The Management and Quality Assurance System of Åbo Akademi University

The university has a diverse activity that strives to unite academic creativity with social progress within the framework of legislation and the sponsors’ call for results and efficiency. Research, education and social collaboration depend on interaction between many, and sometimes conflicting, kinds of quality (e.g. prime, equal and cost-effective quality). A balance between the different forms of activity is a prerequisite for prime functioning of the university. Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU) has established a system of management and quality assurance to assist the directors of the university, to secure and develop the quality of the processes within the core function and supporting functions, to promote a development oriented work community and to strengthen the credibility of the university’s activity.

The Present System
The Present System has evolved from Åbo Akademi University’s quality system from 2008. The management and quality system has been gradually updated since the audit of the Åbo Akademi University’s quality system of 2009 according to the recommendations given in the report from the audit and the needs identified by the university. Changes in the national economic situation as well as diverse university internal work of investigation resulted in a new organization as of 1.1.2015. This new organization involves significant changes in education and a new structure for management and administration. A key aim of the new system is to integrate leadership and quality management through more clearly defined managerial responsibilities, developed sets of rules and a more focused structure for reporting.

The Basis of the System
The overall objectives for the Management and Quality Assurance System are laid down in the strategy of ÅAU – barrier-breaking university 2015-2020. The system shall:
- guarantee a well-functioning and continuous development of the activity
- guarantee that the quality is checked and developed in all phases of the activity
- support the development of a shared quality culture

The steering document “The Management and Quality Assurance System of Åbo Akademi University” clarifies the management and quality policy by explicitly defining objectives, by giving definitions for the terms management and quality assurance and by giving an account of the university’s prerequisites, executive structure and how the university develops the quality of its activity through the executive steering process.

ÅAU’s identified principles for management and quality assurance describe the terms that together characterize the university’s view on management and quality assurance. The activity they describe form an entity, the parts of which are dependent and supportive of each other. Together the parts are a prerequisite for reaching the objectives of the management and quality assurance system. There are four leadership principles and five quality principles.

Leadership principles:
- A common direction
- Clear leadership
- Professional leadership
- An involving leadership culture

Quality principles:
- Target-oriented readiness to act
- Common view on the activity
- Identified responsibility
- Continuous development
- Open communication and purposeful documentation

The university’s quality assurance is a combination of:
- Active steering of activities, e.g.
  - strategic planning (the university’s strategy, equal treatment plan, language policy)
  - periodical reporting and analysing results
- Quality assuring elements, e.g.
- set of rules (degree regulations, instruction for ÅAU library)
- processes (process for planning teaching, process for crisis information)
- agreement (agreement about supervision in doctoral education, task specific employment contracts)
- Groups for management (Committee for Bachelor’s and Master’s Education, Committee for Equality)

- Resources enhancing the knowledge and wellbeing of the personnel and students, e.g.
  - courses and support material in management and pedagogics
  - courses and support material in academic study skills
  - development discussions between the closest chief and employee

**The Motive Power of the System**
The continuous development of the activity is guaranteed by an advanced quality driving culture and a systematic activity steering process. The culture is founded on education and trust in the individual and common responsibility to perform and improve the activity of ÅAU. There are four identified main processes within activity steering: *strategic planning*, *annual planning*, *execution and reporting*, plus *evaluation and development*, the aim of which is to maintain a cyclical development process. The activity steering process is founded on creating information about the activity and consequently creating an analysis based feedback to the activity. The analysis is decisive for how the information is dealt with. This can be immediate (e.g. if auditing points to flaws in project control), included in the next annual plan (e.g. if course evaluation shows that part of the layout did not support learning) or be coupled to the strategic planning (e.g. if recurrent annual reports show low student exchange).

**The System as a Picture**
The picture summarizes ÅAU’s management and quality assurance system. The activity is steered by both external prerequisites such as legal status and duty, external competition and expectations plus the university’s social goals, and by the university’s own values. Based on the premises ÅAU sets the goals for the activity, decides common rules and defines responsibilities. The university’s set guidelines can, however, only guarantee the quality of the activity to a certain extent, since with its investment the university society always decides how the core activity and the support services function. With the principles for management and quality assurance ÅAU has defined how the activity is to be carried out in order to guarantee a qualitative activity. The activity steering process is to safeguard that ÅAU maintains a cyclical development process.