

Finnish examples of quality initiatives in university lifelong learning

Kari Seppälä, draft 23.5.2003

1. The case study for EQUIPE by the University of Turku

The case study by the University of Turku is a description of five different quality projects/initiatives in university adult education in Finland. The idea of the case study is to picture the general features and compare the similarities and differences of the initiatives. The starting point for the essay is tolerably personal as the writer has been individually involved in different roles in most of the initiatives.

For EQUIPE, the article adds value through the documentation of the richness of the quality initiatives. It will also highlight the necessity of selecting the applicable quality approach for different purposes and the importance of constructing a reasonable entirety of the quality enhancement mechanisms both institutionally and nationally. In the second year of the project it will be possible to widen the viewpoint by the experience from European projects (EQUAL, ALPINE¹, ODELUCE²).

The quality initiatives are:

- The national study of adult education at universities in 1992-1994³
- The accreditation of professional courses from 1999 onwards⁴
- The evaluation of adult education at the University of Turku in 1999-2000⁵
- The national evaluation of the open university in 2001-2002⁶
- Selecting adult education quality units in 2002-2003⁷

The national quality and evaluation system in Finland is based on the autonomy of the universities. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council has been established in the Ministry of Education⁸. The role of the FINHEEC⁹ is to act as an expert body promoting the development and evaluation of the universities. There is a lot of discussion and development work concerning quality of teaching and learning at the universities but few or no quality systems have been established in degree studies. Instead, many fields of education have been audited and all the universities were evaluated by the end of the year 2000. In adult education some universities have started to construct a system of quality, but none of them has been certified. In 1999, a voluntary system of accreditation of professional courses was launched by the FINHEEC. The Finnish Council of Directors of Centres for University Continuing Education¹⁰ contributes actively to the quality work.

¹ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/alpine/>

² <http://www.odeluce.stir.ac.uk/news/index.htm>

³ cf. Seppälä 1994

⁴ cf. <http://www.minedu.fi/asiant/kka/english/projects/accre.htm>

⁵ cf. Evaluation ... 1999, Taylor 1999, Puukka 2000, Goddard ... 2000

⁶ cf. Kess ... 2002, Seppälä 2003

⁷ cf. Viisi ... 2003

⁸ <http://www.minedu.fi/minedu/index.html>

⁹ <http://www.kka.fi/index.lasso?cont=english.lasso>

¹⁰ <http://www.dipoli.hut.fi/uce/english/index.html>

2. The initiatives in brief

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|--------------------------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| <u>Feature</u> | National study of adult education at universities (a) | Accreditation of continuing education courses (b) | Evaluation of the University of Turku (c) | National open university evaluation (d) | Selecting adult education quality units (e) |
| <u>Character of initiative</u> | Inquiry | Accreditation | Evaluation | Evaluation | Evaluation/Management |
| <u>Level of analysis</u> | National | Project | Institutional | National | University |
| <u>Particular</u> | Versatility of materials and tools | Consultative procedure | Two-step international peer review Decentralized organisation | Tailoring Transparency Embedding | Resource allocation Use of Internet |

(a) *The national study of adult education at universities* is a part of the “pre-history” of the quality work in adult education at Finnish universities. The University of Turku implemented the research and reported its outcomes in 1994. In early 1990’s the general steering by the Ministry of Education and the low permanent funding had led to educational markets, where the centres for continuing education at different universities had adapted themselves with varying operations models and service supply. The versatility made it difficult to describe and analyse the educational field in a compact, still extensive way. The role of the research project was to give a comprehensive general view of the role of universities in adult education. It supported the work of the university department of the Ministry of Education.

The special feature of the study was the wide use of different materials and methods. The scope of the analysis was the entirety of the work done at the centres for continuing education. The first volume was a statistical analysis of the quantitative and structural trends in university adult education in 1987-1992. It included a chapter on evaluation and calculability. The second volume discussed the fundamental principles and working modes of university continuing education and open university activities and their evaluation. The third volume made use of an enquiry that was directed at the orientation of the centres into new tasks and activities like production of teaching materials, research, consultation and community outreach.

