

EVALUATION IN FINLAND

NATIONAL DISCIPLINE-BASED EVALUATIONS

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The university degree system underwent considerable changes at the end of the 1970s: degrees based on subject levels were replaced by degree or study programmes, a credit called a “study week” (referring to *c.* 40 hours of study) was introduced as the basic unit for measuring the studies, and the lower university degree (Bachelor’s degree) was abolished in the humanities and natural sciences. The reform of the degree system met strong opposition particularly in the field of the humanities and the arts. In some other fields, the reform did not change practices to a similar extent.

Ten years later, a wish to thoroughly revise the system, which had been established, adapted and shaped in practice, grew intense. In the 1980s, many gradual alterations had already been made to the degree system. In the humanities and arts, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with long and obscure terms that the degree programme structure had introduced. The impracticality of the terms could perhaps be illustrated by the fact that in open university teaching the terms “*approbatur*”, “*cum laude*” and “*laudatur*” referring to the subject levels of the old degree system were never abandoned. Furthermore, the fragmentation of studies and syllabuses into small segments and courses caused a great deal of dissatisfaction. The requirement of mastering larger entities had been rather neglected.

The Ministry of Education was also ready for a revision of the degree system. International equivalence, for instance, set its own demands for the revision. The reintroduction of the two-tier basic degree system -- *i.e.* the Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees -- was considered necessary in all fields of education. The lower degree (Bachelor’s) was believed to decrease drop-out rates and to improve Finnish students’ position in international exchange and post-graduate programmes. In addition, the correspondence between foreign and Finnish degrees would become easier to determine.

1. Evaluation of the humanities

On 25 March 1991, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to evaluate the standard of education and the functionality of the educational system in the humanities. The committee’s task was to evaluate the quality of undergraduate and post-graduate teaching as well as academic degrees in relation to the goals set in the degree statutes and in comparison to international standards. When evaluating the organisation of teaching and curricula, the committee was to pay particular attention to the extent and breadth, dimensioning, effectiveness, and work load of the curricula as well as to the teaching methods and international co-operation. In addition, the committee was to draw a proposal for developing student selection, degree structures and curricula. The committee was also to make suggestions about the division of work between undergraduate and post-graduate studies as well as about monitoring and assessing the quality of teaching.

The humanities degree committee consisted of nine members from different universities. In the spring of 1991, the committee analysed the present situation in the field of the humanities and arts. The committee also discussed the nature of the evaluation procedure. The committee considered motivating and informing the faculties and departments most important. Several occasions for open discussion were also organised. The committee's proposals for the development of the degree system in the field of humanities and arts were published in October 1992.

During the spring of 1992, 76 departments, subjects or degree programmes conducted voluntary self-evaluations. The reports based on these self-evaluations were given to the committee. In two disciplines (English and history), a peer-review, *i.e.* an external evaluation by foreign experts of these disciplines, was carried out. Furthermore, the self-evaluations carried out in the departments of the humanities at the University of Vaasa were decided to be continued with external peer-reviews. The committee published the results of the evaluations in its final report in March 1993. The report contains, for instance, a summary of the most important results of the self-evaluations and external peer-reviews as well as the committee's proposals for the development of education in the humanities. The new degree statute for the humanities was drawn on the basis of the committee's evaluation, and it came into force on 1st August 1994.

2. Results of the evaluation

According to the humanities degree committee, students should be offered an education that provides flexible opportunities for a variety of work. The students' opportunities to move freely between subjects and faculties should be increased. The students also wished for more variation and options in the methods of teaching. In many disciplines, the courses, study entities and theses should be made more realistic in size than they were at that moment. In many faculties, teacher education needed reforms in its organisation and, especially, in its pedagogical and didactic content. Furthermore, post-graduate education lacked established procedure in most faculties.

The problems concerning university entrance examinations were considered so extensive and difficult that the committee could not attempt to solve them. The committee suggested, however, that in counting the initial scores to be taken into account in the entrance examinations, only the total score of the compulsory subjects of the matriculation examination should be taken into account.

