anca Prisăcariu**, Romania (European Students Union's QA Students Experts Pool).

FINHEEC staff members: Senior Advisor **Kirsi Hiltunen** acted as the project manager for the audit and as the secretary of the audit team, and Chief Planning Officer **Sirpa Moitus** acted as another secretary of the team.

The audit team conducted a four-day site visit to the university. The purpose of the visit was to verify and supplement the observations made of the quality system based on the audit material. The programme of the visit is included in Appendix 3.

The audit team drew up this report based on the material accumulated during the evaluation and on the analysis of that material. The report was produced jointly by the audit team so that the expertise of all team members could be utilised. Prior to the Evaluation Council's decision-making meeting, the university was given the opportunity to check the report for factual information.

# 2

## The University of Graz

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### 2.1 The Austrian framework

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In Austria, higher education is provided by public universities, such as the University of Graz, by private universities, by universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) and by university colleges of education. The higher education institutions offer the following degrees:

- Diploma (after 8–12 semesters), or, respectively, Diploma (FH) (after 8–10 semesters);
- Bachelor's degree (6–8 semesters);
- Master's degree (2–4 semesters following the bachelor's degree, at universities at least 4 semesters);
- Doctorate (at least 6 semesters following the master's degree or diploma degree).

The Universities Act 2002 introduced a new concept of autonomy, and a complete restructuring of the public universities took place as a result of it. The act came fully into effect as of 1 January 2004. The main tasks of the universities are as follows:

- to develop and impart the sciences and/or the arts;
- to provide basic training for scientific and/or artistic occupations and the qualifications for professional activities that require the application of scientific and/or artistic findings;
- to train the next generation of scientists and/or artists;
- to offer further training, especially to graduates;
- to support national and international cooperation in the field of scientific research and teaching and/or the exercise of the arts and their teaching;
- to support the use and application of university research results and/or the practical accessibility of the arts.

The universities are legal entities under public law and have their own legal personality. They act free from instructions and regulate their specific matters autonomously in their statutes. The Federal Minister for Science and Research has legal supervision over their activities. Universities are headed by a University Board (*Universitätsrat*), a Senate (*Senat*), a Rectorate (*Rektorat*) and a Rector (*Rektor/in*). The Senate enacts the curricula. The Rectorate or the study administration is responsible for all decisions on admission. In Austria, there is free access to universities; admission is restricted only in a few fields of study (e.g. psychology). The University Board is responsible for reviewing the legality and efficiency of the admissions process. Rectors are elected by the boards. The performance of each university (including the offering of study programmes) and its budget is negotiated every three years between the respective university and the federal minister and laid down in due performance agreements.

External quality assurance was voluntary for public universities until March 2012, when the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) went into effect. The HS-QSG governs the general framework for external quality assurance in Austrian higher education. According to it, universities have to undergo a periodic audit of their quality systems. A certification following an audit process is granted for seven years. Regarding audit procedures, so-called assessment areas (*Prüfbereiche*) are laid down in the HS-QSG. Those assessment areas are generic areas guided by the objectives, guiding principles and tasks of the higher education institution and they should assure comparability and guidance.

Universities have a freedom of choice when it comes to audits. An audit according to the assessment areas may be performed by the AQ Austria, by a quality assurance agency registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) or by another internationally recognised and independent quality assurance agency. These agencies shall be announced by the Federal Ministry for Science and Research by decree.

## 2.2 The organisation of the university

The University of Graz, founded in 1585, is Austria's second oldest university and one of the largest in the country. With some 32,000 students and 3,900 employees it contributes

significantly to the life of the Styrian capital. The University of Graz has seven organisational units: six faculties and an administrative and services unit. There are 76 departments and approximately 110 study programmes. The faculties are as follows:

- Faculty of Catholic Theology
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Business, Social and Economic Sciences
- Faculty of Environmental, Regional and Education Sciences
- Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Faculty of Natural Sciences.

In accordance with the University Act 2002, the University of Graz is a legal person under public law. Within the limits of the law and ministerial orders, the University of Graz has enacted the rules and procedures necessary for its governance according to the statutes of the university. The Rector's Office, the University Board and the Academic Senate are the governing bodies of the university. The organisation of the University of Graz is illustrated in Figure 1.

The number of students, graduates and staff are presented in Table 1.

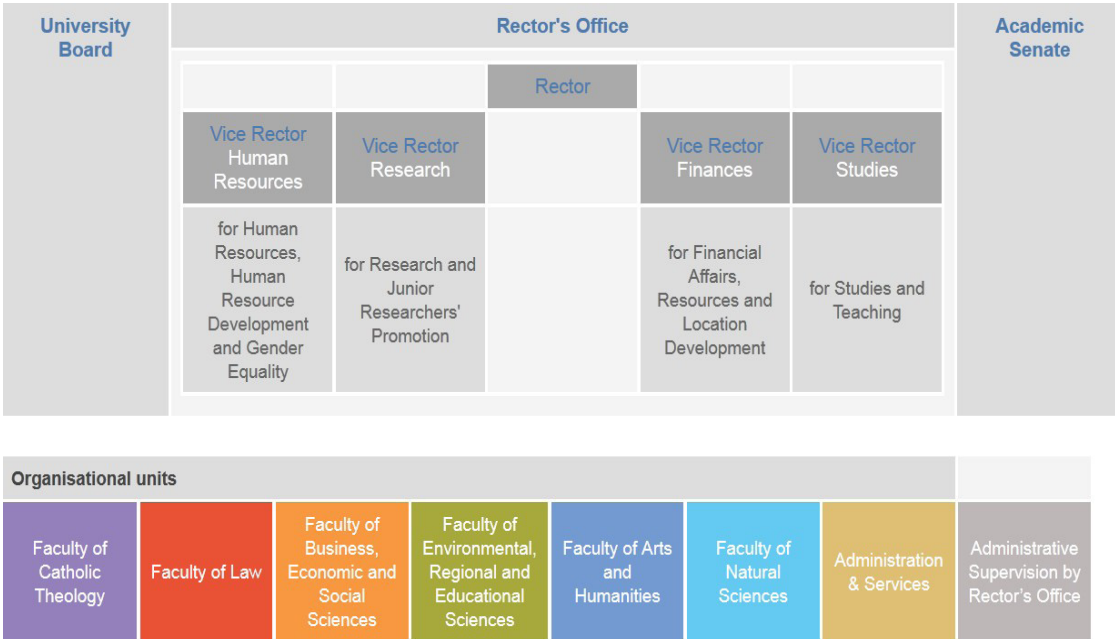


Figure 1. Organisation chart for the University of Graz (Self-evaluation report, p. 10)



Table 1. The number of students and staff in 2012

<b>Enrolled students</b> (Winter term 2012/2013)	<b>Number</b>
Bachelor's degree	17,160
Master's degree	4,361
Diploma (incl. secondary school teacher accreditation programme)	12,869
Doctoral degree	2,260
<i>Total (double registrations excluded)</i>	31,578
<b>Enrolled students by faculty</b> (Winter term 2012/2013)	<b>Number</b>
Faculty of Catholic Theology	595
Faculty of Law	4,897
Faculty of Business, Social and Economic Sciences	5,705
Faculty of Environmental, Regional and Educational Sciences	5,914
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	9,010
Faculty of Natural Sciences	7,049
Interdisciplinary Studies	1,353
<i>Total (double registration excluded)</i>	31,578
<b>Degrees awarded</b> (average 09/10 – 11/12)	<b>Number</b>
Bachelor's degrees	1,102
Master's degrees	557
Diploma (incl. secondary school teacher accreditation programme)	923
Doctoral degrees	180
<i>Total</i>	2,834
<b>Staff</b>	<b>Number</b>
Academic staff (teaching and research staff)	2,700
Other staff	1,279
<i>Total (adjusted)</i>	3,933

\*An average per year based on three years (2010–2012)

# 3

## The quality policy of the University of Graz

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The quality system's objectives and responsibilities are clearly defined. The goal-setting process is an inclusive one. Quality management is defined as a communicative task and an executive function. The division of responsibilities related to the quality system is described in "Uni Graz quality concept" (Self-evaluation report, pp 22 ff.) and it is linked to the university's organisational structure. Even though the responsibilities are divided among many different bodies, there is evidence that the division of responsibilities functions well. The key persons responsible for the operations are committed to their duties.

The documentation is well-organised and systematically updated. The information needs of all stakeholders have for the most part been taken into account. Communication about the information that the system produces is active and up to date, although it is more focused on quantitative measures than on qualitative issues.

The quality policy of the University of Graz is at a **developing stage**.

### 3.1 The objectives and key elements of the quality system

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According to its strategy, the University of Graz is committed to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of its activities. The purpose of the quality system is to ensure comprehensive and systematic quality assurance and to enhance research, teaching and support for early-stage researchers and services. Further goals include promoting

the organisational units and demonstrating how their activities meet strategic objectives and comply with external requirements.

The setting of the quality objectives has been part of a long process involving discussions with the members of the faculties, who were invited to present initiatives and ideas concerning quality management. Based on the results of these discussions, the Office of Performance and Quality Management (LQM) drafted the quality objectives at the beginning of the year 2011. Following an elaboration process by the Quality Management Board, the Rectorate made a decision about the quality management plan and related objectives in December 2011.

The University of Graz's quality system has the following goals:

1. To establish and support a quality culture by involving all university members and stakeholders and by anchoring quality-based thinking within the organisation;
2. To implement a long-term strategy by linking the strategy to quality management;
3. To enhance the transparency of the processes by means of process descriptions and clarifying responsibilities;
4. To enhance international communication and profiling by means of close cooperation at all university levels, participation and clear rules of procedure;
5. To implement a quality circle that correlates with the objectives, processes and results, and the closing of which shall ensure that steps are taken to match the quality of the performance/achievement with the strategic objectives;
6. To install a task-oriented instrument for quality management via a range of instruments that can be applied according to specific requirements.

The system is designed to follow the logic of the quality management cycle (Figure 2), from the establishment of objectives through planning to meeting those objectives; actions will be implemented and monitored to meet the plans, the outcomes will be identified and analysed and, finally, the processes will be enhanced. According to the self-evaluation report, the key elements (also referred to as quality tools) of the quality system are as follows:

1. Continuous strategic planning processes with the monitoring of operations and feedback;
2. Performance agreements, which are connected to the institutional objectives;

3. Comprehensive reporting system (also referred to as a management information system, MIS);
4. Evaluations;
5. Strategic human resource development;
6. Annual appraisal interviews;
7. Tracking and benchmarking initiatives.

The key elements are integrated within the quality management cycle. The cycle follows the traditional PDCA cycle, but the illustration below is more detailed than the traditional PDCA illustration. This policy and methodology is supposed to apply in nearly all activity fields.

The University of Graz's quality system aims to be a self-learning system, where staff and students have the possibility to influence the quality policy. Quality management as such is a relatively new undertaking at Austrian universities, with the first systematic steps taken in connection with the first performance agreement period between the universities and the Federal Ministry for Science and Research in 2007. This is reflected in the quality policy of the University of Graz, which is strongly linked to the performance agreements and geared towards producing quantitative information while following a chosen set of performance indicators. There is less emphasis on qualitative information produced through analysis and discussion.

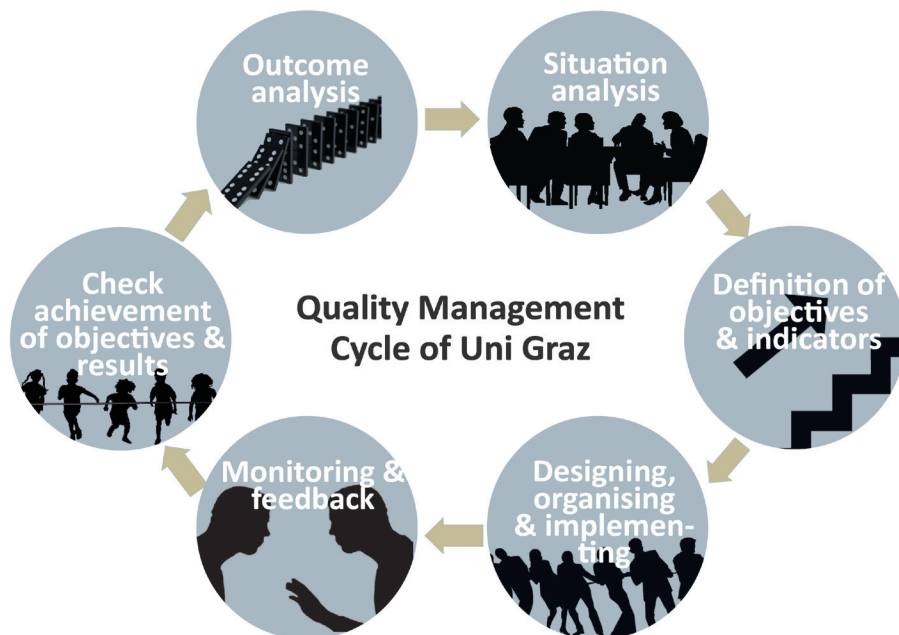


Figure 2. Quality management cycle of the University of Graz (Self-evaluation report, p. 20)

### 3.2 Division of responsibility in quality system processes

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The division of responsibilities is described in the University of Graz's quality concept and it is linked to the organisational structure. The Rectorate has the overall responsibility for the system. It also determines how the system will be realised and provides resources for it. The University Board approves the development plan and the preliminary version of the performance agreement. Both of these documents have strong links to the quality system. The University Board establishes performance agreements with the Rectorate. The Senate enacts and amends the statutes of the university, including internal regulations. It also submits comments as part of the development plan process and lays out the curricula for degree programmes.