(b) In 1999, FINHEEC appointed a subsection, the Accreditation Board of Professional Courses to assess continuing professional education and make decisions on accreditation. The law defines the *accreditation of professional courses* as “evaluation and registration of professional courses”. The process includes a review of relevant documentation (application), a visit to the course and the immediate feedback after the site visit. Accreditation gives public recognition or registering to professional, non-degree courses that meet certain standards. It is a ‘promise’ that the certain course will

provide the quality of education it claims to offer. The Board will be responsible for accreditation of professional courses until the end of 2003.¹¹

(c) *The University of Turku carried out an evaluation project* with the theme of 'external impact of the University'. The evaluation of adult and continuing education was a subproject in the University evaluation. Adult education is a basic task of the University of Turku. The tasks, principles and organisation are specified in the adult education policy¹² approved by the University Board in 1996. The core tasks are open university, continuing professional development and regional development work. The forms of operation include both designing and arranging courses, the development work at national and international level as well as research and publications. The production is based on expert organisations (Centre for Extension Studies and Centre for Maritime Studies) and networks of expertise, which are both scientific and professional.

In principle, the university evaluation covered all the functions and activities of the university. The point of view was the external impact of the University that covered the relationship between the University and its environment as well as the adaptation of the internal structures to the University tasks and responsibilities. The scope of the evaluation of adult and continuing education was that of the total quality management covering not only teaching and learning but also the supportive functions from management and funding to marketing, research and development. The analysis covered both the centres for continuing education and the service by the faculties.

(d) The Ministry of Education defined the scope of *the open university evaluation*: implementation of the open university as a system of adult education, the main purpose of which is educational equality and two main principles open access and equivalence to the degree courses. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council carried out the project in 2001–2002.

The main purpose of the open university in Finland is enhancing educational equality. Nineteen universities share the responsibility of open university education. Annually, 80000 students take part in the courses that are equivalent to the degree courses. The universities organise most of the courses, but they also co-operate with adult study centres. Utilization of new learning technologies is well developed. However, the opportunities to take a degree after open university studies are limited.¹³

Recent trends include increased competition among students and the halt of a long-time growth in volume, the widening participation of young age groups and the importance of lifelong learning in the political agenda, the generally strengthening links with the traditional university but with diversified modes of organisation, as well as the national entrenchment of management by results and the recent modification of the resource allocation system.¹⁴

(e) *Selecting adult education quality units* is a part of the resource allocation system of the Finnish universities. FINHEEC carried out the selection of adult education quality units the third time in 2002-2003. The process and the method have changed every time.

¹¹ cf. <http://www.minedu.fi/asiant/kka/english/projects/accre.htm>

¹² <http://www.tkk.utu.fi/pol/>

¹³ See also <http://www.avoinyliopisto.fi/english/index.html>

¹⁴ Kess ... 2002, documentation page

The last process paid attention especially to the entirety of adult education in the universities, its networks and visibility as well as the main achievements and success factors. The Ministry of Education called for the analysis of the organisation, supply and quality of the activity.¹⁵

3. Rationale and motivation – the dynamics and triggers

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|-------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| <u>Case</u> | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | Open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
| <u>Feature</u> | | | | | |
| <u>Context</u> | Universities and adult education | Universities/ polytechnics Working-life | University and its region | Universities and adult education | Universities in their contexts |
| <u>Initiative</u> | Ministry of Education | Ministry of Education FINHEEC | Ministry of Education FINHEEC | Ministry of Education | Ministry of Education FINHEEC |
| <u>Motivation</u> | Need for a general view | Quality assurance Testimony of quality | Min.Ed: Quality in general UT: External impact | Need for the clarification of the basic values | Quality Resource allocation Sharpening the profile |
| <u>Tensions</u> | “Old” and “new” school University competition | Prejudices of universities Universities - Polytechnics | Position of the centre for continuing education at the university | No significant about the evaluation University competition | Different views of the criteria Universities: model of evaluation |

It is not always easy to name only one stakeholder that has made the original initiative to start a quality project. In the national evaluations in Finland the Ministry of Education has usually taken the first step, although it has discussed the needs and principles of the evaluations with the FINHEEC or the universities. Also, there are usually plenty of reasons to start a project in addition to the general quality enhancement.

