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Trust in quality management: from compliance to enhancement

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Presentation outline

- 1 Conceptualisation of trust
- 2 Trust in quality assurance
- 3 Methodology
- 4 Case Ethiopia
- 5 Case Finland
- 6 Best practices for trust-building

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The concept of trust



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What is trust?

- Multidimensional and context-specific construct
 - Common elements:
 - **Relational** element between two or more parties
 - **Uncertainty** over intentions and behaviour
 - Willingness to assume perceived **risk**
 - Some dimensions of trustworthiness:
 - *Intention*
 - *Competence*
 - *Reliability*
 - *Openness*
 - *Risk, uncertainty, and vulnerability*
 - Link between trust and accountability
 - Distinction from similar notions
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Trust in quality assurance



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Growing importance of trust

- Changing landscape between governments and HEIs
- Growing accountability requirements in higher education
- Perceived decline of public trust in HEIs
- Competing explanations of trust 'crisis'
- Trust as a key aspect of functioning QA

“implementation of a quality system carries with it implied criticism of the quality of academics’ work and a lack of trust”
(Harvey, 1995, p. 29)

Perspectives on building trust in QA

Rationalist/instrumentalist

- Enforcing compliance to regulations, procedures and standards
- Control and incentives
- Emphasis on external instruments of validation
- Presupposes relatively weak internal foundations for establishing trust

Normative/cognitive

- Common systems of values, norms and procedures, and institutional reputation
- Assumes relatively more enabling conditions for establishing trust

Stensaker and Maassen (2015), Stensaker and Gornitzka (2009)

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Accountability and compliance

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Enhancement

Quality management models

Accountability/compliance-oriented

- Goals and expectations of external stakeholders
- Societal responsibility
- Top-down orientation
- Bureaucratic regulation
- Weaker trust relations

Enhancement-led

- Institution's own strategic objectives
- Continuous quality enhancement
- Overall institutional transformation
- Institutional commitment
- Stronger trust relations

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Methodology



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Our methodological approach

- Case study
- Comparative approach
- Data sources:
 - a) Interviews (28)
 - b) Focus group discussions (2)
 - c) Stakeholder survey (over 40)
 - d) Document review
 - Institutional and national documents
 - Feedback from HEIs on institutional audits (56)
- Thematic analysis

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Case Ethiopia



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Landscape of Ethiopian HE

- About 100 million
- 70% is under 30 years of age
- Rapidly massifying HE
- 800,000 students (2018)
- 50 public & 167 private HEIs
 - Funding
 - Student and teaching staff
 - Enrolment size
 - Prestige



Weak trust relations

- Acute quality concerns
- External and internal QA mechanisms
- Double standard: private vs. public
- Weak trust foundations
 - Stated intentions
 - Capacity
 - Openness & communication
 - Risk/uncertainty
- Playing 'quality game'
- Allegations of corruption
- Questionable autonomy, credibility and impartiality

Influence on QA model

- Dominance of compliance oriented QA
 - Focus on input and process
 - QA units as 'fault finders'
 - *Enhancement activities at early stage*
 - *Politicisation and political pressure*
 - Consistent with rationale/instrumentalist perspective
 - *Rigid regulatory system*
 - *National and institutional legislations*
 - *Active role of agency and QA units*
 - Lack of systemic stakeholder engagement
 - *Climate of mistrust and weak cooperation*
 - *Neglects students and external stakeholders*
 - *Inadequate platform*
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Case Finland



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Finnish higher education landscape



14 Universities



25 Universities of Applied Sciences



300,000 students (2017)

