

Students' Role in External Evaluation of Quality – Case: Finland

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About Me

- 2007-2010 National Union of University Students in Finland's (SYL) Educational Officer
- Several working group memberships, e.g. AHELO Coordination Group in Finland, NQF (National Qualification Framework), etc.
- Member of FINHEEC (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council), until 11/2010 (beginning 2007)
- From 11/2010 onwards: Director of Communications, The Association of Finnish Lawyers. Responsibilities include educational policy, also a role in Akava - Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland
- Master's degree 2008, University of Turku

FINHEEC's Audit Model

- External audit's carried on by audit group, which will always have a student member
 - This is the case even in smaller group of 3 members performing a re-audit (for HEI that hasn't passed)
 - Other members have HE background: professors, quality management experts, or represent working life
- Group's work is essential, final decision done by FINHEEC (12 members, of which 2 students)
- FINHEEC's staff of around 10 experts train the group and help them during audit

Who Are The Students?

- It varies, but usually they have some prior knowledge of HE administration, or have been involved in student union / association
 - Prior involvement speeds up the process of learning, but is not always demanded
 - Active mindset and willingness to defend one's views is, however, required of all – one might have to challenge views of distinguished professors, for example
- Few students have been members of several groups (two or even three)
 - It has worked out fine, but are they "too good"?

Obstacles to Overcome

- Other group members might have very low expectations
 - Positive: with little effort, expectations are met, or student member surprises with his/her abilities
 - Negative: it is harder to take one's place, equality issues: there are "experts" and then there is quota-filling student
- Possibility to change perception of others permanently: after all, students are active, able to learn complex issues and develop HE with others

The Tasks in the Group

- **First and foremost student is a full member, who shouldn't be limited to a narrow role**
- But, because of his/her background, student might be able to
 - Ask challenging continuation questions, when interviewing students of HEI
 - Other group member might have a naïve idea that students “tell the truth” because they are not biased like staff of HEI
 - In reality, interviewed student might be tempted to smoothen things up: outcome of audit could affect value of degree he/she is taking
 - Students are also a very heterogenic group – one shouldn't think that opinion of a student represents opinion of all

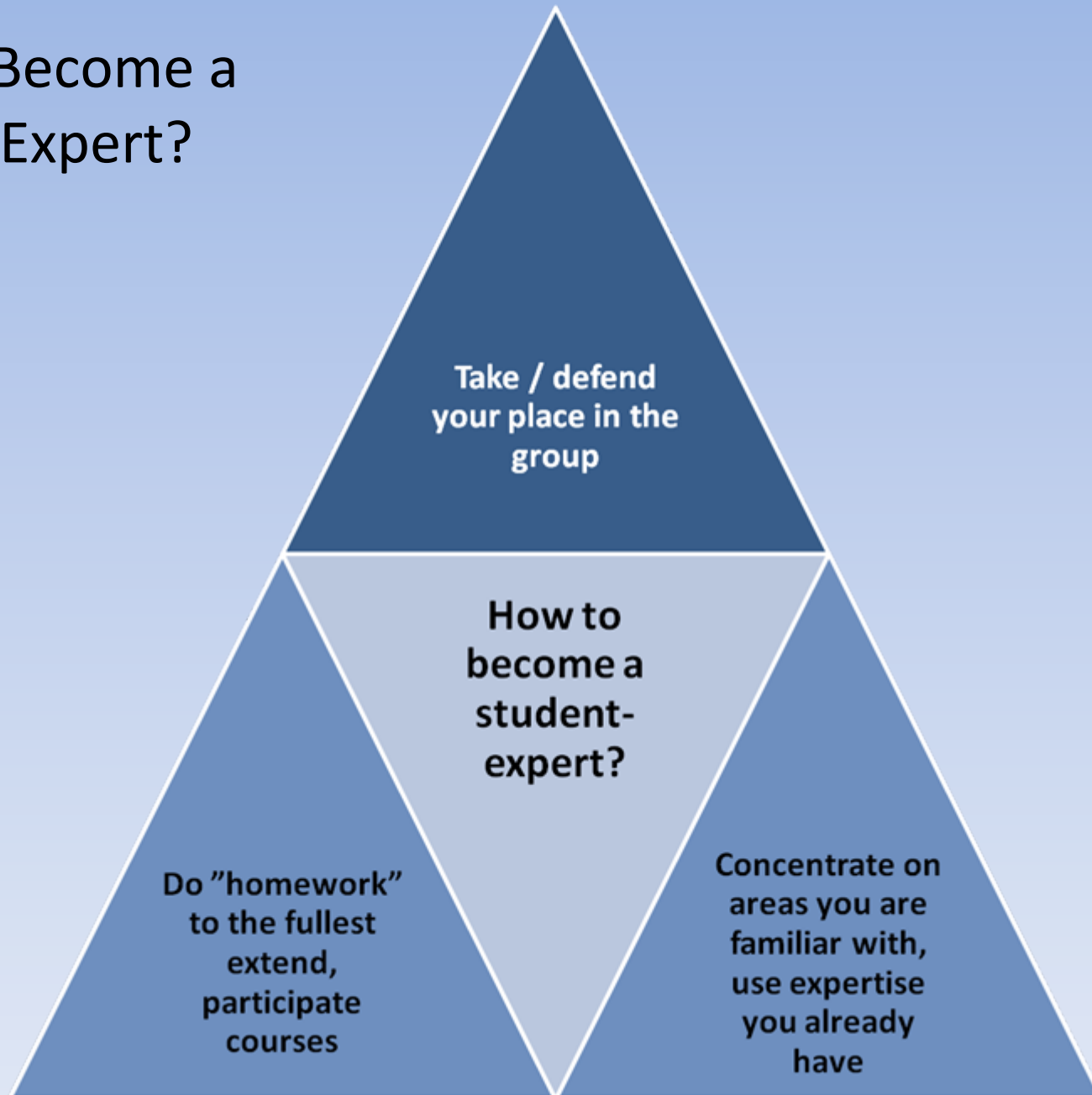
The Tasks in the Group (2)

- Ask challenging continuation questions from other interviewees, like Human Resources managers
 - Student's perspective could be new and eye-opening, and he/she brings up issues that are seldom discussed
 - Example: “Why does recruiting processes take such a long time in your institution?” Easy answer is that they take a long time in many HEIs, but this answer is not satisfactory: slow recruiting cause major problems for students.
- Be active and responsible
 - Sometimes other group members are extremely busy – student might get a bigger role than anticipated

Other Things to Consider

- Every FINHEEC audit group will take a course that covers all the practical issues and some theory Quality Assurance is based on
 - The course is of good quality, and crucial for students. Students should also go through all the reading material, and not assume “that I know this already”
- Before site visit group will get reading material, provided by HEI (or HEIs in some cases)
 - Once there was full meter of files stacked up with paper, student member used a full month to go through files
 - This is extreme example, but going through 300+ pages takes also time one has to be ready to spend

How To Become a Student-Expert?



Group Work

- In **groups of three**, think how would you **defend your position** when a member of the audit group would ask you to **”Concentrate only on student issues, because evaluating quality of research is too demanding for you.”**
 - Let us assume that you are a full member of group (like in Finland).
 - You would be offended for sure, but try to think **constructive arguments**.
- Short discussion, followed by debrief.

What We Need in Future?

- Mutual **respect** between all parties
- (Proven) **expertise**
- Aim to the **good of the HEI on the long run**, not just short-term good of the students (or professors) – this concerns the whole audit group, also HEI itself
- Developing “**quality culture**” – work on quality is important, and it can also be fun!

Thank You!

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