The Ministry of Education was responsible for the start of the national study of university adult education in the early 1990's, when the need for a general overview of a rapidly growing activity was obvious. “Traditionalists”, who wanted the university to concentrate on its traditional core tasks, questioned the academic nature of adult education. Also, the economic success of the continuing education centres caused debate of the proper beneficiaries of the profit within the university. The conditions for relevant valuations were non-existent in a situation, where both the universities and the Ministry of Education lacked adequate information.

The accreditation of professional courses has been on the agenda in Finland since 1996. At that time, the number of the programmes had increased rapidly. Also, the Minister of Education had to publicly assume responsibility for the invalid qualifications offered by

¹⁵ Viisi ... 2003, foreword

a Continuing Education Centre of a certain university.¹⁶ The FINHEEC also had an interest in the accreditation of continuing education courses so as to assure and attest the quality of UCE programmes. It is up to every higher education institution to decide, whether it has the motivation to ask for the accreditation. The polytechnics have been far more active in the applications than the universities. We can also see the European background for the growth of the discussion on accreditation:¹⁷

- The growth of student exchange calls for high quality educational institutions, whose modules can be approved as parts of degrees.
- The students need consumer protection.
- The employers require information because of the international recruitment.
- The accreditation helps the institutions to define the transferability of the studies.
- The internationalisation of the educational markets demands the validation of foreign training programmes.

The evaluation of the University of Turku¹⁸ was one in the series of institutional evaluations of all the Finnish universities. The administrative initiative was based on the working plan of the FINHEEC. The University decided to direct the evaluation to the development and improvement of co-operation with the society. For the University the evaluation was basically a learning project supporting the strategic work of the University. The project was especially adequate because the university (as all the universities in Finland) was to negotiate a new agreement for a new three-year period with the Ministry of Education. The theme "external impact" is important for the University that has become ever more dependent on its relations with the changing environment. For the centres of continuing education the project was one phase in the strategic process and a tool to sharpen the role of the centres at the interface of the University and society.

In the open university evaluation the Ministry wanted to stress the basic values of the activity. The promotion of co-operation between universities was an important objective, although it was not emphasized in the commission. The key staff of the open university units all over Finland discussed the initiative by the Ministry in their annual meeting and committed themselves to the evaluation at an early stage of the project. The FINHEEC's interest to implement the project arose from the intention to evaluate phenomena that are new, important and have a special relevance in the higher education sector. At the same time, other thematic evaluations with a particular link to educational policies were realized.

Sharpening the profile of university adult and continuing education was important in the selection of the adult education quality units. For the Ministry of Education it is a part of the financial steering system of lifelong learning at the universities. In addition to the allocation of the funds to the open university it is the main prescriptive economic tool concerning university adult education. The universities are generally willing to apply for the status both because of financial resources and the chance to benefit from the quality label. In 2002 many of the universities were reluctant to produce the application because of the weaknesses of the evaluation criteria and the considerable workload. However, by the deadline most of the universities had applied.

¹⁶ Hämäläinen ... 2001, p. 10

¹⁷ Erikoistumisopintojen ... 2001, p. 10

¹⁸ <http://www.utu.fi/english/>

4. Objectives - what were the quality initiatives seeking to achieve

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|----------------|------|--|---|---|--|---|
| <u>Feature</u> | Case | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | Open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
| <u>Target</u> | | Adult education at universities | Continuing professional courses | Adult education at the university | Entirety of open university | Adult education at universities |
| <u>Purpose</u> | | Description of the entirety of adult education at universities | Evaluation of quality and registering courses | Development of activity in the university | Development of activity in the university sector | Allocation of resources |

Following the definition of a quality initiative, all the projects or activities aimed at the assurance or more often the enhancement of quality. In addition to this, they had special aims and objectives that were due to the actual context. (1) The Ministry of Education set in motion the national study of adult education so as to draw a comprehensive picture of the activities.

The course accreditation aims at the registration of courses, the variety of which is huge in relation to contents, methods and outcomes. The final aim is to assure and enhance the quality of extensive continuing education programmes and the working practices. The accreditation process offers the higher education institutions a chance to reflect their activities with external experts and to learn from the good practice in other institutions.