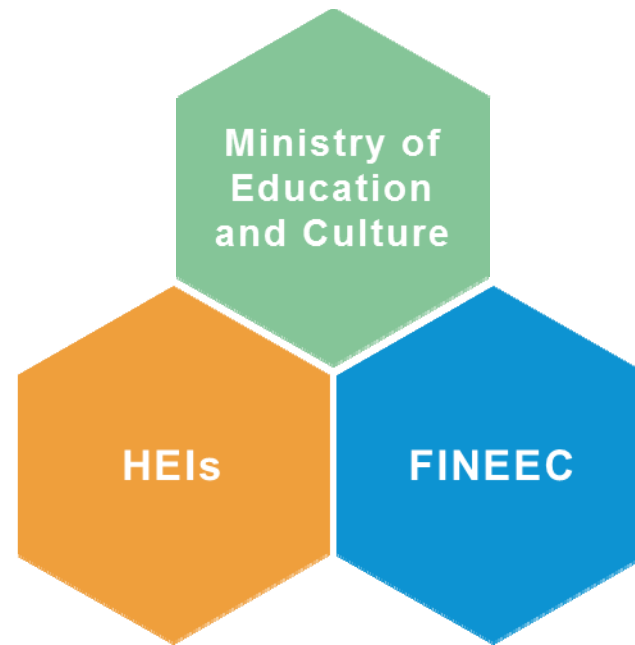


53 % women – 47 % men

Source: Statistics Finland



Quality assurance framework

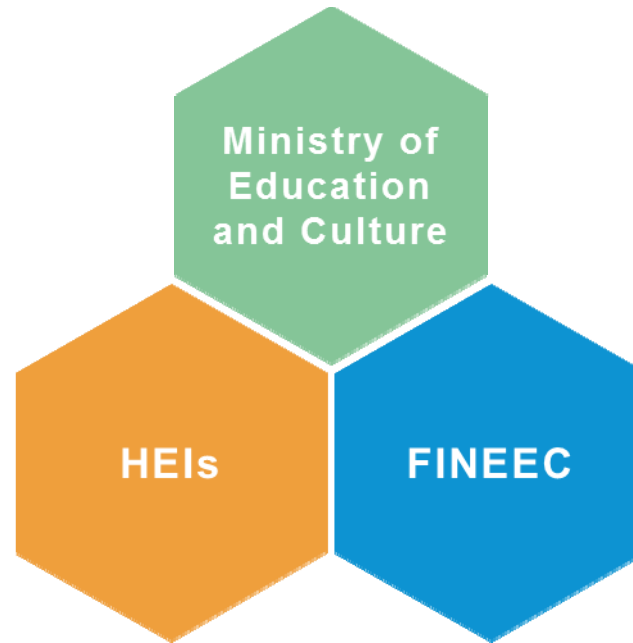


Quality assurance framework

Main responsibility for quality and improvement of education and other activities