On the faculty level, the quality work is led by the deans, whereas on the department level it is led by the heads of the department. The deans (and vice deans) are responsible for the target agreement process together with the Rectorate and the academic units as well as the people that they supervise. The deans of studies are responsible for the quality management of classes and examinations in each field of studies at a particular faculty.

LQM is responsible for the overall development of the quality system and for co-ordinating the quality work. It is also in charge of conducting external evaluations of research, quality-related projects and strategic and non-financial planning. The Department of Educational and Student Services (LSS) is responsible for, among other things, managing and developing quality management tools in teaching, such as evaluations of studies. In addition, the QM Board, which consists of five external experts, counsels management in all matters of quality assurance and quality development. The QM Board – as an independent and external body – played an important role in building the University of Graz's quality system.

There are also two other offices: the Office of International Relations (IRO) and the Office of Research Management and Services (FMS). The IRO is mainly in charge of services related to the internationalisation of the university, whereas the FMS is responsible for issues pertaining to research. The FMS has implemented a comprehensive ProjectDataManagementSystem (PDMS), which covers the following phases of research projects: registration, approval,

extension and termination. All third-party-funded project applications are in the PDMS database.

The level of co-operation between the Rectorate and the LQM – the hubs of the quality system – is strong and their roles are clear. The overall objectives and the responsibilities in relation to the quality policy are also clearly defined, even though the responsibilities are divided among many different bodies. One challenge, however, is the divisions of responsibilities related to support services, such as IT and the library. These services seemed to have somewhat weaker links to the institutional quality management cycle.

It is the audit team's impression that the division of responsibilities could be better communicated to all stakeholders. The strong link between performance management and the quality system often leads to an interpretation at the faculty level that the quality system is to some extent a control organ. Some stakeholders also referred to the quality system as the LQM. This can lead to blind spots concerning the responsibilities of the quality policy in certain areas.

Because the LQM is also responsible for performance management, there is a risk that the quality development work will focus more on issues related to performance agreements and the management information system. The roles of LSS and ZLK (Competence Centre for University Teaching) are especially challenging in this respect. Therefore, the audit team raises the question of whether the co-operation and information flow between the LQM, LSS and ZLK as well as the IRO should be more formalised.

### 3.3 Documentation and communicativeness of the quality system

The University of Graz's quality system documentation consists of three categories:

- System-level documentation, which consists of the quality concept, including the general principles and the description of the quality tools;
- Procedural rules;
- Quality information, which is documented in different systems.

Table 2 provides a more detailed description of how the quality system is documented.

Table 2. Documentation of quality information (Self-evaluation report, p. 36)

<b>Where documented</b>	<b>Quality-related information and documents</b>
Internet	Mission Development plan Performance agreement of the university Annual intellectual capital report Statute (including evaluation standards) Manual for the development of curricula
Uni Graz online (partly available to the public)	Results of course evaluations Performance report for each level (including individual intellectual capital statement)
Brochures (paper based)	Facts and figures Students' statistical data Facts and figures on gender equality Information for committee appointments
Intranet <sup>1</sup>	Quality concept
Business intelligence platform	Performance cockpit <sup>2</sup> Teaching report <sup>2</sup> Research report <sup>2</sup> Resources/staff report <sup>2</sup> Equal treatment report <sup>2</sup>
ZLV dashboard	Monitoring the performance agreement together with the departments
LQM, FMS intern	Results of research evaluation
Human resources planning tool	Status and results of appraisal interviews

<sup>1</sup> Accessible for student representatives and staff members

<sup>2</sup> Including information on internationalisation

The LQM, which has the main responsibility for the documentation, develops the reporting and online systems continuously. The needs of the users are assessed, for example, during periodic meetings with the Rectorate, deans, vice deans and deans of studies. The Uni Graz Online, the business intelligence platform (BO) and the ZLV dashboard produce a great deal of quantitative information that can be used by the different organisational levels and units. Using the online data, the LQM also produces reports based on individual requests.

The audit team have the impression that the main forum for quality communication is the annual performance agreement process, which flows from the top management level to the individual level. The online systems are comprehensive and in effective use more or less throughout

the organisation. These online systems also produce much relevant data, especially for strategic management, but the documentation of the quality information related to operations management and its follow-up is to some extent unsystematic.

The quality system is well documented as such, but the documentation related to the quality management cycle at different organisational levels needs to be developed. In some areas, the documentation is not sufficiently user friendly and access to some information is restricted. Faculty members, for instance, have access only to information concerning their own faculty. Also, transparent access to student feedback is lacking, which makes follow-up assessments somewhat difficult at the programme level. However, the University of Graz recognises these development needs. Communication about quality development is active and up to date although there is still room for improvement.



# Strategic and operations management

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The university has a result-oriented style of management, which is based on a performance agreement negotiated with the ministry and the faculties. Even though there is a tendency to reduce quality management to merely designing, feeding and monitoring the information system, there are strong links between the information system and strategic and operations management. The system has been built upon the requirements set out by the performance agreement and regularly informs all people involved about the current status in relation to achieving the objectives. But the central role of the performance agreement and its indicators tends to skew the system towards quantitative appreciations.

Breaking down the overall university objectives into objectives for the various faculties and lower level units creates coherence and is used for budgetary negotiations and other managerial decisions. The management is strongly dedicated to quality work and uses the system regularly to take strategic and managerial decisions and give feedback at all levels of the organisation.

The link of the quality system with strategic and operations management is at a **developing stage**.

## 4.1 Linking the quality system with strategic and operations management

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According to the Mission Statement, the University of Graz regards itself as an international institution for education and research, committed to the benefit of society. Its policy is to “maintain freedom in research and teaching, which permanently commits us to social, political and technological developments. Increasing flexibility and globalisation are

the essential framework conditions". Besides the university's ambition to create a profile and increase its visibility in a European and global context, one of the most outstanding characteristics of the university is that it has acquired a special position in south-eastern Europe.

The backbone of strategic and operations management is the performance agreement negotiated with the ministry, which includes numerous indicators for the different objectives. This performance agreement is strongly linked with the development plan. An extensive amount of data has been collected to create the new plan. A succinct evaluation of the previous plan was also provided. Therefore, the Rectorate began its strategic reflection with a comprehensive set of institutional data.

The development plan contains objectives for the university as a whole and specific objectives regarding teaching and research for each scientific field. The strategic objectives provide a framework for action that will be implemented by the year 2020. They will be implemented in cooperative strategic projects by the departments and centres and various fields of study, faculties and administrative units. The strategic objectives represent a long-term perspective; the implementation will take place in three-year intervals corresponding to the budget cycle. The main strategic objectives for the period 2013–2018 will be structured in seven categories as follows:

- **Research**, including projects regarding the improvement of the scientific profile of the university;
- **Teaching and studies**, including projects related to staff to student ratios, the development of programmes, an increase in mobility and offers to develop didactic competences;
- **Early-stage researchers** with projects to support the career development of young researchers (education, support for mobility);
- **Location development and infrastructure**, including collaboration projects with the business world and partnerships with higher education institutions;
- **Social responsibility** with projects related to the third mission of the university and sustainability;
- **Members of staff**, including projects to support the development of staff both professionally and personally;
- **Gender equality, equal opportunities and the promotion of women.**

It is worth noting that "supporting quality development" is one of the strategic goals of the University of Graz. A performance agreement, negotiated together with the

ministry, is associated with this development plan and defines the indicators for all of the objectives.

The performance agreement is then supposed to be broken down and passed on to all levels of the organisation, right on down to the individual level, in accordance with a scheme developed by the university (Figure 3). This kind of integration and articulation of strategic objectives constitutes a new organisational culture within a context where faculties historically had extensive autonomy. Although only 10 to 15% of individual members of the academic community have concluded an individual performance agreement (mainly the new colleagues), the process seems to work well at the faculty level and this ensures alignment between the goals of the university and the various faculties. This integration is reinforced by the fact that budgetary

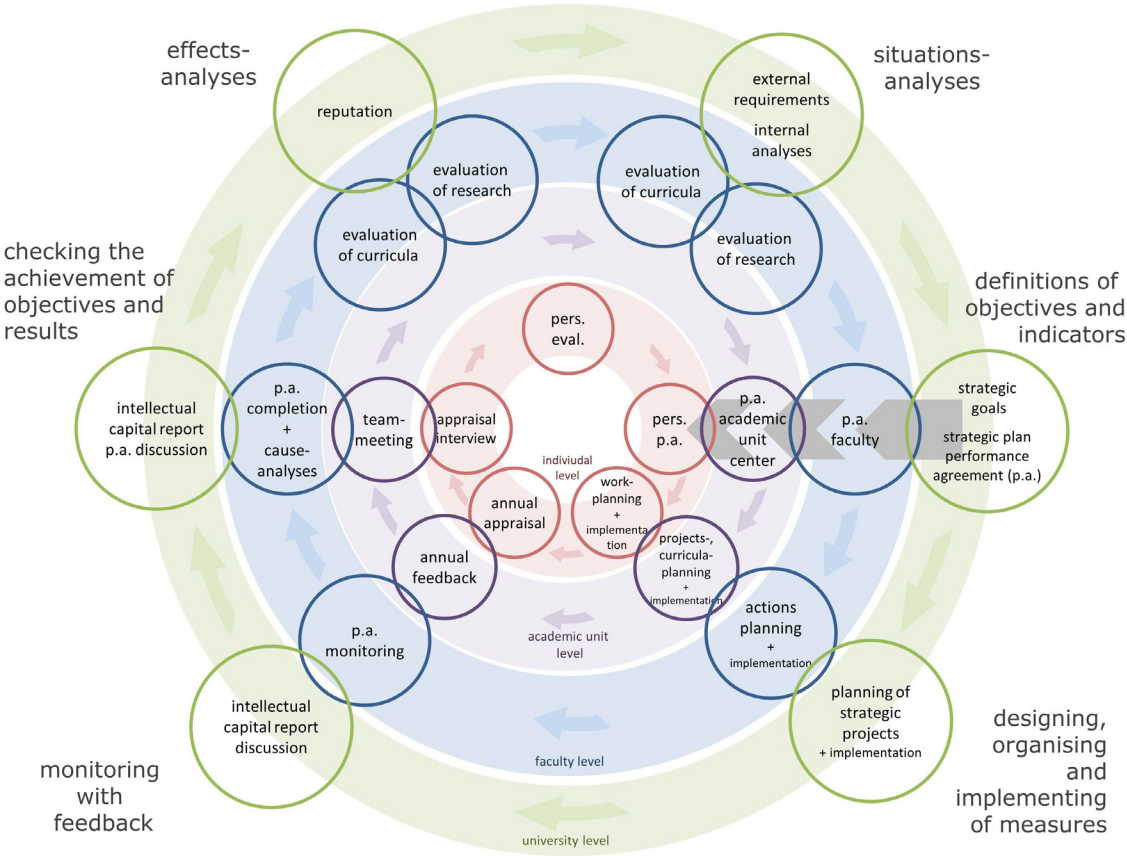


Figure 3. Strategic and operations management in terms of the quality cycle (Self-evaluation report, p. 43)

negotiations are based on assessments of the extent to which the various actors achieve their objectives, which can have certain financial consequences (effect range: -1 to +4%). The distribution of academic positions or the allocation of new positions is also influenced by these data.

The performance agreement is monitored via a well-developed information system (the ZLV dashboard), which is managed by the LQM and which is used to produce all kinds of tables, graphs and reports quarterly and annually. Everyone who is responsible for objectives related to the performance agreement can have access to the relevant information. Additionally, reports are prepared for different stakeholders and this creates transparency regarding the university's performance.

The management of the university is strongly dedicated to quality work. They meet frequently, at least weekly, with the LQM, who are in charge of the system, in order to monitor performance in relation to the objectives specified in connection with the agreement. There are also regular meetings with the deans to deal with these issues. The system is continuously being developed, with the aim of making it as helpful as possible – and ensuring that the people in charge at different levels in the university see it in this way. The LQM is directly linked to the Rectorate and is therefore very sensitive to managerial needs concerning the governance of the university.

The various information systems that compile statistical data have a central role in the quality system. The role is so strong that for many interviewees, there is a quasi overlap between the data systems and the quality system. This strong focus on performance agreements serves to emphasise quantitative data and give much less space to qualitative data. The strategic projects included in the development plan are succinctly reported if not related to the indicators for the performance agreement. Along the same lines, faculties do not report annually on their strategic development apart from mentioning the performance indicators. A significant number of interviewees highlighted this bias towards quantitative indicators.