The foreign evaluators of the fields of English and history emphasized the following things, for instance: more attention should be paid to students' needs in the practical organisation of teaching, the structure of the posts and positions of the teaching staff should be developed, the licentiate degree should be abolished, and the doctoral dissertations should not be published. The evaluators also noted that the original profiles of the departments of translation studies and those of the departments of the corresponding languages (departments of English, for instance) had become somewhat blurred.

The committee suggested changing the degree system so that the Candidate of Humanities (*i.e.* Bachelor of Arts) would be established as the basic university degree (120 credits) and the Master of Arts (160 credits) would become the higher basic degree. Subject teacher qualifications should be possible to acquire as part of the Master's degree (160 credits). The committee also suggested a grade or unit of 20 credits to be used as the basic measuring unit in dimensioning the studies. Faculties would be able to choose freely their degree programme structures. When the new degree system would come into force, the old students would continue their studies according to this new degree system.

For future evaluations, the committee suggested the establishment of a permanent and esteemed national evaluation body, operating, for instance, in conjunction with the Council for Higher Education or with the Council of University Rectors. For the realisation of such a body, a permanent secretariat would be needed. Furthermore, evaluations of research and teaching should not be separated. In the committee's opinion, students' extensive participation would be a central precondition of successful evaluation. In addition, the results of the evaluation should be made public, and an introduction and establishment of an accreditation system should be considered. The evaluations should also be extended to include institutions of higher vocational education.

3. Evaluation of the natural sciences

On 25 March 1991, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to evaluate the standard of education and the functionality of the education system in the natural sciences. The committee's task was to evaluate undergraduate and post-graduate teaching as well as the quality of the degrees in the natural sciences in comparison to the goals set in the degree statutes and to the international standards. The committee was also to evaluate the organisation of teaching and the curricula paying particular attention to the extent and scope of the curricula, their effectiveness, teaching methods and the extent of international co-operation. In addition, the committee's task was to suggest how student selection, degrees, curricula and teaching could be developed; how the work between undergraduate, post-graduate and further education should be divided; and how the quality of teaching could be assessed and monitored.

The committee for evaluating education in the natural sciences consisted of eight members from different universities. In October 1992, the committee submitted its report to the Ministry of Education for further measures. Based on statistical data, research data and the self-evaluations conducted by the faculties and departments, the report provided an evaluation of education in mathematics and natural sciences compared to their education abroad. In September 1992, the committee invited five foreign experts to evaluate education in mathematics and the natural sciences. The committee's suggestions included, for example, proposals for reforming the degree system and the subject teacher education. The new decree on the degree system became effective on 1st August, 1993.

3.1. The committee's suggestions

The committee suggested that school education in mathematics, physics and chemistry should be broadened and developed taking international standards into account. Students should be accepted into universities on the basis of their senior secondary school-leaving certificates and matriculation examinations.

According to the committee's suggestions, students should be provided with more guidance and they should be made familiar with the functions of the department more effectively already early on in their studies. The guidance and supervision in writing theses and in post-graduate studies should also be made more effective. Teaching loads and duties should be more flexible so that different teaching methods could be used in an appropriate manner. Moreover, the evaluation of studies and teaching should be developed. Teaching results should also be reported in the annual reports. Teaching merits should be taken into account in determining teachers' salaries.

According to the committee, the degree system should be revised so that the degrees would correspond to the international degrees and that they would meet students' various aims. A three-year Candidate's degree (Bachelor of Science) of 120 credits was recommended as the new basic degree. The Master's degree (of 160 credits) would become the higher basic degree. Post-graduate studies aiming at the Doctor's degree could be started after completing either the Candidate's, Master's or Licentiate's degree.

Furthermore, teaching should be developed in the strong areas of research, and co-operation with other departments, faculties and universities should be promoted in order to provide postgraduate education based on diverse and solid expertise. International student exchange based on research co-operation should be developed.

The evaluation of research and teaching should be continued in such a way that it would best support the units' profiles and the development of their operations. Attention should be paid to long-term planning and assessment of research and teaching in mathematics and the natural sciences.

