ÅBO AKADEMI

SWOT-analysis of the planned Quality Assurance System of Åbo Akademi University

Strengths

- Strong support from the FINHEEC.
  The FINHEEC is a central factor when it comes to organizing training opportunities for national QA officers. The FINHEEC has also published guides on QA and assessment.

- The Finnish education system has clear structure and is therefore easy to comprehend.

- The levels for decision-making are few at Åbo Akademi University.

- The administrative processes within the university are fluent and effective.
  In a small university the employees are usually familiar with each other. Daily working routines are not inhibited by rigid protocol and hierarchy. Corruption is non-existent.

- Computerization is at a high level.

- The teachers' and students' knowledge level is high when it comes to using the technical equipment available.

- Students are actively involved in decision-making on every level.
  Student participation is required in every official body and working group. Course evaluations have been used since 1995. All parties are used to utilizing course evaluation forms.

- Detailed statistics on students and their study results are gathered and processed each year.

- Employees with a permanent contract of employment have a secure position.
  There are only State universities in Finland.

- Good readiness to adjust to new administrative systems.

- The hierarchy within the QA system is clear

- Continuous documentation of a number of processes will make comparisons between subjects and faculties easier and more reliable.

- Documenting the development made will guarantee that experiences attained are not lost. Changes in personnel and generation shifts will be less dramatic. Åbo Akademi University has quite a few subjects where a generation shift is imminent.

Weaknesses

- Shortage of resources (economic and personnel).
  Investments in QA are possible only by relocating resources within the administration.

- Opposition against reforms among the personnel.

- Assessment fatigue among the personnel and the students.

- Solving the problems detected when conducting evaluations has proven difficult.

- Decisions made by the University Senate have not been correctly implemented at the faculties.

- The university has quite a few employees with short term contracts.
  An insecure position will obviously affect their involvement in the long term development process.

- The successful implementation of a new QA system is uncertain.
  The university sector is undergoing its biggest changes ever with the reforms caused by the Bologna Process, introduction of a new salary system and large scale investments in the computerization of different administrative procedures.

Opportunities

- Possibility to obtain a Quality Certificate.
  If the QA system is implemented successfully Åbo Akademi University will pass the certification audit made by the FINHEEC. At the yearly budget negotiations the Ministry of Education will pay attention to the result of the audit. Universities with a Quality Certificate will undoubtedly have an advantage when the resources are allocated.

- Well documented plans on development facilitate the receiving of funds from the Ministry of Education and the FINHEEC.

- A good QA system improves the possibilities of participating in international projects.

- There is no evidence that the Finnish authorities will change their positive attitude about QA in the immediate future.

- A system that creates a vivid quality culture will establish a better basis for development in general.

- Centralization and fewer levels in decision-making can prove to be useful when trying to introduce new QA routines.

- The introduction of a QA system improves the possibilities of establishing a unit for QA at the university.

- An increase in the assessment activity should mean better chances in detecting problems. A more intense discussion about QA should lead to a situation where the university reacts faster when unsatisfactory conditions are discovered.

- The motivation amongst students can rise if their efforts lead to visible changes.

Threats

- The QA system is not based on an international standard.
  (For example ISO, EFQM, Balanced Scorecard.)

- Lack of time or other factors may hinder the personnel from getting actively involved in developing the structures.

- Assessment fatigue amongst students and personnel when the activity broadens.

- QA administration is a high risk area if the university must cut costs.

- An unsuccessful implementation of the QA system has mainly negative features. The system will become an administrative burden without resulting in any improvements in quality.

- The introduction of new personnel does not follow a fixed procedure.
  If the exchange of information is limited it's evident that personnel changes will affect long term development.

Possibilities to fulfil the opportunities and avoid the threats

- Creating economic and/or other incentives is necessary if the university wants the faculties and their personnel to become involved. This can be done by including QA in the yearly budget negotiations between each faculty and the rector.

- Information concerning the QA system and its potential must reach every individual at the university.

- The national and international development in the QA sector must be followed actively in order to secure rapid implementation of new ideas in the area.

- Åbo Akademi University should orient the QA processes towards the standardized models adopted at a European level.

- Active search for extra funding in order to enable the creation of a QA unit within the university.

- The university must pay attention to the risks involved when shaping the QA system. It is only possible to create a functioning system through continuous contact with personnel and students.

This SWOT-analysis was made by the Quality Board of the university. The members of the Quality Board represent all sectors of the university; students, teachers, professors and administrators. One of the university's two Vice Rectors acts as chairman.