This strong emphasis on quantitative indicators tends to give a reductionist view of the quality situation at the university. Indeed, this could reduce strategic planning to merely creating performance agreements, while reducing evaluation to just measuring “scores” based on quantitative indicators.

Due to the numerous objectives and indicators included in the performance agreement, the strategic priorities of the university have been somewhat “flattened out” by the many indicators, which are all given the same “weight”. In tandem with the necessary follow-up of the performance agreement, the University of Graz could consider selecting a few strategic objectives and build more complex indicators (including qualitative ones) around them.

## 4.2 Functioning of the quality system at different organisational levels

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The roles in the quality system are clearly defined at all levels, but the system is more fully established and works more smoothly at the highest levels of the institution, namely at the level of the Rectorate and deans. The Rectorate and deans are fully involved in elaborating upon the strategic plans and performance agreement at their respective level. The objectives are broken down to fit the needs of academic units and, in a few cases, they are specified at the individual level as well. This reflects the variability observed by the audit team in terms of how involved the academic units and individuals are in the selecting, elaborating upon and implementing the strategic projects and conducting follow-ups on them. So, whereas quality work functions efficiently at the central level (university and faculties), efficiency at the lower levels (departments and individuals) varies greatly: it can be good in some faculties and weaker in others. During the interviews, the audit team heard that everyone complies with the requirements linked to the performance agreement, but that only some of them really “own” the system and take advantage of it. Some members of staff reported having some difficulties in seeing the relevance of the process and said that they just comply with the rules without seeing how this contributes to achieving the strategic goals of the university.

If one were to summarise the quality system, together with the performance agreement and the information system designed to monitor it, it can be said that the system is functioning at all levels, since almost everyone complies with the requirements to feed the system with relevant data and to use the data for reporting purposes or to initiate new actions.

But in the view of developing quality in a wider perspective, the use of some existing management tools could be enhanced to contribute more fully to the strategic

development of the university and the fulfilment of its mission. For example, individual appraisal interviews were designed to be used for reflecting on the status of the agreement and for feedback purposes. However, when only 10 to 15% of the academic staff have such agreements, the interviews often seem to be more focused on daily business and not primarily in line with their stated purpose. Not all of the interviewees could see the use of these conversations as individual development tools. Along the same lines, teachers receive regular feedback from the students, but they are not systematically invited to use the feedback to develop their teaching competencies. These features indicate that the system is more on the side of control than development. However, that control is not linked to the strategic goals of the University of Graz, for example the development of didactic competencies, since teachers are more or less free to take these results into account as they wish. Moreover, the staff are not asked to use these results to document their involvement in the improvement of teaching. These tools could clearly be used to support the professional development of the academic staff, but of course that would require creating a new framework. When considering these kinds of projects, the university could include more qualitative measures within the performance agreement.

# Development of the quality system

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The core of the University of Graz's quality system, the quality management cycle, forms a good foundation for continuous development. However, the procedures required to produce an overall view of how the quality system functions are inadequate. Although the university is able to identify some of the system's strengths and areas in need of development, the system development is lacking somewhat in coherence and comprehensiveness.

The development of the quality system as a whole is at an **emerging stage**.

## 5.1 Development phases of the quality system

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As pointed out in sections 2.1 and 3.1, external quality assurance was voluntary for public universities until 2012, and thus, quality assurance is a relatively new task for Austrian universities. According to the University of Graz's self-evaluation report (p. 31), the professionalisation of quality management started in Austrian universities during the first performance agreement period, 2007–2009. The University of Graz has built up its quality system by aligning it with the development of strategic work. The university considers the following phases to be the key stages for developing the system:

Table 3. Key stages for the development of the quality system (Self-evaluation report, p. 54)

Phase	Year	Cornerstone
Preparatory steps	2000–2001	1st course evaluation (paper-pencil, person- and input-oriented)
Strategic development	2001–2002	1st mission statement Definition of strategic goals
Installation of organisational structures for QM and individual instruments	2003–2006 2004	1st area-wide evaluation of research 1st development plan (2004–2007) Establishment of performance and quality management office
	2004–2006 2006–2007	First round of performance agreements with the faculties Survey of student workloads
Measures towards creating a quality system and systematisation	2008	2nd development plan (2008–2012) Start GEKo (new course evaluation) Process quality in teaching and studies (ACQUIN) 1st meeting of the quality board Evaluation of the library Benchmarking research management and services with the University of Heidelberg and the Technical University of Munich
	2008/2009 2009	Survey of student workloads Focus audit internationalisation (AQA) Development of the University of Graz's quality cycle
	2009–2011 2010	2nd area-wide evaluation of research Benchmarking appointment process with the University of Helsinki
Dissemination and audit	2011	Started graduate tracking Evaluation of NAWI Graz (EVALAG) Rectorate decision about the quality concept
	2012	Update of mission statement and strategic goals Started audit of the quality system (FINHEEC) 3rd development plan (2013–2018) Started strategic project quality management Evaluation of doctoral programmes

As can be seen from Table 3, the University of Graz has utilised benchmarking as well as internal and external evaluations when developing the quality system. Of particular note are two external system-wide reviews: (i) a process accreditation in the field of teaching conducted by the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute ACQUIN (Germany) in 2008; and (ii) a so-called focus audit on internationalisation conducted by the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) in 2009 (see 7.4).

The University of Graz prepared the self-evaluation report for this current audit in 2012. When developing the quality system and preparing for the audit, a strategic project,



including a QM project group chaired by the Rector, was established. Preparations for the self-evaluation had already started long before the audit agreement was signed. The self-evaluation report reflects the systematic way of working and collecting information at the university as well as the ability to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality system.

## 5.2 Procedures for developing the quality system

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The development plans as core tools  
for continuous improvement

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Development plans are seen as an important tool for continuously developing organisational performance and quality. The development plans include targets and strategic projects, which are implemented and monitored as a part of strategic goal setting and result monitoring. The current development plan is the third one, and it covers the period 2013–2018. The first plan was approved by the University Board in 2005, whereas the second one covered the period 2007–2011. When devising the current development plan, the Rectorate has had conversations with the deans of all faculties and has used a report prepared by the LQM. This report included the priorities of each faculty for the coming five years as well as basic data about teaching and research with some trend analysis regarding the previous period. The way in which the previous development plan was implemented was also evaluated. However, there was little evidence about how the evaluation data were analysed and used to improve the current development plan.

The quality cycle as a framework  
for continuous improvement

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A quality management cycle (see 3.1 above), which is central to the University of Graz's formal quality system, indicates that all types of activity, both large and small, should undergo certain quality assurance and management procedures. The aim is that these elements will be systematically applied throughout the organisation and with respect to its basic duties. The purpose of this approach is to integrate quality management both at the strategic and operational

management levels. The approach will also facilitate the integration of continuous evaluations and performance development work. However, the audit team observed that there were great variations in the way in which the quality cycle was implemented as part of the institution's numerous functions and processes. For example, evidence of good implementation was found in terms of the development of research activities, whereas in many other cases the implementation of the cycle and its phases seemed to need clarification and more effort. The team sometimes found that many of the stages of the cycle, and particularly the feedback and analysis elements, were weakly developed or even absent.

#### Continuous improvement and quality culture

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The aims of the University of Graz's quality system are to emphasise goal-oriented and continuous improvement. The system's underlying principles include the integration of strategic and quality management, continuous and transparent development, a generally applied process concept (the quality cycle) and the active participation of the staff. These aims and principles form a good basis for the systematic development of performance quality in terms of basic activities – and in terms of the quality system itself.

One of the strengths of the university's management system can be found in its well-developed battery of objectives and performance indicators, many of which have been harmonised with corresponding registers at other universities in Austria and Germany. This makes comparisons and benchmarking possible. The audit team heard evidence of how this element had gradually developed and how the process of producing data for these purposes had been extended and refined. The results indicate that the management process seems to function well throughout the organisation and is steadily developing. Research evaluations are another core tool that functions at a rather advanced level. Good practice comprises the external evaluations of the research activities and utilising the data to make improvements.

The University of Graz's quality system is well structured and, in theory, it covers all the levels and main activity areas of the organisation. This is also a strength that provides a good basis for continuous improvement. However, the implementation of the whole quality cycle is still at an early phase, with some shortcomings in mechanisms at the operational level "on the ground". Also, the same sometimes

applies to the final stage of the cycle: the types of mechanisms that would make it possible to scrutinise the system's tools and implemented improvement measures in order to assess their effectiveness and fitness for purpose were sometimes lacking.

The implementation and further development of a quality system depends heavily on the institution's quality culture. "Quality culture" is not an easy concept to define, but the university addresses the challenge in its self-evaluation report ("Towards a quality culture", pp 39–40), where some key characteristics are identified: that "quality is an aspect of the strategy", that objectives are "shared or at least accepted", that organisational units have a measure of autonomy, that there is "feedback at all levels", that "reflexivity and personal reflection" are encouraged and that "monitoring and evaluations are enhancement focused". If we add the "active participation of staff", which is mentioned elsewhere, we are getting close to a description that many would agree with. But the measure of a strong quality culture is not just the institution's ability to formulate it in theory (although this is important too), but rather the way that it is implemented and "alive" in the actual work done throughout the institution. A mature quality culture would see these ideals realised in the quality management processes throughout the institution. In this respect, the University of Graz still has a ways to go.

In the most general sense, the audit team found evidence of a strong quality culture in most of the different units that we visited, i.e. in the sense that staff members had a general commitment to do well and to improve. But few or no references were made to the quality culture principles that have been defined at the institutional level. The concepts of quality culture and quality work, and their links to the formal quality system, are neither fully developed nor communicated well throughout the organisation, or possibly there is a mismatch between the institutionally defined quality culture and that of the discipline communities, which serves to underline the fact that "culture" cannot be created by decree but has to be built collectively. A number of procedures that one would expect to see have not been defined or described, so that vital elements in the institution's quality culture concept, such as "feedback at all levels", "reflexivity" and staff participation, are far from being fully realised. The quality culture concept needs to be clarified and disseminated throughout the organisation and more emphatically linked to mandatory system procedures in order to ensure its effective

application. The audit team believes that annual reviews or self-assessments of the quality system might be a useful tool in this respect. If such evaluations were carried out, they would help managers obtain an overall picture of the system's strengths and weaknesses. It is probably due to these deficiencies in the quality system that certain problem areas – whether they are “intuitively” perceived or not – are not picked up by systematic monitoring and formally registered as points for improvement.

For example, the university is well aware of the need to develop qualitative indicators for research and better indicators and procedures for teaching as a whole. It is obvious that the course evaluation system does not serve continuous improvement in an effective manner and, although most staff members and students seemed to agree on this point, the quality system has not picked up this central mechanism for evaluation as a whole. Many staff members expressed ideas for improving the quality and performance in various areas, but the quality system does not seem to have systematic practices for collecting and analysing such ideas.

The University of Graz uses a wide range of quality tools to improve performance. However, not all of these tools are equally well linked to quality management or sufficiently transparent to the relevant stakeholders. The audit team had the clear impression that the system is in the process of steady growth and development, but that this is happening without proper mechanisms to assess these developments holistically. The audit team sees this as resulting from the fact that the “final” tool of a quality system, the systematic and regular evaluation of the system itself as a means of assessing its fitness for purpose, does not seem to be fully in place.

# Quality management of the institution's basic duties

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## 6.1 Degree education

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The objectives of the quality management of degree education at the University of Graz are well in line with its policy goals and key strategies. The objectives are defined with the purpose of achieving excellent and up-to-date higher education, but also with the purpose of addressing perceived challenges. The measures that are chosen to reach these goals – and to meet these challenges – are on the whole fit for purpose, but they are somewhat lacking in breadth and depth and do not always function as well as they should. Various other elements, e.g. certain key support services, have not been well integrated within the quality system.

The quality system produces a great deal of quantitative information about educational activities, but it is much weaker on documenting qualitative analysis. This must be seen in connection with weakly developed routines for formal reporting and a lack of consistent involvement of academic staff. Some of the instruments that have been applied in this field are of a relatively recent date, and they have not yet produced evidence of their effectiveness.

Quality management of degree education is at an **emerging stage**.

### 6.1.1 The objectives for degree education

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The university's overall strategy is expressed in the Strategic Plan and in the Development Plan for 2013–2018. The University of Graz professes its commitment to determine and develop educational standards and to examine and improve the organisation of education and programmes so that they meet the expectations of students, “who expect a quality university education and an organisation that meets the most modern state of knowledge”. Based on this commitment, a set of objectives have been devised for degree education:

- Profiling and improvement of curricula;
- Review and enhancement of courses;
- Development of teaching skills;
- Support of early-stage researchers.

According to the Mission Statement, students “are trained to become autonomous and, as graduates with great technical and social skills, to acquire interdisciplinary and critical thinking. Teaching has the same value as research and is developed according to high quality standards.” Although the strategy is not very explicit on the question of how these goals are to be achieved, two strategic measures are highlighted in the self-evaluation: “basic modules at the beginning of studies and an expansion programme to improve mentoring”. The assertion is that these measures have already “contributed to raise the teaching situation to a new level”.