Establish their **own QA systems**

Participate in **external evaluations** of their operations and quality systems

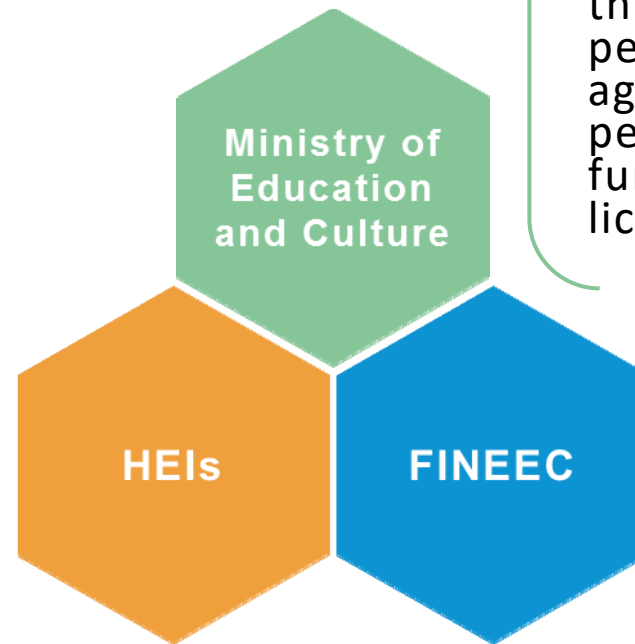


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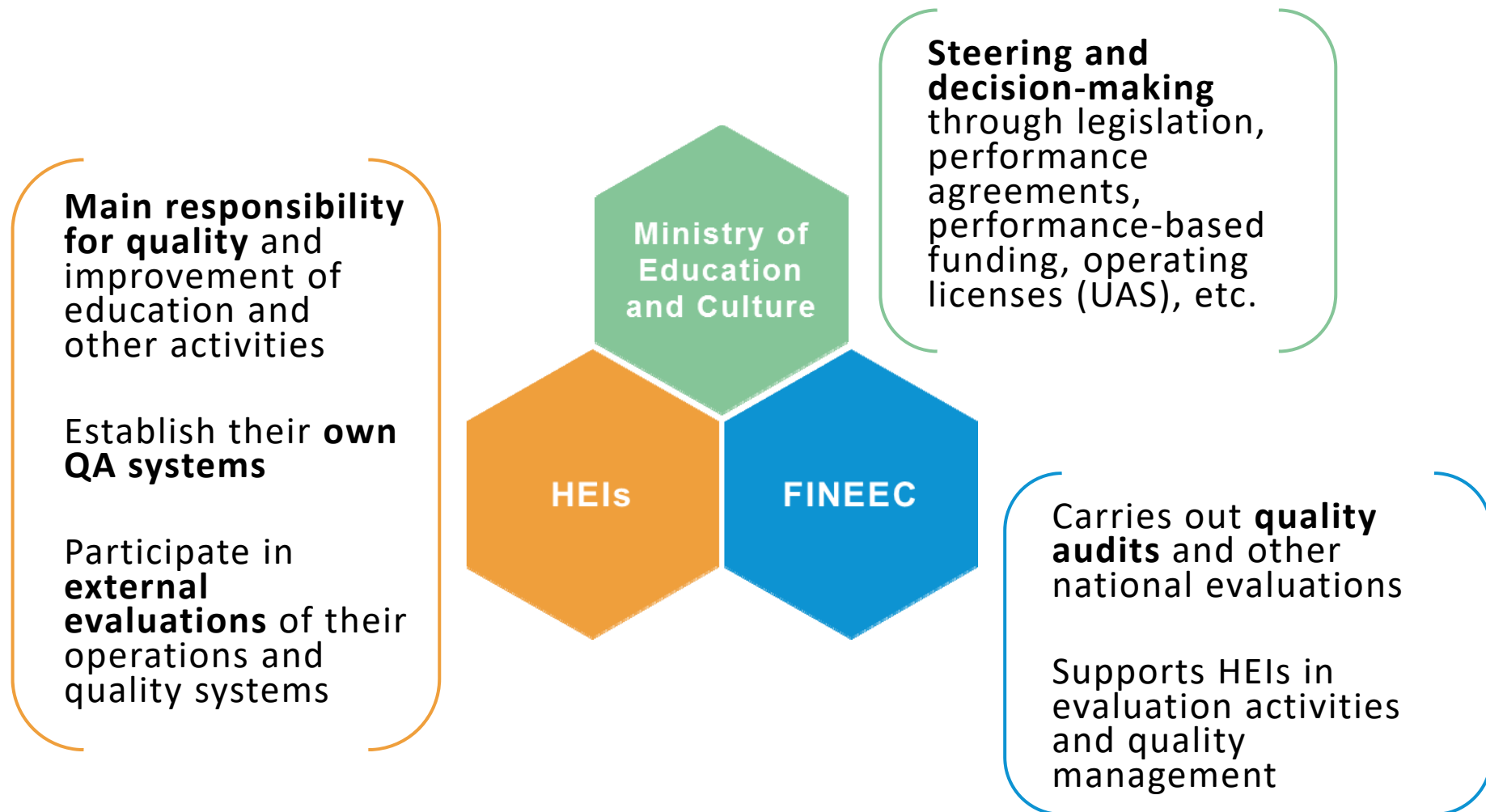
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Participate in **external evaluations** of their operations and quality systems



Steering and decision-making through legislation, performance agreements, performance-based funding, operating licenses (UAS), etc.

Quality assurance framework



Enhancement-led evaluation

Participation

- Continuous interaction with stakeholders

Respect and trust

- Between FINEEC and HEIs

Responsibility

- HEIs enhance the quality of their operations

The goal: HEIs identify strengths, good practices and development areas in their own operations, therefore helping them achieve their strategic objectives and foster continuous development.

Does the approach work?

According to higher education institutions¹, the audits have:

- 1) Enhanced the operations
- 2) Fostered trust and interaction
- 3) Built confidence in the professionalism of the evaluators.

94 % gave a positive answer to the question:

“Have you used the information from FINEEC’s evaluations in your work/unit/the organisation you represent?”²