In the institutional evaluation the university of Turku decided to strive for a better understanding of and a strengthened position in its environment. The main aim of the Centre for Extension Studies was to promote the development of adult education at the interface of the University and its environment. The goal was to strengthen the strategic capacity in the field of adult education. The objectives were (1) to develop the networks (2) to improve the implementations (3) to sharpen the evaluation and (4) to construct a basis for future strategies.

The general aim of the open university evaluation was to support the development of the activity - that is sometimes seen to live in the margin of the university - to grow to be an essential part of the university sector. This should take place through (1) a description of practical implementation of lifelong learning, (2) defining development tasks, (3) disseminating best practice and (4) sharpening the profile of the open university.¹⁹

The general goals of the selection of the quality units in university education are: (1) enhance the quality and relevance of education, (2) stress the significance of the quality of education alongside the quality units of research and (3) support the continuous development of education also by financial stimuli.²⁰ In the selection of adult education quality units FINHEEC examined the general quality of adult education at universities.

¹⁹ Kess ... 2002, documentation page

²⁰ Yliopistokoulutuksen ... 2003, p. 7

The specific interest lay in how well adult education is integrated in the mainstream university.

5. Models - approaches to quality and the main features

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|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| <u>Case</u> | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | Open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
| <u>Quality Model</u> | None | Tailored (Curriculum) | Tailored (Making It work) | Tailored (Essence of activity) | Tailored (Strategy) |
| <u>Concept of quality, special element</u> | Versatility | Quality of projects | External effectiveness | Essence of activity | Visibility |
| <u>Implementation</u> | Survey | Expert Review | Peer Review | Peer Review (EQUAL) | Expert Review |
| <u>Choice of Themes/ Criteria</u> | Min.Ed. Researcher | Accreditation Board of Professional Courses | Min.Ed. University Centre for Extension Studies | Min.Ed. FINHEEC Planning team Review Team Universities | Min.Ed. FINHEEC Planning team Expert team |
| <u>Themes/ Criteria</u> | Transition of offer Progress of procedures Widening of the tasks | Basic criteria Working-life orientation Contents and objectives Process Pedagogy Practices Quality Assurance | General quality Cooperation and networks Innovations Evaluation Future | Equality Access Equivalence Functionality of the system of studies | Adult education at universities: Entirety Contents University commitment |

None of the initiatives used a universal total quality model, which is understandable, because most of them were one-time evaluations. The national survey of adult education was an example of applied research. The most often used general approach was the peer review. Independent experts made the evaluations in the course accreditation and the selection of quality units, because of the concrete financial or official effects. The open university evaluation followed generally the principles of communicative learning whereas the course accreditation carries the element of consultative evaluation. The special feature of the selection of adult education quality units was the same position in the resource allocation system that is used in the selection of the quality units for teaching, although the model of selection is thoroughly different.

It is quite typical for the Finnish quality projects to tailor the models and criteria. Instead of quality systems, you would probably find independent temporary projects. Still, this does not mean that the quality enhancement would only rely on the expertise of the evaluators. Quite often experiences from previous quality projects are made use of. For example, the institutional evaluation of the adult education at the University of Turku followed the criteria produced in the Socrates project “Making It Work”.²¹ The open university evaluation made use of the principles of “mutual evaluation” piloted in the EQUAL project.²²

Where the universal models are excluded, the importance of another well-thought-out structure grows. One form of structuring the evaluations is to define carefully the sets of criteria. The fundamental principles of the criteria come mainly from the Ministry of Education, but typically the FINHEEC, the planning group and the peer review team can modify them. Also the universities and even their units have a say in the formulation. Because of its nature the national adult education survey was carried out without predefined criteria.

The criteria for the accreditation of professional courses require that:

- The professional course deepens, expands and upgrades the knowledge, skills and capabilities gained in the first-degree studies.
- The professional course has a distinctive profile as compared to other continuing and degree oriented education.
- The course matches with the basic mission of the university in the Finnish higher education system.
- Professional studies implement the adult education strategy of the university.
- The designation of the course is congruent with the level and content of studies.
- Marketing, brochures, the certificate issued and other material and information are factual.

The other criteria include work-orientation, contents and objectives, the educational process, pedagogical arrangements, practical arrangements and the practice of quality assurance. There is a special set of criteria for professional courses taught through a foreign language.