It is of course difficult to find evidence that such comprehensive improvements have actually been implemented throughout the programme portfolio. In any case, the current strategic goals have a long-term perspective; they anticipate the University of Graz in the year 2020, when an increased number of professorships, certain admission regulations and “target group specific information and counselling” will have harmonised mentoring ratios with internationally recognised standards. The university realises that the achievement of quality enhancement requires measures to address the challenges that result from an (imposed) open-access policy in most subjects. The audit team agrees that establishing classes in all subject areas with manageable numbers of committed and fully participating students will no doubt contribute to an enhancement of quality. But there are few concrete indications of how admission regulations and increased counselling will be achieved.

Another main strategic goal is to improve the average number of ECTS credits obtained by students and the student

graduation rates. The two goals are obviously connected, as oversized classes and students whose participation is intermittent or absent must have an adverse effect on both quality and the results. One of the targets here is that 75% of the students achieve at least 8 ECTS points per semester. The very modest nature of this goal highlights the gravity of the problem. The other goal, that 40% of all graduates complete their programme within the duration norm plus one extra semester, is more ambitious and indicates that a reasonable number of students are committed to working conscientiously towards completing the prerequisites for graduation. In order to reach these targets, the university will extend its services, counselling and support for students, i.e. by establishing a “StudentServiceCenter”.

The university has also taken steps to achieve its goal of profiling and improving the curricula. The main tool here is the systematic application of curricula commissions and a thorough consulting process for the adoption of all new programmes. The curricula for doctoral programmes are being developed according to the development process for degrees. A higher education provision that meets “the most modern state of knowledge” implies a modernisation of degree programmes along the lines of the European (and eventually the national) Qualifications Framework. The university seems to have made much progress on this count through its efforts to ensure that its research orientation and the measures for enabling students to achieve key skills and competences are integral elements in all degree programmes. Presumably, the recently introduced system of evaluating all new programmes after three years will help sustain and make it possible to modify the intended profiles of the programmes.

The other expressed goal concerning the quality of the education provided to students, the review and enhancement of courses, is also being addressed in terms of systematic quality management processes. The course evaluations by students are being universally applied throughout the university and they provide feedback to the teaching staff and the academic leadership. It is the audit team’s view, however, that this tool, as currently practiced, is rather limited in scope, transparency and effectiveness, a point that we shall return to in greater detail below.

The objective of extending the provision of didactic competence courses for academic employees, especially younger lecturers, is also being followed up on. But the didactics programme for lecturers is restricted to new

employees as an obligatory arrangement and is still in an early phase. It is not expected that the process will be completed until 2015. The university also provides an obligatory UNISTART-Wiss programme for young academic employees to support them in their careers. The ZLK offers didactic training “High Noon – Didaktik du Mittag” once a month. The training sessions are open to the whole staff and they are available also as podcasts. As to the aim of providing support for early-stage researchers, strategic efforts in this field, too, have only been recently introduced and are therefore difficult to assess. The strategy sets relevant, if rather abstract, quality aims for strengthening the quality of doctoral education, but information about the results was not presented (see also 6.2).

To sum up, there is a clear correspondence between the institution’s strategic objectives in the field of degree education and the strategic measures that have been defined in order to realise them. In this general sense, the strategic measures are fit for purpose. In a more practical sense, however, weaknesses do appear. It is a characteristic of many of these measures that they have only been introduced relatively recently, or still only exist as plans, so their actual implementation and effectiveness are still difficult to assess, especially as they are not explicitly detailed. Another characteristic is the general orientation towards achieving quantitative goals, with very few strategies that directly address the quality of teaching and learning from a more didactic angle. This is reflected in the lack of robust measures to monitor, evaluate and systematically enhance established provisions. Based on the self-evaluation material and interviews, the audit team concludes that the mission statement that teaching and research are of equal importance is not quite true in practice.

#### 6.1.2 The functioning of the quality management procedures

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There is general consensus and agreement among students and staff in support of the institution’s efforts to conduct systematic quality management so as to ensure and enhance the quality of degree education. However, opinions were more divided – and frequently negative – when the specific mechanisms were discussed. This was particularly the case with one of the central instruments – the GEKo course evaluations – which found little enthusiastic support among the interviewed staff and students, with many respondents even directly criticising the instrument. The criticism was



either specific, in the sense that the questionnaires and their application were seen as having weaknesses, or it was general, in the sense that many disciplines considered such a standardised instrument too “insensitive” to catch the relevant quality topics for their discipline. The insistence on the uniqueness of the different scientific fields, which is common among scientific personnel in academia, always manifests itself in the form of a defence of faculty autonomy and a resistance to global mechanisms. This insistence also constitutes a defence of academic autonomy against administrative management, which was seen by many of the lecturers that were interviewed as being too intrusive. These attitudes were more pronounced in some faculties than in others, but the audit team concludes that they were widespread enough to make it difficult to smoothly and efficiently evaluate the quality of the education being provided. While the interviewed students were on the whole somewhat more positive, the low response rates in these evaluations indicate that the effectiveness of this instrument is limited. The institution has not been able to involve the teaching staff and the students sufficiently in the quality management of education.

The audit team does not readily accept the view that common instruments cannot be applied to different disciplines. Consequently, we see no problem in the fact that the University of Graz uses standardised questionnaires throughout the institution. Furthermore, flexibility can be achieved through having the possibility to choose from among different sets of questions and add new questions, specifically questions related to individual courses. Other features are more problematic, like the scope of the questionnaires: both the students and teachers claimed that detailed questions about all kinds of peripheral aspects frustrated many students. While the audit team did not in fact consider the questionnaires too detailed (about 20 questions plus locally added questions), we still have comments regarding their general orientation: there is a massive reliance on the students’ own perceptions of their learning, which is epistemologically problematic in relation to an “objective” assessment of educational quality. Smaller questionnaires, ones more sharply focused on the crucial aspects of the education being provided by the university, might provide more reliable and manageable information; it might also arouse more interest and increase the response rates. As it is, the validity of the student feedback is questionable, not least

of which because only one sixth of all courses are evaluated each year. The questionnaire feedback should in any case be modified or deepened through the increased use of more discursive methods<sup>3</sup>, like for instance focus groups. (The use of focus groups is indeed mentioned in the self-evaluation report as part of a more “qualitative surveying of students”, but the audit team found little evidence of such groups being used.) With this weakness in mind, an even larger problem is that the system as a whole seems to rely exclusively on a system of student course evaluations. Although the students’ perceptions of the quality of teaching is essential in any assessment of educational quality, it ought to be supplemented by other information sources and perspectives, for instance more systematic responses and analyses by the teaching staff.

When the formal system fails to involve the teaching staff constructively in the management of educational quality, the reason may be that the way in which the programmes being offered are evaluated is geared towards monitoring and assessing individual courses, usually given by individual teachers and with feedback mechanisms that seem rather ineffectual. With their isolated and semi-private nature, these evaluations, although they may be useful for the individual teacher, fail to provide data that can be used effectively for the purpose of more systematic quality analysis and development. While this is the case as far as the formal quality system is concerned, we also found that teachers in several departments arrange discussion seminars on the quality of teaching on their own initiative, “besides” using the formal system, as it were, thus demonstrating both the need for such collective quality work and their own commitment to quality enhancement.

The quality management of educational programmes is thorough when it comes to establishing of new provisions (curricula): curricula commissions with broad representation work in detail on the composition of programme propositions, while the entire process invites the contributions of relevant internal and external stakeholders at several stages. This is a very robust element in the university’s quality management of degree education. A useful follow-up procedure would be to evaluate new programmes after the first three years, but this measure is still so new that only a couple of programmes have been done such an evaluation. The use of macro statistics

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<sup>3</sup> The audit team learned that various other such “discursive” evaluation methods are used by many individual teachers on their own initiative.

and graduate tracking are other mechanisms that may provide useful perspectives on the university's performance as a provider of degree studies, particularly in terms of their relevance and "acceptance" outside the university itself.

It is still the audit team's view that it will be difficult to take a more proactive and constructive approach to the quality management of the current educational system unless attention is somehow shifted from the course to the programme level. The programme is the entity – the "commodity" – that is offered to the students; its total coherence, sequence and effectiveness in relation to the intended learning outcomes cannot be realistically monitored and managed through the students' evaluations of individual courses. Nor can these qualities be seen as "secured" once the new programme has been established. An ongoing focus on the programme level once the programme is actually in operation should engage the teaching group more in discussions about curricula and didactic perspectives. This would make it possible to focus more on the students' learning outcomes; also, it would facilitate sensible reporting on quality assessments and improvement measures and it might help overcome the inhibitions that the direct, and sensitive, student – teacher relation imposes on transparency and openness in the present system.

The audit team recognises the university's many efforts to safeguard and develop the quality of its degree education. Many of these projects, like the evaluation of doctoral programmes, the graduate tracking project (2009–11) and the various thematic evaluations and benchmarking processes that have been undertaken fairly recently with the assistance of external expertise bear witness to a commitment to high quality, as do the different stimulation arrangements, such as the "didactics hotline", "teaching day" and teaching awards. The commitment to further improvement is also demonstrated in the self-evaluation report, where the university itself draws attention to some areas in need of further development, such as clarifying the consequences of course evaluations and more systematically implementing university didactics enhancement. The university has plans for these improvements, but, important as they are, the audit team regards these issues as less pressing than paying attention to what we find to be the main weaknesses: these are of a more systematic nature and can be found in the annual, routine processes that relate to actual performance in the degree programmes.

### 6.1.3 The information produced by the quality system

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The quality system used by the University of Graz produces a huge amount of data relevant to monitoring educational quality. The effectiveness of the online services ensures that the data is readily available for management and other internal stakeholders and that it has been screened with different degrees of access for different user groups. In the audit team's view, these sources of information are quite well developed. The most detailed and updated information, however, has to do with fulfilling the various performance agreement indicators (via the ZLV dashboard), and therefore it has a clear quantitative bias. The self-evaluation report claims that the "information is prepared in such a way that it is directly applicable to decision-making": while this is obviously true in relation to the attainment of performance targets, in education as well as in research, less information is available for more comprehensive assessments of educational quality. This lack of systematic, reliable information on teaching activities complicates the treatment of quality questions at any management level and limits the possibilities to aggregate the data and conduct more composite analyses, and, consequently, to discuss and select broader improvement measures. In short, it hampers quality management in a deeper sense, i.e. one that goes beyond the steering objectives and moves more towards performance targets and "fire brigade" responses to specific local problems – as important as these objectives are in their own right.

The audit team found that the routines of formal (written) internal reporting on the quality work related to degree studies are weakly developed throughout the institution. We see this as a consequence being connected to a course evaluation system that lacks transparency and the possibilities to usefully aggregate information. Also lacking are good instruments for collectively focusing on the degree to which the students achieve the intended learning outcomes. This makes it very difficult for the academic leadership to acquire a deeper and more comprehensive form of assessment that is strategically oriented towards learning efficiency, enhancement or even excellence. Or, to make up for this, the transfer of quality-related information must be based on extremely effective informal and ad hoc (oral) consultations and initiatives throughout the organisation. In fact, this is what we were told. We heard about widespread and frequent meetings and other types of contact and consultations

that take place horizontally and vertically between the various organisational units in routinised patterns. But the audit team finds it hard to accept that demands related to institutional memory, binding commitments, transparency and accountability can be fully honoured by such informal and undocumented routines.

#### 6.1.4 The involvement of different parties in the quality work

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Quality work, as it relates to the education that is provided, centres around three organisational units: the LQM (Office of Performance and Quality Management), the LSS (Department of Educational and Student Services) and the ZLK (Competence Centre for University Teaching). Of these units, the LSS has by far the greater part of the responsibilities. Whereas the LQM has the overall responsibility for the institution's quality system, the LSS has specific responsibility for the development of studies and their quality management, the follow-up evaluations of new programmes and various stimulation arrangements. It also supports the work of curricula commissions on new programmes under the responsible leadership of the Senate.

Other functions related to educational quality are also taken care of by these offices: graduate tracking is handled by the LQM, while research and courses in university didactics and information/networks in the fields of teacher competence and professional training are handled by the ZLK. Responsibility for the support of early-stage researchers is not in the hands of an administrative unit, but allotted to the dean of studies of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, appointed by the Vice-Rector for Research and Junior Researchers' Promotion as the project leader of the project "The support of early-stage researchers".

One characteristic of the University of Graz's quality system is that it involves many groups and formal bodies in the quality management processes. The roles and distribution of responsibilities are in general clearly defined. Whereas the administrative responsibility for running the different routines is typically located in either the LQM or the LSS, the Rectorate is usually accountable for them. For example, the Rector is ultimately accountable for graduate tracking and curricula development and evaluation (together with the Senate and the Vice Rector of Studies), while the Vice Rector is accountable for most other functions related to degree studies. The system also provides clear rules for broad

consultations in most of these matters. The various deans of studies, the curricula commissions, the study director and other relevant offices are also consulted during several types of processes, whereas they are always informed in other cases. Students are also consulted, usually via the Student Union, in curricula- and teaching-related matters. The diverse array of roles for most functions through the systematic use of clear assignments as “responsible”, “accountable”, “consulted” or “informed” is very commendable. So is the level of clarity about the Rectorate and the Senate being ultimately accountable for all these processes.