1) Audited between 2010-2017, N=56

2) Stakeholder survey 2018, N=46

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Best practices



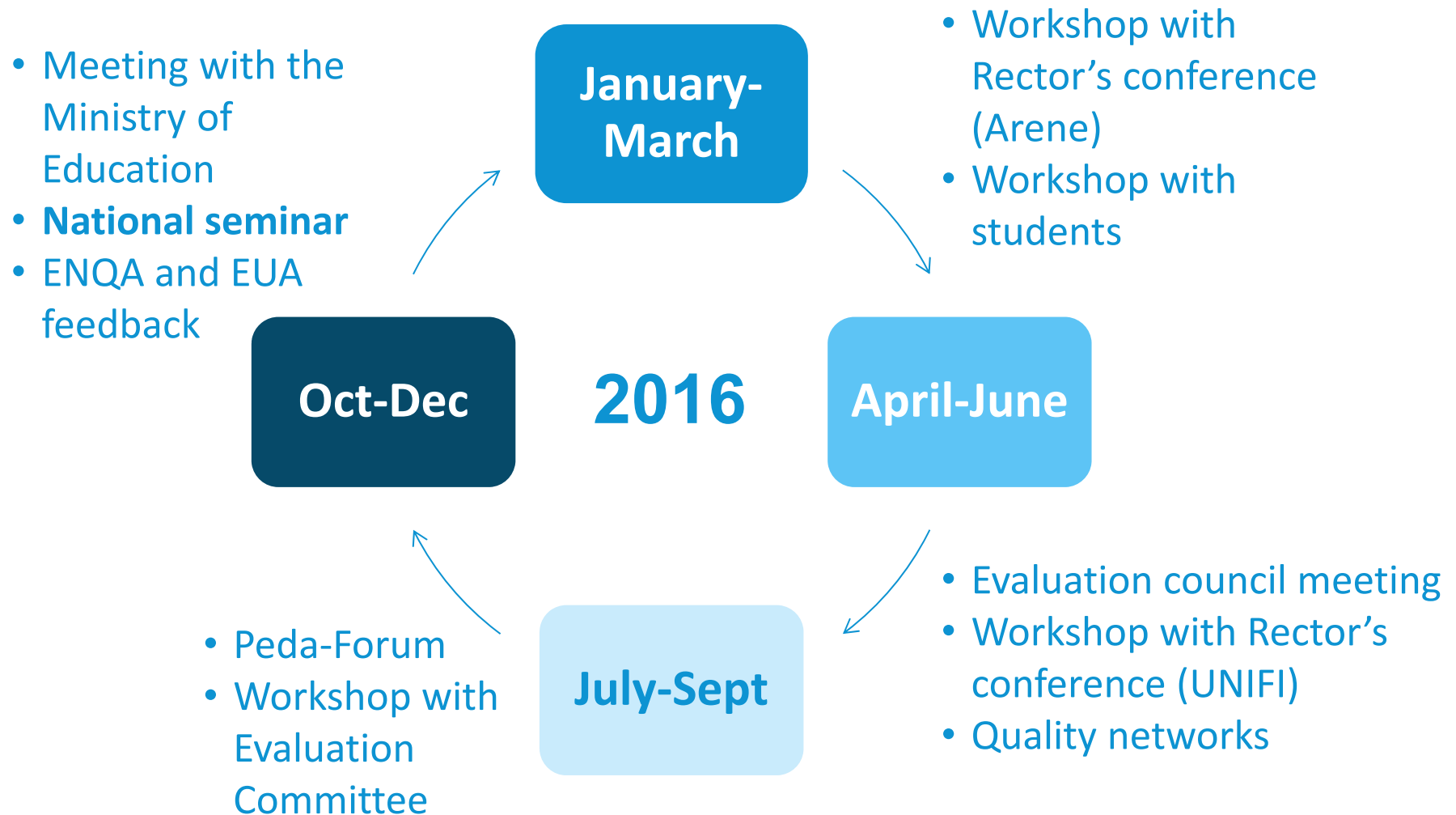
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Trust through stakeholder engagement

- The **planning and design** of evaluations
- **Carrying out** evaluation projects
- Formal **decision-making**
- **Feedback**



Planning the new audit model



Audits foster stakeholder engagement

Self-
evaluation

Site visit
interviews

Development
of operations

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Conclusions



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What can we conclude from the case studies?

- QA as an accountability instrument
- Link between trust and quality management
- Stakeholder engagement as a component of building trust
- QA can help restore public trust in HEIs
- Weaker trust relations – compliance – rationalist
- Stronger trust relations – enhancement – normative
- Balancing accountability and enhancement purposes

Impactful stakeholder engagement

In order to foster trust, stakeholder involvement should be...

- Systematic and continuous
- Meaningful and impactful
- Authentic
- Transparent

Important to keep in mind

- Significance of cultural context
- Models are not mutually exclusive
- Role of HEI management in mediating between internal and external interests
- Further theoretical and empirical examination of trust in higher education and QA is needed
- More cross-disciplinary application of trust models

Thank you!

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