KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Författare **Tatjana Volkova, Hans Gruber, Siamäk Naghian, Kateryna Suprun, Mira Huusko & Sirpa Moitus. Self-assessment of the University of Vaasa (eds.) Marja-Liisa Hassi & Tanja Risikko.**

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# Audit of the University of Vaasa

# Abstract

## Title of publication

Audit of the University of Vaasa

## Authors

Tatjana Volkova, Hans Gruber, Siamäk Naghian, Kateryna Suprun, Mira Huusko & Sirpa Moitus

Self-assessment of the University of Vaasa (eds.) Marja-Liisa Hassi & Tanja Risikko

## The Higher Education Evaluation Committee’s decision

The University of Vaasa passed the audit on 17 December 2024.

The Quality Label is valid until 17 December 2030.

## The audit team’s evaluation of evaluation areas I-III

I: HEI creates competence: *good* level

II: HEI promotes impact and renewal:  *good* level

III: HEI enhances quality and well-being: *good* level

## HEI as a learning organisation – evaluation area chosen by the University of Vaasa

Management of the portfolio of study programmes

## Theme and partner for benchlearning

Theme: International student recruitment

Partner: Jönköping University, Sweden

## Key strengths and recommendations

**Strengths**

- The University of Vaasa’s study programmes are planned and implemented in a transparent manner, with the participation of key stakeholders.

- UVA’s diverse and vibrant cooperation with the industry in the Ostrobothnia region is based on ecosystem thinking and the regional heritage. The university benefits from the strong industry and work communities in the area.
- The active participation of staff in quality assurance activities demonstrates a high level of commitment to further improving UVA’s activities.
- UVA has established functional feedback practices and systems to support continuous learning and the management of the portfolio of study programmes.

**Recommendations**

- UVA should monitor and update study programmes continuously to ensure that intended learning outcomes and assessment methods are aligned.
- UVA should strengthen the systematic use of quantitative and qualitative metrics to monitor and enhance its societal engagement and impact in the short and long-term.
- UVA should adopt a more systemic, systematic and strategic approach to the enhancement of the quality management system.
- The renewal of the portfolio of study programmes should be well monitored and supported.

# Tiivistelmä

## Julkaisun nimi

Vaasan yliopiston auditointi [Audit of the University of Vaasa]

## Tekijät

Tatjana Volkova, Hans Gruber, Siamäk Naghian, Kateryna Suprun, Mira Huusko & Sirpa Moitus

Vaasan yliopiston itsearviointi (toim.) Marja-Liisa Hassi & Tanja Risikko

## Korkeakoulujen arviointijaoston päätös

Vaasan yliopiston auditointi on hyväksytty 17.12.2024.

Laatuleima on voimassa 17.12.2030 asti.

## Auditointiryhmän arvio arviointialueista I-III

I: Osaamista luova korkeakoulu: *hyvä* taso

II: Vaikuttava ja uudistava korkeakoulu: *hyvä* taso

III: Kehittyvä ja hyvinvoiva korkeakoulu: *hyvä* taso

## Oppiva korkeakoulu – Vaasan yliopiston valitsema arviointialue

Koulutusohjelmien portfolion hallinta

## Vertaisoppimisen teema ja kumppani

Teema: Kansainvälinen opiskelijarekrytointi

Kumppani: Jönköping University, Ruotsi

## Keskeiset vahvuudet ja kehittämissuositukset

**Vahvuudet**

- Vaasan yliopiston koulutusohjelmat suunnitellaan ja toteutetaan läpinäkyvästi, ja keskeiset sidosryhmät ovat mukana koulutuksen kehittämisessä.
- Vaasan yliopiston monipuolinen ja aktiivinen yhteistyö alueen elinkeinoelämän kanssa

perustuu ekosysteemiajatteluun ja alueen kulttuuriperintöön. Vaasan yliopisto hyötyy alueen vahvasta teollisuudesta ja työyhteisöistä.
- Henkilöstön aktiivinen osallistuminen laadunvarmistukseen osoittaa vahvaa sitoutumista Vaasan yliopiston toiminnan jatkuvaan kehittämiseen.
- Vaasan yliopiston toimivat palautekäytännöt ja -järjestelmät tukevat jatkuvaa oppimista sekä koulutusohjelmien johtamista**.**