One possible weakness of having such a comprehensive system of roles and functions might be that it creates too much of a bureaucratic workload for the employees. However, the audit team did not get the impression that this is the case. None of the academics that we interviewed seriously complained that the system is too burdensome. We also got the impression that the academic leadership and the main support offices, like the LQM and the LSS, were performing their tasks with great enthusiasm and commitment. But even if the rank-and-file academics do not feel too oppressed by the burden of the quality work, their commitment to the system and their own roles in it seem more varied. Some of them referred to their relationship to the LQM as an “us-and-them” relationship, with no feeling of ownership on their part. Consequently, their level of commitment to their assigned roles was weaker. While some of these attitudes are obviously grounded in a general academic suspicion of target-oriented management and quality assurance processes, the audit team also finds that the general profile of the system is somewhat that of a top-down system. So, if the distribution of roles and responsibilities is quite good and covers all relevant fields in relation to the quality of the education provided, the institution’s “quality culture” – in the sense of widespread participation and a commitment to the quality system – has not yet reached full fruition: there is a strong commitment to quality work among the leadership and those who are working more specifically with these topics, whereas large numbers of lecturers and students have only a peripheral, and to some extent, indifferent attitude to the institution’s efforts.

### 6.1.5 Support services key to degree education

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The students that we interviewed generally expressed satisfaction with the support arrangements put in place for their educational activities. This was true for the administrative and information services as well as for the physical facilities. When academic employees were asked about the same thing, attention soon shifted to support services for research, which attracted much more engagement and interest than the support services provided for education in general.

The contributions of the main supporting offices for degree education (LQM, LSS, ZLK) have been commented on above, with commendations for the enthusiastic and dedicated work they perform within the totality of the University of Graz's quality system. At points where the effectiveness of their work can be questioned, this has more to do with the "anatomy" and orientation of the system itself than to any weakness in their actual operations. Still, the university's self-evaluation report gives very little attention to the internal quality management of these vital functions. The audit team's impression is that this attention to key functions, what there is of it beyond occasional surveys, consists mainly of reporting in regular meetings to the Rectorate, but without recorded, systematic assessments of performance in accordance with defined quality criteria. There were also indications in the interviews that these offices might be understaffed in relation to their comprehensive tasks, but this was not emphasised by representatives of the offices themselves.

Among the other support services for degree education, the ICT and library services are central. There was also little information about these services in the self-evaluation report, but the interviews left the impression that there was general satisfaction with them. Wide variations in the extent to which teachers used the ICT learning platform (Moodle) had more to do with individual teachers than with any recorded weakness in the system. The library, too, generally got "good press" when mentioned by interviewees, and it emerged that the leadership here conducts rather systematic feedback schemes among students and staff to make sure that their operations are relevant and adequate. But we also got the impression that these support services receive little attention from central quality management and that the quality assurance operations that they actually carry out are initiated independently, without being really integrated into the larger system.

## 6.2 Research

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The quality of the research activities at the University of Graz are assured via different processes, at different levels and in combination with different support measures. There are clear relations between the evaluation of research outputs and strategic goals and the decisions that are taken on the basis of the evaluation processes. Stakeholders at different levels of the institution are fully aware of the stakes and are involved in the various processes.

Quality management of research is at a **developing stage**.

### 6.2.1 The objectives for research

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According to the Mission Statement, the University of Graz fosters “topical and methodological variety within an international cooperation network. We build our profile by determining research focuses under the consideration of socially relevant research questions.” Furthermore, innovative interdisciplinary research and cooperation between the various subjects is especially encouraged, and the university aims to actively provide its knowledge and the results generated via research to society in general.

Research is naturally an important dimension in the preparation of the development plan described earlier (4.1). In the current plan, the university has included the following objectives for research:

- Enhancing the profile of core research areas and international visibility;
- Increasing the visibility of performance and the transparency of publications;
- Developing support measures for research and promoting good scientific practices.

In its current development plan, the university has made a strategic move by creating core research areas to enhance its scientific profile. This has been done through a bottom-up process that has resulted in better ownership of the strategic decisions and that supports collaboration between researchers. This participatory process resulted in seven core interdisciplinary areas. To monitor the achievement of the objectives set for research, the university has developed an information system that produces regular reports and increases the transparency of the research results at all organisational levels of the university.



## 6.2.2 The functioning of quality management procedures

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One of the key quality management procedures for research has to do with conducting research evaluations of the academic units established to enhance the research profile and international visibility of the university. The procedure was established as part of a collaborative process involving all of the faculties in 2001–2002 and evaluations are being conducted cyclically every five years. Currently, the University of Graz has plans to extend the cycle to a period of eight years due to the considerable effort involved in the evaluation process. Two cycles for conducting an area-wide research evaluation have already been implemented, the first one starting in 2003 and the second one in 2008. The research evaluations are conducted as a peer review. They are based on a self-evaluation report followed by a visit and report from external peers. A workshop is organised with different actors about half a year after the site visit; the workshop includes representatives from the leadership of the university and the faculty, researchers from the unit being evaluated, interest groups and the units involved in quality management. This workshop aims to agree upon the measures that need to be taken into account in the performance agreements with the faculties.

The results of the research evaluations are used for strategic development and resource allocation. The effects of these evaluations may include harmonised studies, the establishment of doctoral programmes and schools, more money for research groups instead of just individuals or more money being allocated to the research infrastructure in general. According to the university leadership, these two rounds of evaluations had been important for formulating the university's research strategy, and the second round in particular has resulted in much discussion within the faculties. Several researchers also expressed satisfaction that the evaluations had greatly increased openness and transparency about the research results. However, in spite of such direct follow-up effects, the research strategy does not seem to be totally clear to all faculty staff members beyond the level of performance agreements. Also, there were different views within the different faculties as to the usefulness of these evaluations.

Measures to increase the visibility of performance and the transparency of publications include a "performance record" and an "individual intellectual capital statement". Almost all aspects of job performance (publications, positions

on academic committees, travel for academic purposes) are recorded in the performance record database by each individual. The main aim is to increase transparency and accountability. The performance record is used to monitor the targets of the performance agreement and the data are added to the dashboard. The performance record is also utilised for the individual intellectual capital statement, which gives an overview of individual performance in the fields of teaching, research, transfer (from science to the general public), networking and administration.

At the individual level, new academic staff receive clear objectives regarding research outputs through their individual performance agreements and these are reviewed annually. But even still, 85 to 90% of the academic staff do not have specific research objectives and yet they are of course still expected to contribute to the overall performance of the department, faculty and university. Introducing individual agreements to all academic staff might help increase the extent to which the university reaches its strategic targets.

The support of early-stage researchers is an essential part of the university's strategy. The university has established a tenure-track system to facilitate research careers. It is also striving to improve doctoral education by establishing specific doctoral programmes and schools in order to improve the international competitiveness of doctoral students and young researchers. The aim is to be educating 80% of all doctoral students in structured doctoral programmes by the year 2020. The university also aims to increase the number of doctoral students receiving financial support. According to the interviews, doctoral students have a positive view about these programmes: doctoral schools provide opportunities for regular (even weekly) meetings, networking, external guest lectures, workshops on different themes (e.g. preparing scientific papers), conferences, exchanges between doctoral schools, etc. The University of Graz is planning to conduct an evaluation of the different doctoral schools during the year 2013. The audit team recommends that the university include doctoral studies in its feedback system.

### 6.2.3 The information produced by the quality system

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All of the research objectives included in the performance agreement are broken down and fully monitored at each relevant level of the institution, with the information system being managed by the LQM. The data are used to regularly

inform the relevant internal and external stakeholders about the extent to which the objectives have been achieved during the year.

According to interviewees, “the University of Graz has a high-quality reporting system”. This highlights the question of what is meant by the notion of reporting. The audit team agrees with this statement if it is taken to mean “submitting data to the database”; but it does not agree with the statement if it refers to the use of qualitative, evaluative reports.

The evaluation of research is indeed essentially quantitative, with little integration of qualitative analysis. This came out clearly in the interviews with the different faculty members: quality management all comes down to numbers. The interviewees partly regretted this as being overly “reductionist”, but the faculty members also stressed that there was not enough time for either research or quality management. The commitment of the different faculties to the key quality management instruments of research and their perception of the impact of these instruments on the quality of research seem to vary. According to the researchers themselves, good criteria for research have not yet been developed. Some interviewees expressed the idea that the main feedback on quality did not come from the quality system itself, but instead in each individual case from the refereeing of research articles. During the process of implementing the self-evaluation report, it became evident to the University of Graz that more discussion about university-wide indicators concerning the quality of research is needed. Even though the current indicators are in line with the performance agreement, their relevance for different fields or even at the institutional level could be improved (e.g. the choice of what types of publications to include in the records) or better aligned with the strategic goals of the university. For instance, the university puts a strong emphasis on “science to society” activities. Therefore, the university could take into account in its records not only the publications in refereed journals, but also, at least to a certain extent, the publications in line with “science to society” activities or other research endeavours related to these activities.

The University of Graz has several evaluation processes, but they could be more integrated or better articulated. This was also admitted by representatives of the LQM: “A lot of small (quality process) wheels are running. However, we are not sure how the wheels work together.” For instance, the external evaluation of research could be followed by an

evaluation of the support services. This would provide useful feedback to the support units.

#### 6.2.4 Support services key to research

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The University of Graz has not only developed strategic and evaluation processes, but also support measures to enhance the quality of research. The Office for Research Management and Services (FMS) provides support to researchers applying for third-party funding (information about funding opportunities, counselling, guidance for application, etc.). This unit also offers workshops on proposal writing and applications. The strong attendance at these workshops confirms that they fulfil a need.

The FMS has also implemented an information and document archiving system, ProjectDataManagementSystem (PDMS), for third-party-funded projects, which is fully integrated with the campus management system, UNIGRAZonline. This tool strongly facilitates follow-ups on the workflow when different people at different hierarchical levels in the research project are involved. According to the staff, the number of applications has increased in recent years as well as the amount of third-party funding.

To help control knowledge transfer and secure intellectual property, the University of Graz has procedures to ensure counselling and control at the FMS. Since the new University Act has come into effect, researchers have had to submit their inventions to the university. The quality management of the FMS itself is quite informal, but the interviewees appreciated their expertise and commitment to providing support services.

The university has established “DocService” (within the LSS) to support early-stage researchers. The DocService is a competence centre and service point, which provides services for doctoral students and supervisors. For example, it offers courses on transferable skills to support early-stage researchers in their academic careers.

### 6.3 The societal impact

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The objectives set for the societal impact are linked to the overall strategy and performance agreements of the University of Graz, and thus, they reflect the university's high level of awareness about its social responsibilities. The quality system produces relevant information for the

quality management of some of the operations. Although personnel groups, students and external stakeholders are involved and committed to developing the operations, some of the quality management instruments related to the societal impact are quite new and need to be further developed and integrated with the central quality system.

Quality management of the societal impact is at a **developing stage**.

#### 6.3.1 The objectives for the societal impact

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As the largest university in the area, the University of Graz is aware of its social responsibilities and its role in the national and regional culture and economy. The university leadership keeps a steady focus on the university's "3rd mission": the objective of maintaining a constructive engagement with the surrounding society.

The efforts of the university in the field of social responsibility, cooperation, lifelong learning and equal treatment for all are stated in the Development Plan for 2013–2018. The following goals have been set:

- Strengthening cooperation in the local area and supporting the economy;
- Increasing the visibility of achievements in research and teaching;
- Providing continued interaction with society and lifelong learning opportunities at the university;
- Reconciling family and work for staff members of the university;
- Ensuring equal treatment for everyone as well as gender mainstreaming.

Various collaboration arrangements exist between the University of Graz and other universities, mainly in the city of Graz and the region of Styria. NAWI Graz stands for joint teaching, research and doctoral programmes in the field of the natural sciences; it was established in 2004 together with the Graz University of Technology. NAWI Graz was evaluated in the spring 2012 by a German evaluation body, the "evalag", which found the collaboration very successful in terms of the education provided. BioMedTech Graz, established in the autumn of 2011, is a cooperation and networking initiative between the University of Graz, the Medical University of Graz and the Graz University of Technology with the aim being to intensify interdisciplinary and inter-university collaboration

in terms of science in joint research projects and in the support of early-stage researchers. Under the umbrella of the Styrian University Conference, nine universities coordinate their positions and activities, not least in the field of education and teacher training. These collaborative arrangements mainly concern the political and strategic aspects of higher education in the region and do not have specific quality management instruments.

### 6.3.2 The functioning of the quality management procedures

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A commendable effort by the university to reach out to the general public and to establish a forum for dialogue and knowledge transfer is the Centre for Society, Knowledge and Communication – the so-called 7th Faculty. The activities of the centre are monitored as part of the performance agreements, and in this sense the centre is integrated with the quality system of the university. But more extensive mechanisms of continuous/annual assessment seem to be lacking, although the centre is part of an evaluation cycle for centres, expecting the first evaluation to be conducted in 2015. Like the UNI for LIFE unit, the 7th Faculty is active in relevant national networks and uses questionnaires to get an impression of user satisfaction, but its members also admit that it is difficult to conduct and interpret surveys among such heterogeneous groups of “clients”. There is frequent contact with the university’s leadership and research communities, but no systematic self-assessment and formal reporting.