The committee also suggested that the study grant system should be developed so that students could concentrate on full-time studies. Assistantships should be used more efficiently as post-graduate study places while other forms of support for post-graduate studies should also be developed.

4. Evaluation of the social sciences

In a meeting on 25 March 1993, the deans of the social sciences from different universities appointed a committee whose task was to determine, through co-operation between universities, the need to revise the degree system and degree programmes in the social sciences. The committee was also to draw a proposal for a new degree statute for the social sciences. The committee consisted of seven members from different universities.

The social sciences degree committee was established because the evaluations in the humanities and natural sciences had led to such fundamental changes in their degree structures that, for the sake of both national and international equivalence, corresponding revisions were needed in the degree structure in the social sciences. The committee submitted its proposal to the Ministry of Education in the autumn of 1993. Prior to that, comments from all units of social sciences were requested regarding the statute draft made by the committee.

4.1. Results of the evaluation

In the social sciences, a similar large-scale national evaluation that was carried out both in the humanities and in the natural sciences was not carried out. However, the deans' initiative brought about close co-operation where educational units and different disciplines of the social sciences discussed the directions of development in the field of the social sciences. There were enough evaluation data available on the education in the social sciences, data that were gathered in different ways and from different points of view, that the basis for the structural development of the social sciences education could be formed. For instance, high drop-out rates and lengthy studies were typical of the social sciences education. The introduction of a lower university degree was seen as a solution to these problems. Contrary to the humanities and natural sciences, the lower university degree had never existed in the field of social sciences. The development of the education content was also considered necessary.

In accordance with the statute that had come into force at the beginning of 1980, subject-based degree programmes had also been established in the social sciences. To a large extent, however, the degree programme structure and its new concepts had remained only a superficial reform, and, thus, it had not much changed education in a deeper sense. Instead, the old subject-based studies were gradually brought back in practice. In the committee's opinion, the unnecessary use of the term study programme or degree programme -- and the practice of using it synonymously with the term subject or discipline -- should be abandoned. The term study or degree programme should be used only in situations where the studies are not built upon one subject only, but consist of studies in different subjects and fields and represent interdisciplinary or vocationally determined entities. Degree or study programmes could also cross the boundaries of different faculties.

The committee felt that in developing academic post-graduate studies, the doctoral degree should be the main objective of these studies. The possibility of completing a licentiate degree should, however, be retained for those who, for one reason or another, do not aim at the doctorate. Furthermore, after completing the licentiate degree, it should still be possible to continue to the doctorate, either immediately or later on. According to the committee, post-graduate studies could be made more effective by establishing national or local graduate programmes or researcher education programmes or by attaching more post-graduate students to research projects. At the subject level, some teacher resources could also be channelled especially to post-graduate education.

Since the committee believed the Finnish doctoral degree to be excessively demanding, the doctoral degree and its requirements should be evaluated in relation to international degrees. Further academic (post-doctoral) qualifications could also be assessed through the system of docentship. Also, the need and nature of professionally oriented post-graduate study should be assessed as soon as possible.

5. Evaluation in the field of education

On 26 February 1993, the Ministry of Education set up a project group to evaluate and develop the degrees in the field of education. The task of this project was to suggest concrete measures for developing the structure of the studies in education and in teacher education and to evaluate the quality of teaching and degrees in undergraduate and postgraduate education in relation to the aims set in the degree statutes, to the international prospects and visions and to the changes in educational system. The project group was also to evaluate the organisation of the higher education teaching and the curricula, especially in terms of the extent and scope of the curricula, effectiveness, teaching methods and international co-operation. In addition, the project group's task was to suggest how student selection, degrees, curricula and teaching could be developed; how the work between undergraduate, post-graduate and further education should be divided; and how the quality of teaching could be assessed, evaluated and monitored.

The project group involved in evaluating and developing the degree system in education consisted of ten members from different universities, the National Union of Finnish Students and the National Board of Education. During the academic year of 1993-1994, the group heard experts of different areas on several occasions. In February 1994, an international evaluation was carried out in three faculties of education (in Helsinki, Joensuu and Oulu). The international peer group consisted of four foreign experts.