**Kehittämissuositukset**

- Vaasan yliopiston tulee seurata ja päivittää koulutusohjelmia jatkuvasti varmistaakseen, että opintojaksojen osaamistavoitteet ja oppimisen arviointimenetelmät ovat linjassa keskenään.
- Vaasan yliopiston tulee vahvistaa määrällisten ja laadullisten mittareiden systemaattista käyttöä yhteiskunnallista vuorovaikutuksen ja vaikuttavuuden seuraamiseksi lyhyellä ja pitkällä aikavälillä.
- Vaasan yliopiston laatujärjestelmän kehittämisen tulee olla nykyistä systeemisempää, järjestelmällisempää ja strategisempaa.

# Sammandrag

## Publikationens nam

Auditering av Vasa universitet [Audit of the University of Vaasa]

## Författare

Tatjana Volkova, Hans Gruber, Siamäk Naghian, Kateryna Suprun, Mira Huusko & Sirpa Moitus

Vasa universitets självvärdering (red.) Marja-Liisa Hassi & Tanja Risikko

## Beslutet av sektionen för utvärdering av högskolorna

Auditeringen av Vasa universitet godkändes den 17 december 2024.

Kvalitetsstämpeln är i kraft till och med den 17 december 2030.

## Auditeringsgruppens omdöme för utvärderingsområdena I-III

I: En kompetensskapande högskola: *god* nivå

II: En nyskapande högskola med genomslagskraft: *god* nivå

III: En utvecklingsorienterad och välmående högskola: *god* nivå

## En lärande högskola, utvärderingsområdet som Vasa universitet valde

Hanteringen av utbildningsprogramportföljen

## Tema och partner för kollegialt lärande

Tema: Internationell studentrekrytering

Partner: Jönköpings universitet, Sverige

## Centrala styrkor och rekommendationer

**Styrkor**

- Vasa universitets utbildningsprogram planeras och genomförs på ett transparent sätt och genom att engagera viktiga intressenter.
- Vasa universitets mångsidiga och livskraftiga samarbete med industrin i Österbotten

bygger på ekosystemtänkande och det regionala arvet. Universitetet drar nytta av den starka industrin och arbetsgemenskaperna inom regionen.
- Medarbetarnas aktiva deltagande i kvalitetssäkringsaktiviteter visar på ett stort engagemang för att ytterliga förbättra universitetets verksamhet.
- UVA har fungerande responsmetoder och system för att stödja kontinuerligt lärande och hantering av utbildningsprogramportföljen.

**Rekommendationer**

- Vasa universitet bör följa upp och uppdatera utbildningsprogramportföljen kontinuerligt för att säkerställa att avsedda läranderesultat och bedömningsmetoder är i linje med varandra.
- Vasa universitet bör stärka den systematiska användningen av kvantitativa och kvalitativa mätare för att följa upp och förbättra sin samverkan med samhället och sitt genomslag i samhället på kort och lång sikt.
- Vasa universitet bör ta fram en mer systemisk, systematisk och strategisk praxis för att förbättra kvalitetssystemet.
- Förnyandet av utbildningsprogramportföljen bör bättre följas upp och stödjas.

# Premise and implementation of the audit

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) has conducted the audit of the University of Vaasa (UVA). The work of FINEEC is based on the principle of enhancement-led evaluation and producing impactful information that contributes to the enhancement of education.

The purpose of the FINEEC audit framework is:

- to evaluate whether the quality work in the HEI meets European quality assurance standards
- to assess whether the quality system produces relevant information for the implementation of the strategy and the continuous development of the HEI's activities, and whether it results in effective enhancement activities
- to encourage internationalisation, experimenting and a creative atmosphere at HEIs
- to accumulate open and transparent information on quality work at Finnish HEIs.

The principles of the audit framework are described in the audit manual.

# Implementation of the audit

A four-member audit team carried out the audit. The members of the audit team were:

- Professor Dr. **Tatjana Volkova**, BA School of Business and Finance, Riga, Latvia (chair)
- Professor Dr., Dr. h.c. **Hans Gruber**, University of Regensburg, Germany
- CEO, Dr. **Siamäk Naghian**, Genelec, Finland
- Doctoral Researcher **Kateryna Suprun**, Tampere University, Finland.

