

PLEASE NOTE! THIS IS PARALLEL PUBLISHED VERSION OF THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

To cite this Article: Ignatius, J., Friman, M. & Järvinen, M-R. (2015) Strengthening the quality management by international cooperation - Cooperation of FUAS and Leuven Association. AMK-lehti/UAS Journal, 3.

URL: https://arkisto.uasjournal.fi/uasjournal_2015-3/ignatius.html

Strengthening the quality management by international cooperation – Cooperation of FUAS and KU Leuven Association

Jaana Ignatius, The executive director, M.Sc, FUAS – Federation of universities of applied Sciences, jaana.ignatius@laurea.fi

Mervi Friman, Head of Strategy Activities, PhD (Educ), Häme University of Applied Sciences, mervi.friman@hamk.fi

Marjo-Riitta Järvinen, Vice president, PhD (Educ), Lahti University of Applied Sciences, marjo-riitta.jarvinen@lamk.fi

Introduction

The Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences, FUAS, is an alliance of three independent universities of applied sciences; Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), Lahti University of Applied Sciences (Lahti UAS), and Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Laurea). This agreement-based alliance operates in the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area. FUAS, the largest strategic federation of universities of applied sciences in Finland, comprises altogether around 19 500 students and 1 400 staff members.

The KU Leuven Association consists of KU Leuven University and five merged universities of applied sciences. KU Leuven Association is a multicampus network situated in 23 different cities and towns across Flanders and Brussels with more than 103 000 students and 17 000 staff members.

FUAS and KU Leuven Association signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2012. The agreement contains stipulations on the cooperation in the following areas:

- comparison of national development trends
- benchmarking on federation-level administration, management and strategy work
- sharing of views in different areas, such as innovation systems and regional development work.

This article concentrates on the cooperation in the field of quality management which the writers of the article have been deeply involved. In this article three development projects of the quality management are present by which the quality work of the federation/association as well as their member universities has been promoted.

Benchmarking Exercise on Quality and Education

FUAS and KU Leuven Association implemented International Benchmarking Exercise on Quality and Education in 2013. The main objectives of this benchmarking project were to: 1) Discover and disseminate good practices of quality management, 2) Find the areas that need further development and to assist the further development of the quality systems and 3) To bring out the benefits and added value of the association/federation operation models. The benchmarking project was divided into two parts; general part of *Quality management and systems* and more specific case level part of *Intended learning outcomes* in the field of social services. The benchmarking project was formed around two benchmarking visits, the first one on May 2013 at Hämeenlinna, Finland and the later on August 2013 in Leuven, Belgium. About 30 staff members from both partners participated in the project.

In KU Leuven Association five pillars: 1) Vision and policy, 2) Preconditioned basic facilities, 3) Implementation of education, 4) Systematic evaluation and 5) The follow-up of the evaluation and accreditation, form the frames of quality assurance. KU Leuven Association has a Working Group for Quality assurance whose task is to support the quality work and give tools for achieving higher quality. The operation itself is done at the institutional level. In FUAS, reaching for the strategic intent and aims of strategic policies is acted out through shared development groups. FUAS Quality and Data production team is the group dealing with improving the quality and measurement and the development of this operation. The FUAS institutions have their own quality systems on base on the circle of continuous development (elements: Plan-Do-Check-Act), although the content of the elements vary on base of the organisational culture. Having the expertise-based teams (e.g. “quality team”) consisting of colleagues from different institutions of the association or federation is a good way of stimulating the partners personnel to work together and spread the knowledge and good practices. This kind of team work forms a good base for creating and developing the quality culture.

The concepts learning outcomes and competence are understood differently within FUAS as well as within KU Leuven Association. In Finland, regional competence profiles are more apparent and in Flanders they have been developed at more general level. The concept of constructive alignment proved to be an interesting concept to investigate the relation between learning outcomes and implementation of pedagogical practices. Regarding the pedagogical practices with the chosen competences there was a lot in common and good practices to share, e.g. student centeredness, three party involvements (student, future employer, teacher), multiple assessment methods and the use of authentic learning environments. Some specific differences were noted with regard to practical training placements (resources, the connection to the world of work, tutoring) as well as operations and agreements with the work place representatives. International benchmarking was experienced as an effective tool for improving the quality of learning and to enhance the use of authentic learning environments in the future. Besides this, it was found that international learning environments between the two partners can be created in the future and utilised for both; students to learn new competences and teachers for their professional development.

Strategic partner event – the Quality Management Reflection

The representatives of FUAS participated in the Strategic partner event in Hasselt September 2014 where three institutions KHLim, KHLeuven and Groep T officially merged together to form the University Colleges Leuven-Limburg. All the three institutions were already part of the KU Leuven Association. The Strategic partner event brought together partner institutions Zuyd UAS from the Netherlands and Belgian Campus from South Africa.

The new institution have developed a pyramid model, which identifies the major components of their international cooperation, encompassing all levels and activities in the realisation of the development in their institution.