Providing lifelong learning opportunities is a stated goal of the University of Graz’s Development Plan 2013–2018 and the goal is being pursued by UNI for LIFE and the Centre for Continuing Education. These two units periodically go through institutional certifications and auditing processes: The UNI for LIFE participated in the LQW (Learner-Oriented Quality Certification for Further Education Organisations), which helped them develop their own evaluation standards, and the Centre for Continuing Education is periodically reviewed in terms of how well it conforms to standards in the area of adult and continuing education.

It is also a strategic goal for the University of Graz to provide an easily accessible interface between commercial companies and the university, thus establishing the university as a leading and relevant institution of research and education in the mind of the public. Different centres have been established for this purpose, such as the Science Park Graz, the

Regional Centre of Expertise and the Climate Change Centre Austria. Another medium for knowledge transfer is UNI Graz Business News. In addition to the University of Graz website, the magazine UNIZEIT, which is distributed via the University of Graz web radio, is a useful channel for disseminating such information. The University of Graz makes its scientific performance known to outside partners through regular contacts, professional marketing and online presentations as well as printed publications.

Both the self-evaluation report and the interviews left an impression of active contacts with commercial and public enterprises in the region, and both the university staff and external stakeholders regarded these contacts as successful. The members of the academic community that we interviewed perceived the responsibility for quality management in these relations to lie with the Rectorate. However, academics as well as the interviewed stakeholder representatives expressed the viewpoint that systematic feedback mechanisms are lacking. Regular contacts between relevant academic communities and, for example, the regional banking and legal establishments were seen as depending on individual initiatives, without being too strongly linked to central management and monitoring. The same goes for the recently established alumni network, which today lacks a mechanism for systematic consultation. The graduate tracking programme is another recent development that may provide important information for curricula commissions and strategic planning in the longer term. The programme has been active as a regular procedure since 2012, but the audit team could not find evidence of results at this early stage.

The audit team found the university's policies for combining family, studying and working life and of securing equal treatment and gender balance to be more integrated within the institution's regular quality management mechanisms. There is a clear commitment to promote women to management positions and three different structures are in place to improve equality of opportunities: the Working Group for Equal Opportunities, the Coordination Centre for Women's Studies, Gender Research and Affirmative Action for Women and the Vice-Rector's Office for Human Resources and Gender Equality. The activities of these structures are evaluated in different ways, e.g. statistical data monitoring, evaluation by questionnaires and benchmarking projects, and they receive close and continuing attention from the institutional leadership.

To sum up, there is a clear correspondence between the institution's strategic objectives in the area of its societal impact and regional development and the strategic measures that have been defined in order to realise such objectives. The interviews with external stakeholders showed that there is a high degree of satisfaction with the university's cooperative arrangements, for instance in connection with the curriculum revision processes. But quality management in this area is quite uneven. For some functions, there is a lack of robust measures to monitor, evaluate and systematically enhance established arrangements. The audit team found little evidence of systematic feedback mechanisms to gather assessments from external stakeholders.

As the University of Graz states in its self-evaluation report, the quality management instruments relating to societal impact are quite new and in need of further development. Acknowledging the fact that quality assurance in this diverse domain can be methodologically challenging, and that this is an under-developed area in the quality management of most higher education institutions, the audit team still recommends that the university establish a consistent strategy to provide indicators and instruments for measuring its societal impact. If the mission of having a societal impact is really to be regarded as the third main activity domain of the university, then this also means that quality management for these activities needs to be integrated with the central quality system, with regular assessments and formal reports on quality status and quality work.



# Internationalisation

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The quality management procedures that are in place for internationalisation advance the development of the operations and the achievement of the goals set for the operations. The objectives for internationalisation are mostly linked to the overall strategy of the university. The quality system produces information for the quality management of internationalisation, and the information is used to develop the university's operations. Personnel groups, students and external stakeholders have limited involvement in the development of internationalisation.

The quality management of internationalisation is at a **developing stage**.

## 7.1 The objectives for the quality management of internationalisation

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The University of Graz has three objectives for internationalisation, as mentioned in the self-evaluation report:

- Improving competitiveness by strengthening the international dimension;
- Supporting the mobility of students and young researchers;
- Developing international strategic partnerships.

These objectives are referred to in the performance agreement 2013–2015 as “staff”, “mobility” and “cooperation”. The results of the recommendations from the AQA audit in 2009 were used to, among other things, formulate the objectives. The university has defined the following key quality procedures for each objective:

Table 4. Key quality procedures in internationalisation (Self-evaluation report, p. 87)

Goal	Key quality procedure
Improving competitiveness by strengthening the international dimension	"Teaching in English" and increasing the number of classes taught in English Joint/double degree programmes and improving implementation procedures Promoting international recruitments
Supporting the mobility of students and young researchers	Analysis of mobility obstacles Defining and monitoring mobility numbers Broadening the scope of the mobility programmes Budgeting mobility grants for young researchers
Developing international strategic partnerships	Project for evaluating institutionalised cooperation agreements and obstacles to mobility Focus on south-eastern Europe and the Americas; strengthening cooperation with selected partners in this region on various levels (research, exchange, teaching, institution building, etc.)

The key quality procedures are also referred to as "measures", which indeed they mostly are – if not just aims. Very few of them actually indicate what is going to be done, or how it is going to be done, and what the targets are in more specific terms, which is what you would expect with procedures. And as long as no monitoring arrangements are specified for the key procedures, it is difficult to see how they function as quality management.

This terminology indeed captures the fact that the focus is very much on implementing certain actions, often by carrying out special (called "strategic") projects. A distribution of responsibilities is provided for seven of the nine key quality procedures. The Rectorate is accountable in all cases, while the International Relations Office (IRO) carries most of the responsibilities. Some quality objectives that are referred to in the strategic documents are missing from the list of key procedures: this concerns utilising foreign students to increase internationalisation at home, obtaining optimal student mixes and teaching intercultural skills in international classrooms. There clearly are links between the objectives set for internationalisation and the university's strategy. Nevertheless, it would benefit the quality management aspects of internationalisation if the university would further specify targets and indicators, appropriate monitoring and feedback mechanisms. It would also be advisable to include among the

key quality procedures the objectives of internationalisation at home and the international classroom, which are mentioned in the performance agreement.

## 7.2 The functioning of the quality management procedures

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Procedures to strengthen the international dimension include the “Teaching in English” programme and increasing the number of classes taught in English, joint/double programmes, and promoting international recruitments. The “Teaching in English” programme was initiated as a response to a recommendation by the AQA audit in 2009. It is offered by the IRO in cooperation with the Human Resources Development. Although successes have been reported, the audit team heard from students and staff that the number of courses taught in English is still limited.

The internationalisation of curricula in terms of the improved incorporation of mobility windows and joint/double degree programmes is a primary objective of the university. It will help increase the percentage of graduates, doctoral students and young researchers who have spent time abroad focusing on issues that are relevant to their studies. The responses of the interviewees on the efforts to establish more joint degrees were mixed. The audit team heard that there was support from the Rectorate and also from the curriculum commissions in some faculties to develop joint degrees and that sometimes it is challenging to establish joint degrees because of high costs and, at times, the lack of a will to invest in such degree programmes.

The university aims to double the percentage of international recruitments between 2011 and 2018. In accordance with the guidelines of the recruitment process, the vacancies for professorships are advertised via international media outlets. A strategic project called the “Quality-oriented development of the appointment process of professors” was launched in May 2012 on the basis of the AQA audit in 2009 and a benchmarking project on the appointment process with the University of Helsinki in 2010. The results of the project should be implemented in 2013.

To support the mobility of students and young researchers, the university has put together a remarkable initiative: in January 2012, a university-wide project was launched to analyse obstacles to mobility involving all faculties and deans’ offices,

administrative units, students and the Rectorate. No less than 25 working groups were assembled to report on this problem. There certainly are good practices in stimulating outgoing mobility: some courses already have an active mobility policy, e.g. it is mandatory for students to study abroad. The university is planning to increase the information events on studying abroad and the offer of stipends for studies abroad. In general, however, the outcomes of this mobility obstacles study to a large extent highlight the obstacles that exist within the University of Graz itself. Even the Rectorate acknowledges that one of the main challenges is the recognition of credits. The heads of curricula commissions have a formal responsibility to recognise credits from abroad, but the recognition practices seem to be varied within the university.

With regard to developing strategic partnerships, the university executed an extensive evaluation of its 500+ partnerships with institutions worldwide. Indicators concerning the quality and quantity of mobility, as well as the obstacles to mobility, played an important part in this evaluation. This led to the selection of some 37 partner institutions as priorities for future co-operation. New guidelines for collaboration will be established; one criterion is that at least two departments have to be involved in any collaborative scheme. The audit team learned that the university was still discussing how this selection process would influence existing cooperation in practice and whether a significant reduction of partnerships would occur.

Finally, the audit team would like to draw attention to a potential conflict between two separate indicators of institutional success in this field, i.e. between performing assessments via pure mobility numbers (largely boosted through the regional focus on south-eastern Europe) and performing assessments via the academic benefit that flows from research-based collaboration, which is based on the strengths and development needs of the various academic units. The two may not always match, and the one might even get in the way of the other.

### 7.3 The information produced by the quality system

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The university, in particular the LQM and IRO, gathers lots of data on mobility. According to the LQM, the nationality of incoming students is the most important indicator of

internationalisation. The LQM has to use and combine the data from different sources – the student database, national data and SAP (HR) data – and has to interpret what the numbers really mean. A distinction is made between mobility data for internal reporting (with breakdowns for each faculty) and external reporting (e.g. the number of incoming and outgoing staff is included in the intellectual capital reports). Indicators for internal reporting, such as the number of courses held in a foreign language, are currently being developed. With the exception of 2011, the data show a steady increase in the number of international students and staff: both increased to 12.2% of the overall university population in 2012. The data also show an increase in the number of incoming and outgoing staff members. However, the number of outgoing students is dropping (from a total of 720 in 2009/10 to 671 in 2011/12) and it was clearly below the target in 2012. If this trend continues, it will become impossible to reach the targets for the number of graduates who studied abroad during the course of their studies (the target is set at 29% in 2013 and should increase to 30.5% in 2015). Although the data that the university has gathered is in general quite strong, there is a need for more coherence between the different databases.

A point for improvement is the information given to foreign staff members, which is mostly available only in German (e.g. contracts, information about the university, etc.). The audit team would also recommend having a mentoring system for new foreign staff members that is overseen by experienced staff members. In addition, foreign students reported that only a small amount of information on university matters was available in English on the website. Considering the international ambitions of the University of Graz, it would be a worthwhile investment to develop an intranet with information available in both German and English. Although the audit team saw examples of course evaluations in English, some foreign students reported that such course evaluations were not made available in English for them. For those students who were not proficient in German, it meant that they did not complete the questionnaires.

While a great deal of data has been generated, especially on mobility, there is hardly any qualitative information. For instance, there is no database for compiling experiences related to the learning outcomes of students who went to study abroad. If this kind of information would be available,

it would enhance the possibilities to steer mobility and to convince students and teachers to invest time in studying abroad.

The audit team heard that many meetings are held regarding internationalisation (or better, regarding the information gathered on internationalisation) between the involved parties, such as the IRO, the LQM and the Rectorate. However, these meetings are often ad hoc and are not part of a systematic quality management process that takes into account all of the key quality procedures. In addition, there is no systematic annual reporting on internationalisation. It would be helpful for the further development of internationalisation and the information provided if an annual report on internationalisation would be introduced.

## 7.4 The involvement of different parties in the quality work

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The Rectorate and IRO are the central actors in quality work related to internationalisation. They meet each week. According to the IRO, there are also frequent meetings with the deans of studies. Meetings with the LQM are more ad hoc. The role of the Senate is to make proposals and comments, but the strategic decisions regarding internationalisation are made by the Rectorate. The role of curriculum commissions in internationalisation is to advise whether a student who has done his or her studies in another country is qualified for a specific study programme at the University Graz (especially doctoral students). In general, the audit team believes that the quality work would benefit, maybe even with less of a workload, by introducing more structure to the meetings between the involved parties.

One positive feature is that the QM Board consists of international members (although mostly from one country: Germany). Another positive feature of the quality work in this area is the international benchmarking and evaluation initiatives that have been carried out and that involved organisations like AQA and ACQUIN. These activities have certainly strengthened the external perspective on internationalisation. In particular, the AQA audit on internationalisation carried out in 2009 was important. One of the recommendations was to increase teaching in English, and this has been done. However, other recommendations, e.g. to increase flexibility in how studies from abroad are recognised,

have not been implemented. The University of Graz has investigated in detail the problem of mobility obstacles and of recognising study periods; it has also involved many working groups in the process. Now, the solutions just need to be implemented.

The research support unit, the FMS, is involved in and also financing the strategic project for supporting the mobility of early-stage researchers. The project is coordinated by the vice-dean of studies from the Faculty of Humanities. The mobility aspects are the responsibility of the IRO. An activity that is being carried out under this project is the writing of research proposals for postdoctoral positions.