Counsellor of Evaluation Dr. **Mira Huusko** from the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre was the audit's project manager, and Counsellor of Evaluation **Sirpa Moitus** was the backup project manager.

The audit is based on the material submitted by the higher education institution, a self-assessment report, additional material requested by the audit team, and the audit team's site-visit to the institution between 25 and 26 September 2024. The audit team also had access to essential digital materials and systems. The main stages and timetable of the audit were:

| | |
|---|---|
| Agreement negotiation | 21.8.2023 |
| Appointment of the audit team | 28.1.2024 |
| Submission of the audit material and self-assessment report | 18.6.2024 |
| Information and discussion event at the HEI | 3.9.2024 |
| Audit visit | 25.-26.9.2024 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Higher Education Evaluation Committee’s decision on the result | 17.12.2024 |
| Publication of the report | 17.12.2024 |
| Concluding seminar | 13.1.2025 |
| Follow-up on the enhancement work | 2028 |

## Evaluation criteria

Evaluation areas I–III are each assessed as one entity using the scale *excellent, good, insufficient*.

The level *excellent* means that the HEI shows evidence of long-term and effective enhancement work. The HEI’s enhancement activities also create substantial added value for the HEI, its stakeholders or both. The HEI presents compelling examples of successful enhancement activities.

The level *good* for evaluation areas I–III is described in appendix 1.

The level *insufficient* means that the HEI shows an absence of or major shortcomings in systematic, functioning and participatory procedures in the evaluation area (I–III). There is no clear evidence of the impact of quality management in the enhancement of activities.

In order for the HEI to pass the audit, evaluation areas I–III should reach at least the level *good*.

# The organisation and strategy of the HEI

The University of Vaasa (UVA) promotes Sustainable Business, Energy and Society by conducting research and delivering higher education in its strategic focus areas: Business Management, Energy Transition, and Governance and Society. UVA delivers bachelor's-, master's- and doctoral-level education in business studies, technology, administrative sciences and communication studies. Built upon the University's core values of Community, Courage, and Responsibility, the University profiles itself as a full-service, business-oriented university with 5600 students (over 4300 full-time equivalent students), ca. 350 teaching and research faculty, and ca. 250 professional support staff comprising the UVA community.

The University's school-based structure comprises four schools (Figure 1). This structure is complemented by three multi-disciplinary, cross-cutting research platforms to stimulate impactful, phenomenon-based, and cross-disciplinary research and collaboration with industry. The affiliated institutions support the University in delivering its key education and research activities. University services provide services for personnel and students.