5.1. The results of the evaluation

The project group involved in evaluating and developing the degree system in education recommended a similar four-tier degree system to education as was already suggested for the other evaluated fields. The group wanted to abolish the basic degree programmes. Also, in order to acquire the teacher's qualifications, the higher basic degree would be required.

For the structural development of the field on education, the group suggested that the departments should create clearer profiles for themselves and they should crystallise their leading principles, their "business ideas", on the basis of the research they conduct. In addition, the units should also look for opportunities for increasing co-operation with other academic fields and with working life and society. One important area of co-operation should be the subject teacher education. In developing vocational teacher education at universities, interaction with adult education research and teaching should be increased.

In the project group's opinion, the studies in education should be developed towards the direction of creating learning environments that foster self-direction, initiative, co-operation and community, and the use of information technology. The emphasis should be shifted towards post-graduate education, a professional licentiate degree and academic researcher education.

6. Revising the degree structure in other disciplines

The Ministry of Education has also initiated similar revisions of the degree statutes, aiming at the two-tier basic degree system, in other fields of study. The degree statutes of theology, agriculture and forestry, and the law have undergone these revisions. The degrees in theology and in agriculture and forestry follow the same model as in the other fields, *i.e.* the Candidate's degree is the lower basic degree and the Master's degree is the higher basic degree. In the field of law, however, the lower basic degree of 120 credits is called the Notary of Laws and the higher basic degree (of 160 credits) remains to be called the Candidate of Laws (corresponds to the Master's degree).

EVALUATION OF TEACHING IN FINNISH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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The evaluation of teaching in Finnish institutions of higher education is presented here with the University of Oulu and the University of Tampere acting as examples. These universities were selected as examples because their evaluation of teaching has progressed further than that of the other institutions of higher education in Finland. However, practically all Finnish institutions of higher education have utilised some measures of the evaluation of teaching. In the following introduction, the section on the University of Tampere is more in depth than the one on the University of Oulu. The present system of evaluating teaching in the University of Oulu is based on the principles introduced in the University of Tampere section.

1. Teaching in the institutional evaluation of the University of Oulu

The emphasis of the self-assessment was on the data gathered in autumn 1992. The data were collected by means of a qualitative questionnaire from the teaching staff, students, and study secretaries.

As a conclusion, the self-assessment report says:

“The University of Oulu should start central development work on improving the standard of teaching, giving it priority over all others. The administrative bodies of the University and the faculties must commit themselves to this.”

Concrete measures to be taken to achieve this are, for instance:

- creating a system for self-assessment of teaching in the departments of the University of Oulu. It is important that the departments learn themselves to assess their teaching and its needs for development.
- introducing a system for evaluating teaching merits into the University of Oulu. Teaching merits, along with research merits, should be taken into account when filling vacancies.
- the quality of teaching should be taken into account when assessing the results of departments.

The measures mentioned above mentioned that were introduced for teaching development in the Report on the Self-Assessment of the University of Oulu have been implemented within the past years. The Senate of the University decided on the realisation of the teaching merits system. The system is based on portfolios that document teaching merits.

This system is nowadays used in several departments of the University.

The teaching evaluation and feedback systems and the accompanying awarding system are applied practically in all the departments of the University. The staff development units of the departments organise the collection of feedback questionnaires of all courses. The feedback is reported to the teacher in question and the head of the department. Each department can design their feedback methods in a way that suits them best. A common feature to all the departments is qualitative, i.e. verbal unstructured nature of the feedback.

Once a semester or academic year the departments arrange a departmental evaluation day which both the students and staff prepare for in advance for instance on the basis of the feedback collected from the questionnaires. The goal of the departmental evaluation day is to deal with the problems that came up in the questionnaires, to find solutions to them and to produce ideas for teaching development.

The last phase of the feedback system at the departmental level is the composition of the self-assessment report. Self-assessment may include many other dimensions in addition to the conclusions based on the student assessment/ feedback. The University Senate has decided on a check list to be used for composing the report. The report is essentially drawn up for the department itself, but it is also submitted to the University's Office of Educational Affairs for the awarding evaluation. The departments are awarded on the basis of the results shown in their self-assessment reports.