The basic model of the evaluation of adult education at the University of Turku was that of an international peer audit. The content, target and the system of evaluation were not based on any national or European models of quality work. The analytical structure of the project followed loosely the conceptual tool designed in the Socrates project 'Making It Work' that analysed the shift of universities towards institutions of lifelong learning.²³ One section of the Centre for Extension Studies was enhancing quality along the lines of EFQM. Thus, the structure and process of the project were tailored to suit the needs of the University's strategic work.

The criteria of evaluation did not follow any defined theory or model of quality, but were designed on the basis of practical experience flavoured by various approaches to strategic development, evaluation and quality. The logic of the criteria arose from the theme of the University evaluation. The criteria tackled one specific feature of quality, namely the external impact:

²¹ Evaluation ... 1999, p. 1

²² Kess... 2002, p. 32

²³ Making ... 1999

- Networks and co-operation. The first theme of evaluation dealt primarily with the external but also with the internal networks of adult and continuing education at the University.
- Innovations. The second theme handled the innovations of teaching and learning as well as the approaches of supportive functions promoting the relations of the University and its environment.
- Evaluation. No organisation can have a conscious and determined impact without a system of follow-up of its environment and evaluation of its products and services. The third theme analysed the starting points and working practises of evaluation.
- Future strategies. The choice of the fourth theme was an attempt to investigate the strategic capacity of the University in search of an active role in the future development instead of mere reactivity.

In the evaluation of the open university, the steering committee decided to tackle the criteria defined by the ministry as follows: (1) the question of equality through the concept of lifelong learning, (2) the question of openness of the system as the practical possibility to access, (3) the equivalence of the curricula with the mainstream education balanced with the equivalence to the needs of the student and (4) the question of the functionality of the system both within and outside the universities.²⁴

The selection of adult education quality units offers an interesting process of a three-step criteria definition, as the Ministry of Education defined the fundamental criteria, FINHEEC phrased the general criteria into guidelines for the universities and the expert team reshaped the criteria into a criteria table.²⁵

6. Organisation - how was the quality initiative carried out - who was involved

The Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Turku carried out the national survey of university adult education. The Ministry of Education was the one to make the commission and to finance the project. It also maintains the academic education database. All the continuing education centres at universities took part in the enquiry, but only in the role of producing the information. This is a great difference in relation to the later open university evaluation, where the universities had a strong say in the planning of the project and the formulation of the evaluation questionnaire.

The Accreditation Board of Professional Courses assesses professional courses (continuing education) and makes the decision on accreditation. The Board consists of 12 members, who represent universities, polytechnics, working life and student unions (university and polytechnic sectors). The final decision is done on yes/no (registered/not registered) basis. Feedback and recommendations for the program are provided.²⁶

Accreditation of Professional Courses include the following steps: (1) An application form is available on the Internet for the Applicants (higher education institutions) on the FINHEEC's website. The institution fills the application and applies for the accreditation on a voluntary basis. (2) After receiving the application, the Accreditation Board appoints two evaluators who (3) conduct a site visit to the program. (4) After the

²⁴ Kess... 2002, p.22-25

²⁵ Viisi ... 2003, p. 15

²⁶ <http://www.minedu.fi/asiant/kka/english/projects/accre.htm>

site visit the evaluators make a proposal for acceptance (yes/no) to the Accreditation Board. (5) The Board makes the final pass/fail decision. (6) The institutions of higher education receive the decision within four months of the delivery of the application. Together with the decision a written feedback is given for the applicant how to further improve the program. (7) The registration of accredited courses is valid for 4 years. The register is available on FINHEEC's website. (8) The cost of accreditation is 841 euros for the organizer of the course.

| Case Feature | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | National open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
|---------------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| <u>Organisation</u> | Min.Ed. University of Turku | Min.Ed. FINHEEC Accreditation Board Experts | Min.Ed. FINHEEC UT steering group CES management team CES staff | Min.Ed. FINHEEC Planning group Review Team Universities | Min.Ed. FINHEEC Review Team |
| <u>Process</u> | Initiative Contract Organising Data collection Analysis Report | Application Further data Site visit Expert statements Registration | Request Working plan Choice of themes Data collection Self-evaluation Independent evaluator Peer Review | Data collection Self-evaluation Mutual Evaluations National hearings Peer Review | Organising and planning University applications Expert review FINHEEC proposal Min.Ed. decision Allocation of resources |
| <u>Material</u> | Statistics and documents Enquiry | University applications | Statistics and documents Inquiries Self-evaluation | Statistics and documents Self-evaluation Mutual evaluations National hearings | University applications |

The evaluation project at the University of Turku was directed by a counselling group lead by the Rector of the University. Practical operation was co-ordinated by a project group consisting of persons in charge of the subprojects. The management group of the Centre for Extension Studies acted as the project group for the sector of adult education.