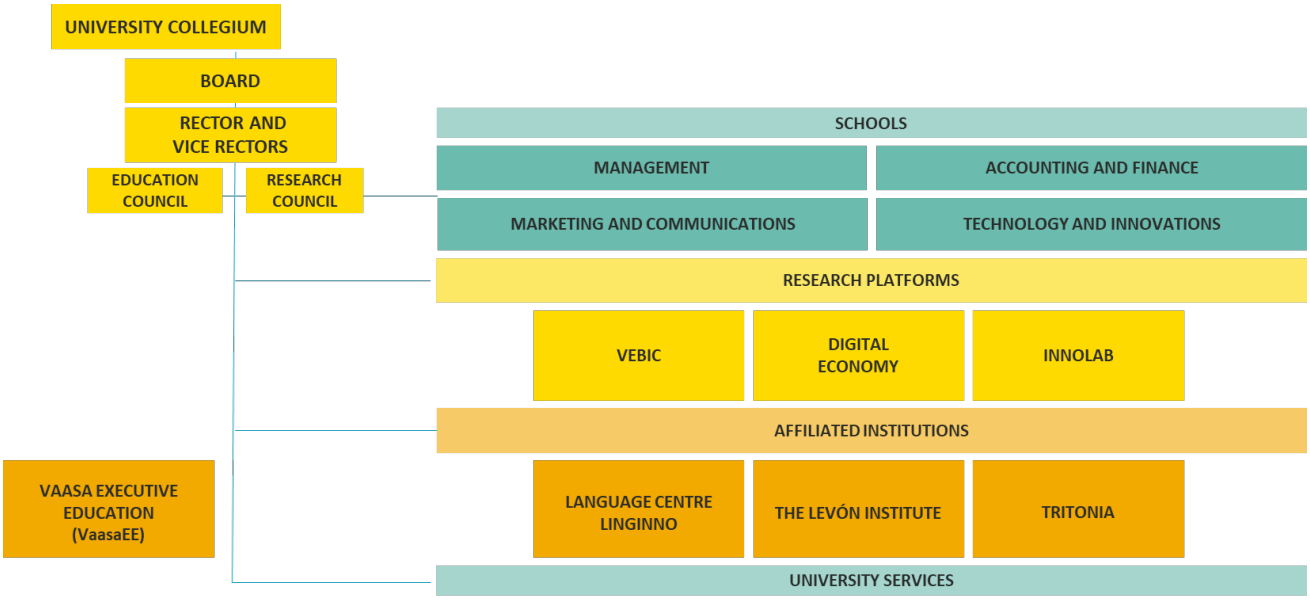



**Figure 1.** University of Vaasa organisational structure.

The University Board comprises 11 members, of whom 6 are elected members of the university community, including a student member, and 5 are appointed by the UVA Collegium. The Collegium is chosen via democratic election and consists of 15 members of the university community. The Board selects the Rector and Vice-Rectors.

The University's mission, vision and strategy (Figure 2) were renewed in 2023 using a

participative strategy process and they serve as the foundations for defining the goals and actions towards 2030. UVA has adopted the ambition of becoming an internationally recognised, high-impact research university. Development programmes and operational strategies have been redefined with that overall vision in mind. The core elements of UVA's strategy (education, research, and societal interaction and impact) culminate in a four-year Strategy and Performance Contract between UVA and the Ministry (see contract between UVA and the Ministry).




**Figure 2.** Overview of the University of Vaasa Strategy 2030.

# 1 HEI creates competence

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

*Evaluation area I assesses the procedures which support student-centred, working-life oriented planning, implementation and enhancement of education, which is based on research or artistic activities.*

Based on the audit team's evaluation, evaluation area I is at the level *good*.

The audit team identified the following as key strengths and recommendations:

**Strengths**

- Planning and implementation of the University of Vaasa's (UVA) degree programmes are transparently organised with the involvement of relevant stakeholders.
- UVA delivers practice-based education jointly co-created by students, staff and external stakeholders.
- Student feedback at UVA is appropriately collected and well processed for quality of education.
- UVA provides excellent support services as regards student well-being and welcoming international students.

**Recommendations**

- UVA should monitor and update study programmes continuously to ensure that intended learning outcomes and assessment methods are aligned.
- UVA should strengthen the involvement of international students in decision-making and participation.
- The academic faculty at UVA should be encouraged to utilise more pedagogical innovations for teaching and learning.

# 1.1 The planning of education

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## Sustainable business, energy, and society – UVA strategy as the cornerstone for the planning of education

Degree programmes are built around UVA's profile – sustainable business, energy, and society – and its corresponding three strategic focus areas: Business Management, Energy Transition & Technology, and Governance & Society. The planning of education and the degree portfolio includes systematic input from different stakeholders such as the City of Vaasa, the region, alumni, and industry representatives (e.g., via UVA and Programme Advisory Boards), research groups and students. The UVA strategy 2030 defines three development programmes for education planning: programmes through which the targets in education planning will be achieved:

- Revised programme portfolio for the best learner experience
- Digitalisation of education
- International education with impact.

The planning of education (BSc and MSc) is headed by the Vice Rector of Education supported by the deans, the School Management Groups, and the joint Programme Development Committee. All UVA curricula are submitted to the Education Council for approval after consideration in the schools. The planning and development of doctoral education takes place in the Graduate School, Management Group of the Graduate School and the Research Council headed by the Vice Rector for Research. Elected student representatives from student associations are represented at all levels of decision-making at the university. (Figure 3).