2. Towards improved quality of teaching -- The Tampere experience

In the University of Tampere a project to evaluate teaching was carried out in 1994 and 1995. After a process of self-evaluation in the various departments, a peer review group of external experts continued the evaluation. Another aim of the project was to create a quality control system; for application in Tampere and, perhaps, also in other Finnish universities. The evaluation was the first in Finland to be implemented throughout the university that addresses teaching only.

The current approach is self-evaluation, in which the institution itself scrutinises its own work and commitment to its main functions, teaching and learning.

It was decided at the outset of the project that the overall objective was not to gather information for decision-makers, nor were the results of the project to be utilised in the allocation of funds. The objective was rather to secure a commitment from the faculties and departments, and if the departments could be seen to accept the projects as advantageous to their work, the project could be rated a success. The goal was to provide the departments with more knowledge of their activities, and to help them to analyse their problems. It was desirable to inculcate the belief that evaluation is a step towards better teaching-not a measuring stick. The project was intended to be a catalyst for this development work. The aspects of teaching that needed some improvement (problem areas) were to be pinpointed, remedial action was to be mapped out, and after this had been carried through, a new evaluation was to be made, resulting in better teaching. With the project still in progress, work on improvement could be started, and, assuming a commitment on the part of the University, this work would gather its own impetus. The project emphasized in the University that the measures taken after the evaluation would be more important than the evaluation *per se*.

This was no mere evaluation of a status quo, but rather the beginning of a continuous improvement in teaching standards. The objective was emphasized to be *a new mode of operation, a new culture*, characterised throughout by recognition of good teaching, with a view to making teaching merit count in addition to academic merit, e.g. in making job appointments.

The project was not modelled on any given quality assessment or quality assurance system (such as Deming, ISO-9000, TQM or TTQ). The process revolved around self-assessment at the departmental level, to which both staff and students made a contribution. Abundant qualitative material was provided to support the self-evaluation process, affording the departments the opportunity to review their own teaching.

The instructions contained a short list of questions dealing with aims and objectives of the curriculum (we called it self-portrait), the teaching and learning environment, teaching and learning practices, assessment and monitoring and finally a description of the evaluation process.

An important question is whether the audit should use a ready-made stencil or employ a free form of monitoring emanating from the object to be monitored. Certain essential elements might well be monitored through a "checklist". Thus all concerned would be aware that these matters would be dealt with.

Departments wrote a self-evaluation report, the optimum length proposed to be 10-15 pages. Last but not least, the project emphasized that work within the department was the decisive factor in self-evaluation. The most important thing was that teaching and learning were widely discussed within the department and that the report written on the basis of these discussions was accepted by the whole department. The results of this self-evaluation were compiled into a draft report, which, together with the background material, was made available to the external peer review group.

As students' views were greatly desired, an extensive questionnaire including both structured and open-ended questions was used. Aspects of particular interest included the atmosphere in the department, staff-student relations, and students' conceptions of teaching and of their own progress. Students were asked to describe their own best and worst experiences of teaching and also of supervision when writing theses.

The external peer group wrote an independent report which, two months after its visit, was presented to the Ministry of Education and to the university. The objective of the evaluators-as indeed the aim of the whole process- was to identify the areas for development in co-operation with the departments and faculties concerned. The group's intention was not to rank the departments or list poor activities, nor did it want to reward or punish. Every faculty and department can draw its own conclusions from the suggested action and choose its way of reaction. Just as in self-evaluation, in correcting the defects there should also be a consensus about the chosen action.

The crucial factors in quality control and maintenance were considered: 1) commitment to the development of teaching; 2) continuity of activity; 3) user-friendliness of methods and 4) openness of the activity. It is pointless to apply methods which the department considers useless. Monitoring must be continuous, but the procedure must be simple and the interpretation of the results must be as unambiguous as possible. The autonomy of the department and faculties must be respected. There is little or no advantage of a procedure designed to assure quality if the department does not accept it.