One member of the management group was in charge of the project. About 30 employees of the Centre for Extension Studies participated in the collecting and compiling of the material of adult education. In addition, more than half of the staff of the Centre for Extension Studies participated in the practical implementation of the evaluation (strategy groups, inquiries, self-evaluation meetings, etc.).

The project was carried out following the traditional steps of a peer audit: (1) the University produced the material for the evaluation (2) the University evaluated its own activities and (3) the international Peer Review Team audited the University. The subproject of adult and continuing education followed the same steps. The material was collected from three main sources: (a) the centres for continuing education produced material based on their expertise, statistics and reports, (b) the faculties' self-evaluation included the theme of adult education and (c) an inquiry was sent to external parties. The self-evaluation based on the material and criteria included the traditional and virtual seminars of the staff of the Centre for Extension Studies and a seminar of the Board of the Centre for Extension Studies. The report from this self-audit was the basis for the University self-evaluation and the international peer review. An independent international auditor included an additional evaluation from the point of view of lifelong learning.

The materials produced by the Centre for Extension Studies included statistical analysis, annual and project reports and also descriptions of the activities by those involved. The future strategies were based on workshops tackling the strategic core edges. From the point of view of adult education the self-audit material by the faculties was based on an inquiry. Also, the feedback from external parties was gathered by and inquiry.

In the open university evaluation, the universities organised a self-evaluation and carried out a limited benchmarking exercise, where they compared modes of operation and looked for best practice. Instead of traditional site-visits, the external expert panel organised three hearings, where the various stakeholders discussed the status of the open university within universities, the context of the open university as well as the quality of teaching and learning.²⁷

The universities worked up their applications for the selection of adult education quality units following the guidelines by the FINHEEC. The exceptional feature of the process was that the applications were to be constructed into the websites of the universities. The expert team analysed the applications and the websites of the universities but did not organise site visits. The team then made a suggestion of five quality units for the FINHEEC that proposed them for the approval of the Ministry of Education.²⁸

²⁷ Kess ... 2002, documentation page

²⁸ Viisi ... 2003, p. 11-12

7. Results - what were the outcomes of the initiatives

| Case Feature | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | National open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
|-------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Concrete outcomes | Report | Accreditation Register | Report | Report | Priority Funding |
| Effects | Advanced knowledge | Curriculum improvement Quality awareness | Revised strategy Quality awareness | National strategy Sharpened profile New system of allocation Leadership awareness | Advanced websites Quality awareness |

The concrete outcome of the national study was a three-volume report that offered a general view on adult education at Finnish universities. The staff in continuing education centres had a chance to collect a documented presentation of the situation in early 1990's. The report was one address in the general discussion of academic adult education as a service for experts and expert organisations that flourished during and after the project.

In the accreditation of professional courses, the higher education institutions have sent their applications for 72 programs by April 2003. FINHEEC has accredited 43 programmes, whereas 21 programmes did not qualify. The remainder of the applications are on the table. The experience of the applicants tells that the process supports the curriculum development.

In the Turku University evaluation project, the Centre for Extension Studies collected the results into a report including (1) a review of adult education in the University, (2) descriptions and analyses of key elements of 'external impact' and (3) a self-evaluation by the Centre for Extension Studies. In addition to the strategic report, two basic results were the key staff's intimate knowledge on the quality approach as well as the inspiring of productive networks. Also some unexpected benefits were gained, e.g. the experiences of the internal virtual seminar.

The main recommendations of the peer review team were the clarification of the internal arrangements at the university, the "mainstreaming" of adult education closer to the academic heartland, the launch of a system of quality assurance and the dissemination of the expertise of new learning environments at the Centre for Extension Studies.²⁹ The independent evaluator's report had put forward the same viewpoints, but included also the question of the proactive role of the university as a counterforce to the market mechanisms and the need for a clear brief for the Centre for Extension Studies.³⁰ The evaluation promoted concretely the strategic work of the university.