Although the recruitment of international staff and students is a clear goal of the University of Graz, there is no systematic procedure to involve current international staff in working to achieve this goal. The audit team noted that the foreign staff have a lot of (comparative) international experience and also have thoughts about how the university could further improve.

The foreign students that the audit team met with were mostly positive about their studies at the University of Graz. Although the university has some procedures in place to integrate incoming students in the university, more systematic attention to the integration of incoming students in the classroom and the community would enhance the intercultural experience of both those students as well as the Austrian students. The ongoing project with the University of Jyväskylä (Finland), which aims to define learning outcomes for international student mobility, is an important step in that direction.

The Austrian students that the team interviewed who had studied abroad were enthusiastic about their international experience. The university could do more to make other students enthusiastic, too, by including students with international experience more systematically in promotion activities for studying abroad and to make them “ambassadors” for outgoing mobility.

In summary, the audit team concludes that the IRO and Rectorate’s engaged involvement, and particularly the very active role of the IRO, is to be commended. But there should also be a more structured (and less ad hoc) involvement of other parties. Better structural involvement and feedback from foreign staff and students, and from international stakeholders, would support the international ambitions of the university.

## 7.5 Support services key to internationalisation

The 28 members of the IRO each have different responsibilities in terms of special projects and working groups; e.g. this year there are projects concerning joint programmes and summer schools. Much of the reporting takes place at different levels of the university (e.g. the Rectorate, Senate, various faculties). These reporting tasks mean that the IRO needs to observe certain trends and promote new internationalising activities or programmes in response to identified developments. Most of the reporting consists of data provision, e.g. on mobility. Reports on student figures are regularly submitted to the faculties; the figures show the current status of the various faculties in relation to the set targets. The audit team heard that different concepts and definitions may be used for the different databases, which means that the data are not directly comparable. These data definition problems and the lack of communication between databases were mentioned by the IRO as points for improvement.

The IRO is making efforts to set up a proper procedure for establishing joint degree programmes. Currently, three new joint degree programmes are being considered. The IRO supports the academic units in making the cooperation agreements and in ensuring that all of the requirements are covered. The quality management of joint degree programmes and strengthening the joint curricula by choosing the appropriate partners is one of the IRO's main concerns. The audit team did not hear of any specific quality management procedures for operative joint degree programmes. Once they have been set up, they are subject to the same quality management procedures as other programmes.

The audit team only heard words of praise from all of the different stakeholders about the services provided by the IRO. For instance, international staff were positive about the IRO services and the available courses on offer for improving teaching in English. Domestic students expressed satisfaction with the information provision by the IRO on studying abroad. International students were also positive. The audit team finds the proactive and enthusiastic approach of the IRO to be commendable. But quality assurance feedback mechanisms related to the IRO's operations could be enhanced by introducing annual reporting on the IRO's past performance and future activity plans.



# The quality system as a whole

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

The quality system as a whole is at a **developing stage**.

In the audit team's assessment, the University of Graz is a well-managed institution, with good tools in place for monitoring and steering its activities. The first thing to notice about its quality system is the fact that it is rather extensive and quite well organized.

The university must arrange its activities within national framework conditions. Like all other higher education institutions in Austria, the University of Graz is subject to rather detailed performance agreements with the ministry. Consequently, a great part of the university's steering instruments are directed towards fulfilling these agreements, which also seems to have influenced the institution's approach to quality management. Another external condition that exerts an influence on educational activities is the open access policy that prevails in Austrian higher education. To some extent, this complicates the planning of educational courses, occasionally resulting in programmes with too many students who are not always fully committed; this is most likely a factor that reduces the number of ECTS credits obtained by students and the student graduation rates. Both of these features are

seen by the audit team to represent circumstantial restrictions on the university's efforts at quality management.

Quality management as it relates to institutional goals and strategies

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The institution has developed a comprehensive set of strategies for its different activity areas. The implementation of these strategies is supported by the quality system, the specific goals of which are well aligned with the goals of the main strategies. The institutional goals have been broken down into faculty-level and department-level goals, and this makes it easier to operationalise them and relate them to the budgeting process. Institutional strategies, together with the corresponding quality management goals and mechanisms, are in place not only for the institution's basic activities, including internationalisation, but also for the support units and their operations. This is true for HR policies, such as gender mainstreaming and other aspects of staff planning and follow-up, as well as for the internal auditing of administrative and support units, many of which also conduct their own internal feedback and monitoring mechanisms, such as, for instance, the library. On the whole, there is consistency in the university's policy goals and the objectives of quality monitoring.

The comprehensiveness of quality management

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The quality system is conceptually unified through the overriding principle of the "quality cycle", which is supposed to work not only as part of the university's total operations management, but for all units, activity fields and processes as well. The concept of the quality cycle, if consistently applied, is a tool for continuous quality development, as activities are regularly assessed in order to detect and rectify weaknesses and improve in the next round.

Quality management at the University of Graz can be said to be comprehensive in the sense that it encompasses all of the basic tasks and operations at the institution. At the same time, the system – as it appears in a practical sense – contains some features that make it necessary to qualify this assessment. For one thing, the team noticed that some of the support services, among them the very offices related to quality management, are less subject to quality cycle processes than most of the basic activities, or in an early stage of implementation, so

that their functioning is too early to assess. In fact, the same goes for a number of tasks falling under the “societal impact” umbrella, which is a “basic activity”. Second, the team found that the quality cycle is often not entirely completed. Great emphasis is put on monitoring activities in accordance with set indicators, whereas the next steps in the quality cycle, the use of all this information for analysis and the identification of enhancement needs or opportunities, are less consistently implemented. With some exceptions for the area of research, it may therefore seem as if the term “quality system” is understood mainly as an “information system”, where feeding the database becomes the most important activity. Third, as was admitted by the quality management staff in the interviews, the many different quality wheels that are operating throughout the institution are not always linked together well enough or coordinated. The audit team sees the quality system as lacking somewhat in coherence.

Finally, the audit team never managed to find evidence of a systematic and full quality cycle related to the quality system itself. As was documented in the self-assessment report and in the interviews, the academic leadership and the quality management staff are quite aware of the fact that the system has shortcomings and development needs, but these needs are usually seen as “missing functions” that require an extension of the system. They are seldom seen as qualitative shortcomings when implementing the routines that are already in place. A mechanism for regularly assessing the qualities of the system itself would be an essential tool for the further development of the system as a whole.

#### The effectiveness of the system

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There is a clear tendency for the system to go by quantitative indicators. The quality system is in many ways a steering system to monitor and manage the activities in such a way that performance – in the sense of “production” – targets are met. In the audit team’s assessment, the monitoring and steering efforts in relation to such performance targets are conducted very efficiently. The system is well geared to produce detailed and updated information on performance according to broad sets of indicators. The audit team acknowledges the crucial importance of steering via performance targets when these targets express the strategies that an autonomous institution must develop in order to execute its mission successfully within the boundaries set by legislation and the performance

agreement with the ministry. In terms of quality management, however, the system has only gone “half of the way”. The audit team would have liked to see more mechanisms for quality assessment that go beyond numerical counting and the ticking off of “targets achieved”.

The team certainly assumes – and heard evidence – that enhancement-oriented work does take place in the university’s numerous departments and disciplines. But there is little trace of such deeper levels of quality analysis in the information that the system actually provides. The impression gained from the interviews is also that there is less “pressure” for quality work in this sense and for local units to be held internally accountable for it. This is particularly noticeable in the continuous assessment of educational courses and programmes, but also in the fields of internationalisation and societal impact. To some extent, research is subject to more in-depth assessments through the area-wide peer reviews and subsequent development workshops. This also has implications for information flows and transparency. When there is little obligation for the various programmes, departments or faculties to produce annual (or other regular) self-assessment reports concerning the quality of their operations and development needs, no such written information can be collated, analysed and forwarded to responsible leadership and the Senate. As far as the leadership is concerned, this lack seems to be offset to some degree through extensive contact meetings, but this will hardly make it possible to look at the lower levels of the system to a sufficient degree or around widely enough in such a large organisation. What then remains as solid and reliable information is the quantitative data from the database. This is – as already stated – both extensive and comprehensive, but these quantitative forms of data should ideally have been supplemented by more qualitative information flowing through a connected line of evaluative reporting. In the audit team’s assessment, the system’s production and application of quality-related information is effective only in a restricted sense.

The way in which the quality work is organised, i.e. through the distribution of tasks and responsibilities, is one of the strengths of the quality system at the University of Graz. This is particularly true of the two basic activities of teaching and research, including their internationalisation aspects. For some of the other activities, for instance those falling under the heading “interaction with society & lifelong learning”,

where quality work has been less integrated into the main system, responsibilities are also less clearly defined.

The University of Graz has developed an organisational structure for quality management that provides a good platform for the institution to take further steps. The centrally placed offices of the LQM and LLS, which are competently staffed and work in close contact with the Rectorate, are well positioned to coordinate and take the lead in this work. However, it is important to heed the signals that the audit team often heard when visiting the faculties: that the quality system “is” the LQM, one with an “us-and-them” attitude and the limited feeling of local ownership that this entails.

#### The quality system and quality culture

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“Quality culture” is an evasive term. In a broad sense, it must be taken to mean that an organisation is characterised by its members’ commitment to quality when executing their tasks and their continuous search to make further improvements. The audit team obtained much evidence of a good quality culture at the University of Graz in this sense.

When the term is linked to organisational structures, however, and in particular to quality assurance and quality enhancement, the term takes on a more specific meaning. A good quality culture must then mean that the general goodwill to perform at a high-quality level translates into a wide level of participation and commitment by all internal stakeholders involved in the organised activities of the quality system. The ‘UNI Graz Quality Concept’ chapter of the self-evaluation report shows that the university has a good grasp of this fact; it stresses that one of the objectives of the quality system is “the cultivation of a quality culture”, and it mentions some of the system’s key characteristics: wide participation and involvement, a self-learning system that is continually developed, a system that supports rather than controls and a system that is transparent.

The actual implementation of this quality culture, however, is a difficult task, and one that many higher education institutions are struggling with. The audit team must conclude that this also applies to the University of Graz. In spite of the wholehearted efforts of the leadership and key quality management staff, the university has some distance to go before the stated goals are reached. Within the different organisational units, there are wide variations in the staff’s committed involvement in the quality management processes,

and sometimes rather negative – or indifferent – attitudes, which in turn influences the readiness to involve students. In this respect, the quality culture of the University of Graz is threatened by the tendency to fall into opposing – but not mutually exclusive – ruts: on the one hand, this involves an over-centralised approach that may alienate sub-units and staff and turn them into “internal clients”, and, on the other hand, a loosely practiced local autonomy for departments and faculties without the balancing force of proper accountability mechanisms. To the extent that the promotion of a quality culture can be helped by means of organisational tools, a first step might be to try to boost the concept of “responsible autonomy” in the programmes, departments and faculties by stressing their strategic ownership of their own activities and to balance this with stricter formal accountability demands, i.e. the implementation of full quality cycles, where quality issues are discussed and analysed within the context of the quality system and where formal reporting is required within institutionally determined guidelines.

# 9

## Conclusions

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### 9.1 Strengths and good practices of the quality system

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#### Strengths

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- The University of Graz has developed a comprehensive and user-friendly system for collecting and presenting relevant data concerning its basic activities. The system involves academic staff broadly in the collection of data and presents the leadership and other stakeholders with precise and updated information on the university's performance in relation to set performance targets.
- Quality work at the University of Graz is characterised by a strong commitment to improvement among the leadership and key quality management/support staff, with frequent contact and exchanges of information. Working in close contact with the Rectorate, the quality management offices, the LQM, the LLS, the ZLK and the FMS, are in a position to launch quality-related projects and provide a robust platform for further developments.
- The quality system is strongly linked to institutional management and is well aligned with institutional strategies and development plans.
- The quality system provides comprehensive and relevant peer reviews on various research fields, which are followed up with concrete measures, entailing consequences for research strategies.
- The International Relations Office (IRO), although it is not fully integrated with the quality cycle process, is a potential strength in its work to enhance the field of

internationalisation. The IRO receives unanimous praise from internal “clients” for its proactive and service-minded attitude and it provides much useful feedback through data compilation and reports for the Rectorate, the Senate and the various faculties.

## Good practices

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- The university’s thorough process of developing new curricula, with a broad degree of participation, several process loops and accountability anchored in governing bodies, is a very commendable practice.
- The quality system is quite clear and transparent in its division of roles and responsibilities; for most processes, it defines what leaders/bodies are either “responsible”, “accountable”, “consulted” or “informed”.
- The high level of commitment to quality work and the degree to which the units with administrative responsibilities for quality management (LQM, LSS, FMS and IRO) cooperate with corresponding units in other Austrian and German universities provides opportunities for valuable benchmarking so as to ensure that the key processes in place at the university are on par with national and international developments.
- The university is commended for its systematic use of individual performance agreements and appraisal interviews to clarify individual objectives for newly recruited academics.