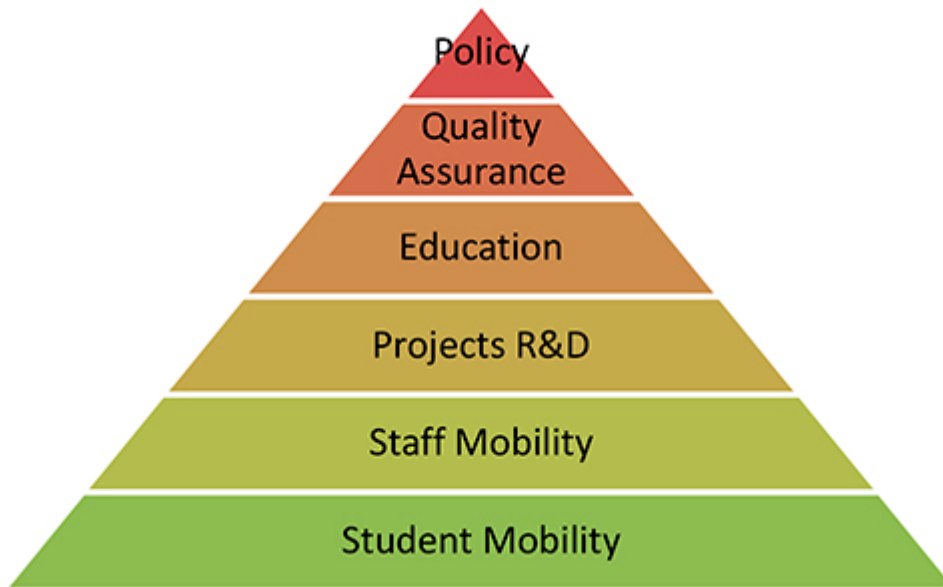


Figure 1. Pyramid model of the merger of KHLim, KHLeuven and Groep T.

In the Strategic partner event, the international partners gave guidance and peer support to the strategic development, quality management and international cooperation of the new merger. FUAS representatives participated in strategic discussions as well as organized a workshop on quality management. The international partners share e.g. the following ideas on quality management: *“Don’t make a quality bible, focus on the core: keep it simple”* and *“Peer review and collaboration with partners helps you to define your quality”*.

The preliminary audit of FUAS quality management

The FUAS member institutions prepared themselves for their international audits of the quality systems (executed by FINEEC in 2016) by doing preliminary audit together with auditors from KU Leuven Association in 2015.

The preliminary audit of FUAS quality management and FUAS member institution’s quality systems was carried out by four staff members of KU Leuven Association and one Finnish auditor. The main aim of the preliminary audit was to improve the quality management of FUAS and the member institutions, especially in the areas of:

1. Quality policy
2. Quality system’s link with strategic management
3. Quality management of the higher education institution’s core duties.

The preliminary audit based on a self-assessment report by the FUAS Quality and Data production team. The evaluation visit was organised in March 2015. During the visit, the auditors became acquainted with the quality management of FUAS as well as each member institution and they interviewed altogether more than 130 representatives of the staff and students.

The preliminary audit based on the means of enhancement led evaluation, which according to FINEEC is defined as evaluation through which the participant will identify the strengths, good practices and areas of development. It helps the participant to achieve their strategic objectives and

to steer future development activities in order to create a framework of the institutions continuous development (Audit manual for the quality systems of higher education institutions 2015–2018. Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. Publications 2015:2).

As a result of the preliminary audit, the following key strengths of the quality policy of FUAS were defined:

- Open communication and transparency
- Availability of data
- The key people responsible for developing the quality system are highly committed to their work.

The following main recommendations were given on the FUAS level:

- Clarify how the quality work done on the FUAS level supports the quality work done in the member institutions
- Less is more, only focus on what you really want to use and benchmark
- Enforce the student engagement.

In addition to the results on FUAS level, each FUAS member institution received their own suggestions for the development of their own quality system. For example, in HAMK it was difficult for the auditors to catch the key message, the core structure of the quality system and the role of the actors at first, but those were clarified in the interviews. In Lahti UAS the audit team recommended that they could establish a consistent approach for assessing the societal impact of Lahti UAS's actions and suggested improving the evaluation of the projects.

All in all FUAS member institutions the staff members and students were very pleased on the possibility to participate in the interviews of the pre-audit. They got the feeling that the auditors were prepared well and made relevant questions. The interviewees thought that the atmosphere was very supportive and relaxed. This helped them to speak English, yet some staff members felt it bit challenging.

Conclusions

Overall the three international benchmarking and evaluating projects revealed similarities and differences in the way of thinking and in the operating methods concerning quality management. The projects deepened the participants' knowledge on the quality management in the association/federation level and on the good practices of both partners. Moreover, it promoted the critical self-evaluation of activities and peer learning. In the future, the aim is to continue this fruitful co-operation between FUAS and KU Leuven Association.

References

Audit manual for the quality systems of higher education institutions 2015–2018. Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. Publications 2015:2.

Descheemaeker, A., Foyen, D., Verbrugge, M., Waeytens, K. & Keränen, H. 2015. Preliminary audit of the FUAS federation of Universities of Applied Sciences.

Foqué, A., Garré, P., Heikkilä, S. Ignatius J. & Kunnari, I. 2013. Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences – KU Leuven Association Benchmarking project 2013. International Benchmarking Exercise on Quality and Education.

Ignatius, J., Järvinen, M-R., Friman, M. & Heikkilä, S. 2014. FUAS-liittouman laadunhallinnan kehittyminen step by step, Step-by-step: Development of FUAS quality management. HAMKin e-julkaisuja 14/2014.

Strategic partner event 08–09 September 2014, introduction.