## Curricula ensuring a meaningful learner experience

Curriculum planning is based on the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004) and the UVA degree regulations. Both define the objectives for the degrees at levels 6-8 in the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. The planning is guided by UVA strategy and more detailed UVA guidelines in each curriculum round (Messi: Curriculum). QA is embedded into the Programme Management Principles for teaching excellence and the best learner experience.

# Strategic Management & Quality Assurance bodies **Education**

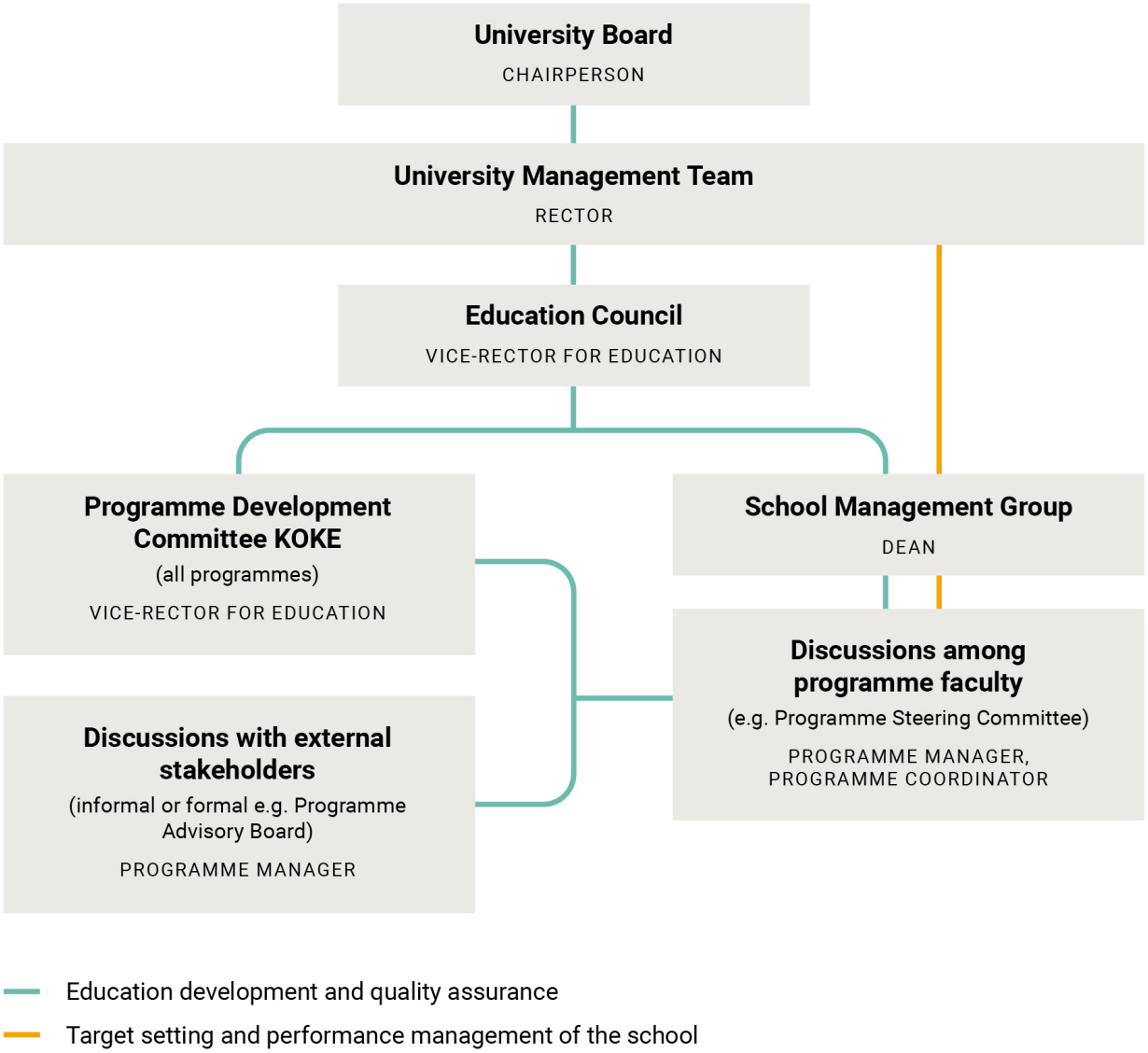



**Figure 3.** Strategic Management & Quality Assurance in Education

The curricula are planned and agreed according to UVA annual curriculum approval cycle (Figure 4) for two to three years. Curriculum mapping is used in the curriculum development work to define and monitor the programme's intended learning outcomes (ILOs) and map the individual courses to ensure that the course curricula, teaching and assessment methods, and virtual and physical learning environments support the students' learning experience and achievement of the defined ILOs. UVA emphasizes the relevance of work life and employment by incorporating