²⁹ Goddard ... 2000, p. 46

³⁰ Taylor ... 1999

In the national open university evaluation the external expert panel reported that:

- Prerequisites for participation do not and should not exist.
- Open access has been more important than educational equality in the working practice.
- Difficulty to take a degree is still a major problem.
- Academic quality is assured by curriculum approval systems and extensive development.
- Central coordination and close contact with the faculties are necessary within universities.
- Competition is more typical than cooperation among the universities.

The external expert panel recommended that:

1. A national strategy be launched by the participating institutions.
2. The activities be networked into a Finnish Open University.
3. The universities organise themselves in favour of the adult student.
4. Enhancing equality direct all the activities.
5. Opportunities to take a degree after open university studies be widened.
6. Quality enhancement be systematic and networked.
7. Funding system support quality and concentrations of expertise.³¹

The effects and the implementation of the open university evaluation are discussed in the chapter below.

The FINHEEC proposed the selection of five adult education quality units. The Ministry of Education will presumably approve the proposition and allocate the resources to the universities as parts of their budgets. The appropriations are not earmarked and the universities are competent to channel the funds the way that they see best.

8. Implementation - how were the results implemented

| Case <u>Feature</u> | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | National open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| <u>After the initiative</u> | Used as background material | Fixed-term registration Used in marketing | Concrete use in strategic process Internal principles Follow-up evaluation | Improved co-operation National strategy work Involvement of Rectors' Council Quality factor in resource allocation | Resource allocation Used in marketing Next round in 2006 |

‘Dissemination’ was not a part of the Finnish project vocabulary in the early 1990’s, but the findings of the national survey were presented in national and regional seminars.

³¹ Kess ... 2002, documentation page, see also Seppälä 2003

The all-round knowledge of the reports has found its way to later reports and official documents. As no recommendations were made, the project did not lead to any concrete development actions.

The maintaining of the register of the programmes is an essential feature of the course accreditation. The higher education institutions take advantage of the accreditation in their marketing.

After the evaluation the work in the University of Turku continued as a part of the strategic process. New strategic plans for adult and continuing education were revised in the autumn of 1999. The plans to construct a university-wide adult education quality approach were eclipsed by the economical difficulties at the turn of the century. After a period of consideration, a university-wide working group prepared a proposition of the working principles of adult education. The university started the arrangements for a follow-up evaluation to be implemented in 2003.

The units of open university made their co-operation more effective at a common national forum and produced a proposal of a national open university strategy.³² They left the case to the decision of the Finnish Council of University Rectors in April 2003. The Ministry of Education nominated a fixed-term administrator to make a proposition about the arrangements of the co-operation between the universities.³³ From the basis of the proposition the Rectors' Council has nominated a working group to deal with the questions of adult education in the universities. Very importantly, the ministry of Education has decided to use a quality factor in the resource allocation of the open university.

The selection of adult education quality units concretises in the budget decisions, but the universities also use the nomination in their marketing as an indicator of high calibre of teaching.

9. Strengths of the initiatives

| <u>Case</u> | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | National open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| <u>Feature</u> | | | | | |
| <u>Strengths</u> | Wide scale New knowledge | Pedagogical support in curriculum development Support for client relations | Wide participation Strong link to university mainstream strategies | Universities Commitment Transparency / networks Links to constant development | Use of internet → Effect on visibility |

The production of a general view of university adult education was a requirement for the advancement of university lifelong learning. A survey was an economic way of producing the information compared to the more work-intensive modes of communicative learning.

³² Avoim ... 2003

³³ Yhteistyö ... 2002

Higher education institutions have used the accreditation system so as to develop their continuing education programmes and the curriculum work. The use of experts who cover both the educational and methodological skills as well as the expertise of the contents of the particular field have been fruitful. Especially the polytechnics have found the registration to be a way to assure their clients of the quality of their supply.