## 9.2 Recommendations

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- The University of Graz should rethink and strengthen the continuous quality management of its existing educational provision. The audit team would like to make the following suggestions:
  - Course evaluations should be annual and an integrated part of all courses. They should be summed up in brief written reports that feed into *an annual qualitative assessment at the programme level*, where the programme’s relative strengths and weaknesses are identified and discussed and where the need for improvement measures is considered. By including an element of open discussion that involves teaching staff, students and responsible programme



leadership, the process would gain in depth and transparency and students would be secured feedback and a “heard voice”.

- A line of written aggregate analysis/reporting should go from the programmes via departments and/or faculties up to the Rectorate. There is no need for this process to be overly bureaucratic; it should focus only on the main points and the reports may be very short texts.
- There is a need to strengthen the full application of the quality management cycle in most areas, in particular outside the two basic activity fields of education and research, i.e. in the support services. This would entail *formalising* the quality work in these areas in more detail, thus integrating the processes better with the institution’s annual cycle of quality management. In particular, this requires formal reporting from the units in question, with self-assessments of recent performance and suggestions for measures/plans for the coming period. Increased emphasis on formalising feedback would create a stronger commitment to act on the basis of quality assessments.
- The information that the quality system produces is heavily based on a well-developed design for registering quantitative data. Such data are of vital importance for internal strategic management as well as for external reporting to the ministry. But for the system to be more oriented towards enhancement, the quantitative information needs to be supplemented and developed/interpreted in qualitative terms, which would require that the system provides more regular “spots” for discussion and analysis, resulting in brief analytical reports. If the system could be developed in this direction, two other challenges would be addressed: it would enhance the system’s transparency and accountability and it would increase the engaged participation of staff and students in the common effort to ensure and improve the quality of the university’s services.
- The audit team recommends that the university extend the practice of concluding individual performance agreements with all members of the academic staff, with special attention being paid to individual research performance in relation to established goals in the appraisal interviews. The constructive use of appraisal interviews might increase the qualitative element when assessing research.

- The university might consider formulating more comprehensive systems of indicators, analysis, responsibilities and feedback reporting based on strategic objectives in the fields of internationalisation and societal impact (including the “7th faculty”), where the University of Graz has clear ambitions and is already doing much work.
- Systematic procedures need to be developed and implemented to review the functionality of the quality system as a whole. The system should be developed to enhance a joint quality culture, which is still taking shape.

### 9.3 The audit team’s appraisal

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The University of Graz’s quality system fulfils the FINHEEC criteria for the quality system as a whole and for the quality management as it relates to basic duties. None of the audit targets are at the level of being absent, and the quality system as a whole (audit target 5) is at the developing level. The audit team proposes to FINHEEC that the University of Graz passes the audit.

### 9.4 FINHEEC’s decision

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In its meeting on 27 August 2013, FINHEEC decided, based on the audit team’s appraisal and the report, that the quality system of the University of Graz meets the FINHEEC criteria for quality systems as a whole and the quality management as it pertains to the higher education institution’s basic duties. The University of Graz has been awarded a quality label that is valid for seven years beginning on 27 August 2013.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Audit criteria

Appendix 2: Audit time frame

Appendix 3: Programme for the audit visit

# Appendix 1: Audit criteria

TARGETS	CRITERIA		
	ABSENT	EMERGING	DEVELOPING
1. The quality policy of the higher education institution	<p>The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ definition of the system's objectives and responsibilities</li> <li>■ knowledge and commitment of those responsible</li> <li>■ documentation of the system and the information it produces or</li> <li>■ suitable communication.</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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 communicated in a systematic and targeted manner within the institution and to external stakeholders.</p>
			<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
2. Strategic and operations management	<p>The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ links to strategic planning, management and operations management</li> <li>■ ability to meet the needs of strategic and operations management or</li> <li>■ commitment to quality work of managers involved in operations management.</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>In terms of management, the system works at different organisational levels, and the managers involved in operations management are committed to joint quality work.</p>
			<p>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.</p>

				In terms of management, the quality system works in an excellent manner at all organisational levels, and there is clear and continuous evidence that managers involved in operations management are committed to joint quality work.
<b>3. Development of the quality system</b>	<p>The HEI shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ procedures for evaluating or developing the quality system or</li> <li>■ overall view of the functioning of the quality system.</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<i>Follow-up section for the HEIs subject to the second FINHEEC audit:</i>	<p>The HEI shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the development work following the first audit.</li> </ul>	<p>The development of the quality system after the first audit has not been systematic or effective.</p>	<p>The development of the quality system after the first audit has been systematic. The system works better than before.</p>	<p>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.</p>

<b>The fulfilment of the following criteria is reviewed separately for each basic duty and optional audit target:</b>				
<b>4. Quality management of the higher education institution's basic duties</b>  <b>4a) Degree education</b>  <b>4b) Research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities</b>  <b>4c) Societal impact and regional development work (incl. social responsibility, continuing education, open university and sciences education, as well as paid-services education)</b>  <b>4d) Optional audit target</b>	<p>The quality system shows a complete absence of or major shortcomings in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ quality management procedures used to achieve the goals set for the operations</li> <li>■ links between goals set for the activities and the HEI's overall strategy</li> <li>■ participation of the institution's personnel groups, students or external stakeholders in the development of the operations or</li> <li>■ quality management of support services that are key to the operations.</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The personnel groups, students and external stakeholders are not involved in the development of the operations in a meaningful manner.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The quality management of key support services is not functional.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Personnel groups and students are involved in the development of the operations in a meaningful manner. External stakeholders also participate in the development work.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The quality management of key support services functions relatively well.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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.</p>

5. The quality system as a whole	<p>The HEI has only individual and unrelated quality management procedures that do not form a structured system.</p> <p>There is no evidence of the procedures' impact on the development of the operations.</p>	<p>The quality management procedures do not form a functioning and unified system.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The institution's quality culture is only just emerging.</p>	<p>The quality management procedures constitute a functioning system.</p> <p>The quality system covers the essential parts of the basic duties of the HEI and provides meaningful support for the development of the operations. There is evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the operations.</p> <p>The development of the operations is based on an existing quality culture.</p>	<p>The quality management procedures form a dynamic and comprehensive system.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>There is clear and continuous evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the operations.</p> <p>The well-established quality culture provides excellent support for the development of the operations.</p>

## Appendix 2: Audit time frame

Agreement negotiation between the University of Graz and FINHEEC	23 April 2012
Appointment of the audit team by FINHEEC	27 August 2012
Submission of the audit materials and self-evaluation report to FINHEEC	17 December 2012
Briefing and discussion event at the University of Graz	6 February 2013
Audit visit	11–14 March 2013
FINHEEC's decision on the results of the audit	27 August 2013
Publication of the report	28 August 2013
Concluding seminar	6 November 2013



## Appendix 3: Programme for the audit visit

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### Monday, 11 March 2013

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9.00–10.00	Interview with the Rectorate
10.15–11.15	Interview with the Office of Performance and Quality Management
11.30–12.30	Interview with the Senate and University Board
12.30–13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30–14.30	Interview with the Student Union
14.45–15.45	Interview with the Office of Research Management and Service
16.00–17.00	Interview with the Department for Educational and Student Services and the Competence Centre for University Teaching

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### Tuesday, 12 March 2013

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	<i>Interview with the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (GEWI):</i>
9.00–9.45	Interview with the GEWI deans
10.00–11.00	Interview with GEWI teachers 1
11.15–12.30	Interview with GEWI students
12.30–13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30–14.30	Interview with GEWI teachers 2
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14.45–15.45	Administration and services
16.00–17.00	Interview with the Office of International Relations

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### Wednesday, 13 March 2013

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	<i>Parallel interviews (9.00–14.30):</i>	
	<i>Interview with the Faculty of Natural Sciences (NAWI)</i>	<i>Interview with the Faculty of Environmental and Regional Sciences and Education (URBI)</i>
9.00–9.45	Interview with the NAWI deans	Interview with the URBI deans
10.00–11.00	Interview with NAWI teachers 1	Interview with URBI teachers 1
11.15–12.30	Interview with NAWI students	Interview with URBI students
12.30–13.30	<i>Lunch</i>	
13.30–14.30	Interview with NAWI teachers 2	Interview with URBI teachers 2
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14.45–15.45	Interview with alumni	
16.00–17.00	Interview with external stakeholders	

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**Thursday, 14 March 2013**

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9.00–10.00	Interview with faculty deans
10.15–11.15	Interview with foreign personnel
11.30–12.30	<i>Parallel interviews:</i> Interview with foreign students      Interview with research institutes
12.30–13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30–14.00	Display of the University of Graz's online systems
15.00–16.00	Audit team's meeting
16.00–17.00	Interview with the Rectorate and LQM

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## PUBLICATIONS OF THE FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION COUNCIL

- 1:2000** Lehtinen, E., Kess, P., Stähle, P. & Urponen, K.: Tampereen yliopiston opetuksen arviointi
- 2:2000** Cohen, B., Jung, K. & Valjakka, T.: From Academy of Fine Arts to University. Same name, wider ambitions
- 3:2000** Goddard, J., Moses, I., Teichler, U., Virtanen, I. & West, P.: External Engagement and Institutional Adjustment: An Evaluation of the University of Turku
- 4:2000** Almefelt, P., Kekäle, T., Malm, K., Miikkulainen, L. & Pehu-Voima, S.: Audit of Quality Work. Swedish Polytechnic, Finland
- 5:2000** Harlio, R., Harvey, L., Mansikkamäki, J., Miikkulainen, L. & Pehu-Voima, S.: Audit of Quality Work. Central Ostrobothnia Polytechnic
- 6:2000** Moitus, S. (toim.): Yliopistokoulutuksen laatuyksiköt 2001–2003
- 7:2000** Liuhanen, A.-M. (toim.): Neljä aikuiskoulutuksen laatuyliopistoa 2001–2003
- 8:2000** Hara, V., Hyvönen, R., Myers, D. & Kangasniemi, J. (Eds.): Evaluation of Education for the Information Industry
- 9:2000** Jussila, J. & Saari, S. (Eds.): Teacher Education as a Future-moulding Factor. International Evaluation of Teacher Education in Finnish Universities
- 10:2000** Lämsä, A. & Saari, S. (toim.): Portfoliosta koulutuksen kehittämiseen. Ammatillisen opettajankoulutuksen arviointi
- 11:2000** Korkeakoulujen arviointineuvoston toimintasuunnitelma 2000–2003
- 12:2000** Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council Action Plan for 2000–2003
- 13:2000** Huttula, T. (toim.): Ammattikorkeakoulujen koulutuksen laatuyksiköt 2000
- 14:2000** Gordon, C., Knodt, G., Lundin, R., Oger, O. & Shenton, G.: Hanken in European Comparison. EQUIS Evaluation Report
- 15:2000** Almefelt, P., Kekäle, T., Malm, K., Miikkulainen, L. & Kangasniemi, J.: Audit of Quality Work. Satakunta Polytechnic
- 16:2000** Kells, H.R., Lindqvist, O.V. & Premfors, R.: Follow-up Evaluation of the University of Vaasa. Challenges of a small regional university
- 17:2000** Mansikkamäki, J., Kekäle, T., Miikkulainen, L., Stone, J., Tolppi, V.-M. & Kangasniemi, J.: Audit of Quality Work. Tampere Polytechnic
- 18:2000** Baran, H., Gladrow, W., Klaudy, K., Locher, J. P., Toivakka, P. & Moitus, S.: Evaluation of Education and Research in Slavonic and Baltic Studies
- 19:2000** Harlio, R., Kekäle, T., Miikkulainen, L. & Kangasniemi, J.: Laatutyön auditointi. Kymenlaakson ammatti-korkeakoulu
- 20:2000** Mansikkamäki, J., Kekäle, T., Kähkönen, J., Miikkulainen, L., Mäki, M. & Kangasniemi, J.: Laatutyön auditointi. Pohjois-Savon ammattikorkeakoulu
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- 1:2001** Valtonen, H.: Oppimisen arviointi Sibelius-Akatemiassa
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- 3:2001** Vähäpassi, A. (toim.): Erikoistumisopintojen akkreditointi
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- 5:2001** Kinnunen, J.: Korkeakoulujen alueellisen vaikuttavuuden arviointi. Kriteerejä vuorovaikutteisuuden arvottamiselle
- 6:2001** Löfström, E.: Benchmarking korkeakoulujen kielenopetuksen kehittämisessä
- 7:2001** Kaartinen-Koutaniemi, M.: Korkeakouluopiskelijoiden harjoittelun kehittäminen. Helsingin yliopiston, Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulun ja Lahden ammattikorkeakoulun benchmarking-projekti
- 8:2001** Huttula, T. (toim.): Ammattikorkeakoulujen aluekehitysvaikutuksen huippuyksiköt 2001
- 9:2001** Welander, C. (red.): Den synliga yrkeshögskolan. Ålands yrkeshögskola.
- 10:2001** Valtonen, H.: Learning Assessment at the Sibelius Academy
- 11:2001** Ponkala, O. (toim.): Terveystieteiden korkeakoulutuksen arvioinnin seuranta

- 12:2001** Miettinen, A. & Pajarre, E.: Tuotantotalouden koulutuksen arvioinnin seuranta
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