real-world applications and industry insights into the curriculum via School- or programme-level advisors. Study and Education Services support curriculum development process, manage the Peppi study system, and collect relevant feedback (e.g. graduate surveys, career surveys, and in business studies also the Assurance of Learning student learning data). UVA Eduwasa team supports teachers in pedagogical and digital planning.

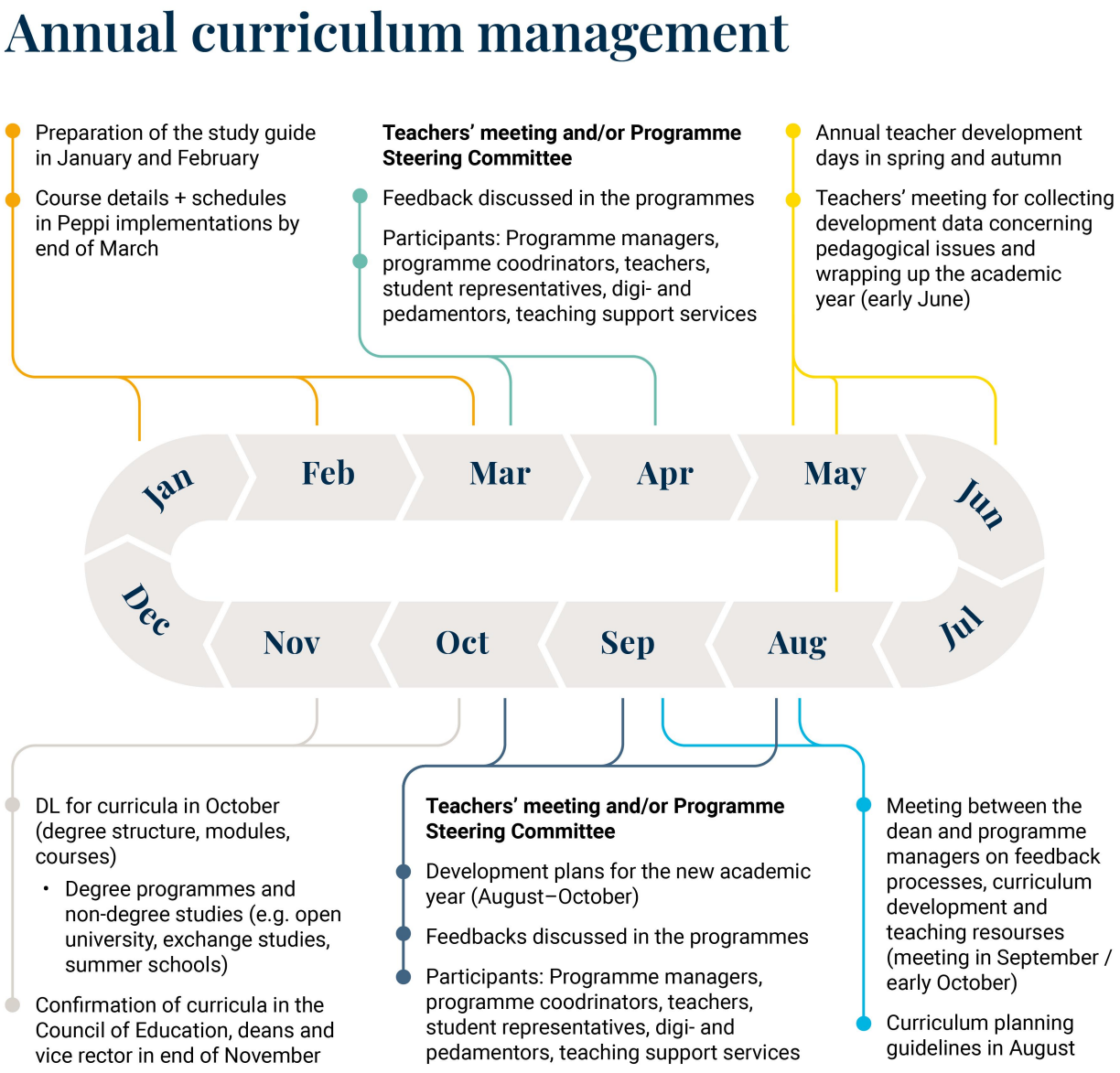



**Figure 4.** Annual cycle for curriculum development and approval

## Research – the foundation of UVA's high-quality education

Course curricula are planned based on the most recent research findings. The majority of teaching faculty in degree programmes hold a PhD and are actively conducting research. UVA's research platforms facilitate interdisciplinary research and knowledge dissemination. Research is integrated into teaching by applying examples and using research articles as course material.

Our education prepares students for academic careers and encourages them to participate in research projects during their studies.

## International education with impact

International accreditation and evaluation processes (AACSB, ASIIN, EFMD, EQUIS) are used to continuously improve education quality, with a particular emphasis on internationalisation, innovation and impact. Both MSc and BSc double degrees have been developed with high-quality partners to increase international learning opportunities for students. Collaboration in international educational networks, like the European university alliance EUNICE, the Global Business School Network (GBSN) and HERMES network, create excellent opportunities for international cooperation in course planning and delivery.

## Planning of continuous learning integrated into curriculum work

Education planning includes paths for continuous education. Trends in working life and society are closely followed to meet the changing needs of different target groups. Open University and Continuous Education teams coordinate the provision of UVA's continuous education. Vaasa Executive Education Ltd. offers MBA modules and tailored executive education. Continuous education opportunities are structured around four main categories:

- Open University education has the same goals, curricula and requirements as degree studies. Studies are mostly arranged online to offer more flexibility. There is an open university route to degree programmes for non-degree learners who have accumulated sufficient studies. Courses are also offered in English to help skilled immigrants in accessing university education.
- Executive Education offers the Executive MBA programme, customized programmes, and online courses (time- and location-independent online training for experts, managers, and executives).
- Alumni Right to Study. After completing the master's degree, a UVA student can apply for an alumni study right for open university studies or normal degree courses to supplement the degree free of charge for one academic year.