The Finnish system of autonomy in quality development was a good basis for the implementation of the evaluation of the University of Turku. The choice of the theme "external impacts" emphasised the results and effectiveness as the edge of the evaluation. The linkage of evaluation and strategic development enhanced the use of experience and knowledge acquired during the project. It also extended the range of planning in terms of time and scope. The decentralised approach offered a learning environment across the organisational borders. The decision to tailor the criteria gave room for flexibility and the analysis of the strengths of the organisation.

As the open university is active in search of new and innovative operations models, the working modes were tailored from the most traditional ones. On the other hand, whereas the open university requires the assembly of scientific, professional and technical experts into project-based teams, a number of expertise forums were set up so as to stress the communicative element. Additionally, the evaluation was closely linked to the strategic processes of the university system, benefiting from the previous steps of activity and giving benefit for the future development. The evaluation was designed to be a learning process, and the feedback from the universities shows that the project achieved this objective.³⁴

The web-based application of the status of an adult education quality unit helped many universities to improve their virtual visibility. The necessity to offer clear and comprehensive information about the entirety of adult education is supportive for the adult students as well.³⁵

10. Weaknesses of the initiatives

| Case <u>Feature</u> | National study of adult education at universities | Accreditation of continuing education courses | Evaluation of the University of Turku | National open university evaluation | Selecting adult education quality units |
|------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| <u>Weaknesses</u> | Detachment of continuous development in universities Lack of guidelines | Incoherence Role of public authority or professional bodies? | Laborious One-time intervention Gaps in quality? | Laborious Timetable Distance from students | Rigid criteria Lack of site-visits Web-based application |

Although the survey used "a light of touch" approach to analyse university adult education, the time span from the start till the end was close to three years. As a quality initiative it was only constructing the capacity to implement more advanced projects. Also, the decision to collect information, not to value the results or to give

³⁴ Seppälä ... 2003, p. 12-14

³⁵ Viisi ... 2003, foreword

recommendations lead to a situation where the results were not fully exploited. The survey approach did not disseminate the idea of quality enhancement, either.

The universities regard the accreditation of UCE as a kind of threat to the autonomy of the academic community. The universities' own decisions and quality assurance mechanisms should be the guarantee of excellence. The universities also criticize the system of mixing up two different training models. The argumentation has its background in the general concern of the role of the polytechnics in the training market.

Although all the phases of the Turku University evaluation were carried out in order to involve the whole organisation to the planning and implementation of the evaluation, only a part of the staff was actively involved. The decentralised approach was also very time consuming. The 'open model' may give too little space for the analysis of the weaknesses of the organisation. As a one-time project the evaluation did not construct a permanent structure for quality work. Although the Centre for Extension Studies was clearly responsible for the evaluation of adult education, the ownership of the overall university evaluation did not spread out sufficiently. This was partially due to the top-down approach, where the Rector's office had a central role.³⁶

The open university evaluation gave the universities the responsibility to take into account the needs and views of the student. Thus, the student participation varied. Also, the implementation was quite demanding for the universities, both because of the large workload and the very tight timetable. The timetable and the communicative process did not give room for an independent international peer review.

The expert team of the selection of adult education quality units found fault with the lack of site-visits and the possibility to apply both by an 'essay' or a web-based embedded application. The applications rather described than analysed the activity. The team was also quite critical against the strict guidelines and criteria of the evaluation.³⁷ The universities criticized the web-based process severely, but only three of nineteen universities excluded themselves from the process.³⁸

³⁶ Puukka ... p. 129

³⁷ Viisi ... 2003, p. 15

³⁸ Viisi ... 2003, p. 11

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Adult Education Policy of the University of Turku

<http://www.tkk.utu.fi/pol/>

ALPINE Adults Learning and Participating in Education

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/alpine/>

Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

<http://www.kka.fi/index.lasso?cont=english.lasso>

Finnish Council of Directors of Centres for University Continuing Education

<http://www.dipoli.hut.fi/uce/english/index.html>

Finnish Ministry of Education

<http://www.minedu.fi/minedu/index.html>

Quality Assurance in the Nordic Higher Education

<http://www.minedu.fi/asiant/kka/docs/lomake/nordicquality.pdf>

Open Universities in Finland

<http://www.avoinyliopisto.fi/english/index.html>

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<http://www.odeluce.stir.ac.uk/news/index.htm>

University of Turku

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