

Cross Border Quality Audit The University of Graz Experience

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Performance and Quality Management





LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN AUSTRIA



Universities Act 2002

“The universities shall develop their own quality management system in order to assure quality and the attainment of their performance objectives.”

Universities can establish study programmes on their own responsibility, no further accreditation.



Act on Quality Assurance in HE (HS-QSG)

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- Accreditation for Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and private universities (AQ Austria)
- Audit for public universities and established UAS, valid 7 years, by EQAR-agency
- Assessment areas:
 1. Quality strategy and its integration into the management tools of the higher education institution;
 2. Quality assurance structures and procedures
 - degree programmes and teaching,
 - research
 - organisation and administration and staff;
 3. integration of internationalisation and societal objectives into the quality management system;
 4. information systems and involvement of stakeholder groups.

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FINHEEC
Audited

University of Graz

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Founded 1585

6 faculties, 123 institutes and centres

Approx. 110 Degree Programs (BA, MA, PHD)

33.000 students, about 19.000 active

4.700 new students

3.000 graduates (165 doctoral degrees)

3.933 staff (2.700 academic staff)

200 millions Euro budget



FINHEEC
Audited

QM objectives



- Establishment and support of a quality culture
- Long-term implementation of university's strategy/ strategic plan
- Enhancement of transparency of processes
- Enhancement of internal communication and identification
- Implementation of a quality circle, which correlates objectives, processes and results to enable continuous quality improvement
- Applying task-oriented QA instruments

QM cycle UG



Application areas

Teaching
Research
Promotion of young
researchers
Management
Service





QUALITY AUDIT



Expectations

Towards the audit

- Critical, friendly feedback from external peers
- Recommendations for development
- Realistic presentation of the status quo, no „window dressing“
- Unbiased report, taking into account the Austrian specifics

Towards the agency

- Experience in audits, comprehensive audit system
- Clear audit criteria
- Should work international, perspective from other HE-systems
- Competence of peers
- Checking fitness for purpose
- Small reporting and documentation effort
- Registered in the EQAR
- €

Choice of the agency

- Desk search: providing comprehensive (teaching AND research) audit, enhancement oriented
- Agency fair: presentation of concepts
- Formal selection: invitation of 6 agencies (AT, DE, CH, NL, NO, FI), terms of reference, hearing with 3
- Negotiation and contracting





LESSONS LEARNT



Expectations have been met

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Audits respect university's autonomie

Audit assesses procedures, not formal rules (fitness FOR purpose)

Key role of peers and their background (recommendations!)

External, international view without preconception

Audits as "state of the art"

Trust from ministry in internal quality management

Acceptance of audit results by government and stakeholders

Clear audit process with flexibility on the Austrian framework

Assessment of a comprehensive, task-oriented QMS

Challenges and solutions

Risk-taking with not “home-agency”

- ✓ Internationalization as strategic objective
- ✓ Peer-location independent from location of the agency

Preparing report and information not in mother tongue

- ✓ Glossary, translations
- ✓ Adjustment of terms with FINHEEC (common interpretation)
- ✓ Peer(s) fit in German language

Challenges and solutions

Reservations on the audit / foreign agency

- ✓ Briefing event
- ✓ Internal communication, project group with senate, deans, academic staff, students
- ✓ Positive experience with international exchange, useful recommendations during site visit and in the report

Providing background information on national HE-system

- ✓ 1 peer confidant with national HE-system
- ✓ Written background document
- ✓ National specifics mentioned in the peer-report

- ✓ QA must be context sensitive and individualised
- ✓ Commitment to a developmental approach in the HEI QA processes
- ✓ QA should be inclusive to the whole institutional community
- ✓ Ensuring the engagement and capacities of the key actors in QA processes
- ✓ Partnership between QA Agencies and HEI
- ✓ Risk taking and failure are essential for creating new knowledge
- ✓ Sharing experiences in QA, e.g. via platforms of dialogue

Source: „Improving quality, enhancing creativity“. Final report of the QUAHECA Project. EUA 2009



Thank you!

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