- LUMA Centre of Ostrobothnia promotes the teaching and learning of science, mathematics and technology for children and young people. The centre is part of the national LUMA Centre Finland.

**Strengths**

Clear and distinctive mission, strategy, and development direction (educational portfolio, student experience, smart use of digitalisation, internationalization)

**Enhancement areas**

More systematic feedback to students at course and programme level regarding learning achievements, curriculum improvements, and learner experience

| | |
|---|---|
| Strong cooperation with industry and public organisations, plus open, constructive dialogue with student representatives and student union/associations | Greater inclusion of international students in decision-making bodies and student association activities |
| Clearly defined programme management structure and principles that steer continuous improvements and multi-step decision-making that ensures sufficient scrutiny and inclusive stakeholder involvement | Enhanced visibility and use of Programme Management Principles |

# 1.1 The planning of education

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

## The organisation of educational planning is transparent

Educational planning is well and transparently organised at the University of Vaasa (UVA). In particular, the close link between UVA's strategy and the involvement of external stakeholders is noteworthy. According to the self-assessment report and audit visit, education planning incorporates UVA's strategic priorities with a focus on business studies, technology, administrative sciences and communication studies. As mentioned in the self-assessment report, UVA has defined three targets for educational planning: revised programme portfolio for the best learning experience, digitalisation of education and international education with impact. According to the UVA's vision, the education offers a transformative learner experience for future employment built on teaching excellence, high-quality learning environments, equality and inclusion.

Educational planning follows a participatory approach and uses rich feedback information. Programme managers, academic faculty, students, alumni, local authorities, industry and the City of Vaasa are closely involved in defining competences of the UVA educational provision. During the audit visit, some external stakeholders wished to have even more influence on the content of the curricula. The active involvement of students and of staff members in educational planning was explicitly mentioned and acknowledged in the student and staff workshops. As UVA's strategy includes an increase in the number of international students, the audit team recommends the university defines processes for the systematic involvement of international students in educational planning and decision-making activities.

UVA follows a student-centred and research-based approach. Education combines research activities with student learning and considerable practice-based activities organised with students, staff and external stakeholders. Based on the audit visit, all students are offered research methods courses. Some students work on research projects and write their theses for the projects and are involved in and co-organise international research seminars and workshops. In general, educational planning is conducted in a systematic and transparent process that corresponds to the Finnish National Qualifications Framework.

UVA's curricula are planned and approved following the processes described in the Annual Curriculum Management cycle. The Education Council, chaired by the Vice-rector for Education, confirms the curricula. As identified in the self-assessment report, intended learning outcomes (ILO) are an integral part of the educational planning process through curriculum mapping and curated principles of programme management.

## UVA should align intended learning outcomes and assessment of learning

According to UVA, the student's workload is standardised and measured against the ECTS. Based on curriculum and syllabus samples and audit interviews, there are differences between different UVA courses that earn the same number of credits regarding the estimated workload, the appropriate number and formulation of intended learning outcomes and the assessment methods. Thus, it is not sufficiently clear to students how the intended learning outcomes can be obtained and the complexity level of the intended learning outcomes across different courses varies from over-simplified to over-demanding. According to the student workshop, there is variation between the workloads of students in the different courses, even if the number of credits is the same. Differences are not explained by the stage at which the courses are offered. The audit team recommends that the UVA study programme documents, like curricula and syllabus, are continuously monitored and updated to refine intended learning outcomes and align them with assessment methods. The audit team also recommends that UVA monitor workload regularly and systematically. UVA should also pay more attention to the competence-based approach of courses and curricula.

Based on curriculum and syllabus samples, the audit team identified some cases of inadequate connections between the intended learning outcomes and the learning assessment methods for these. Sometimes the choice of learning assessments poorly corresponds to the complexity of the courses' intended learning outcomes. The audit team recommends that UVA update more regularly the content and literature of curricula and courses, methods for assessing the intended learning outcomes and other aspects of teaching and learning. In this way, the university can ensure that there is a sound basis for delivering modern and relevant study programmes, materials and teaching and assessment approaches. The audit team encourages UVA to continue the practice of programme managers, academic faculty and students working together on study programmes' curricula and syllabus. Curriculum planning should be better supported by the university. The teachers could benefit from further pedagogical training in curriculum development.

The university has common Principles of Programme Management, which based on the audit visit are also used. The audit team suggests that these principles and other guidelines for standardising good practice could be further developed to improve programme management, including programme delivery by using process descriptions. Detailed process descriptions would contribute to harmonising educational planning practices across the university.

## Internationalisation and continuous learning support UVA's strategy

UVA's curriculum management process includes also joint programmes with international partners. Aligned with its strategic objective of internationalisation, UVA cooperates with a wide range of external stakeholders on curriculum development, including joint and dual degree programmes. Multicultural development and internationalisation at home activities are aligned with the student and staff diversification goal. Members of the UVA community can apply for

international exchange programmes and attend international conferences.

UVA has also considered the need for continuous learning. The university has adopted a strategic approach as regards diversifying its study offer for continuous learners. According to the self-assessment report, the continuous learning provision includes the Open University, the Executive MBA programmes, the alumni right to study and the Ostrobothnia LUMA Centre. They enable flexible learning pathways and a tailored academic provision. Particularly noteworthy are the offers made available for UVA alumni, who benefit from special discounts. The data provided on the Open University demonstrates an increase in the number of enrolled continuous education students, but a decrease in their completed credits. The dropout and non-completion rates should be further monitored and worked on. The audit team considers that UVA’s continuing learning provision is promising as it is also planning micro-credentials for a wider audience.

# 1.2 The implementation of education

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## Transparency and equality in student selection

The University systematically applies Government statutes and stipulations related to student selection, education, study progress, and graduation. University-level decisions that ensure students' legal protection and equal treatment can be found on the University's website Guidelines and regulations.

UVA has a formal process for determining admissions criteria, which involves preparing and publishing admissions guidelines, managing the application process, evaluating eligibility and making decisions based on admission criteria. Admission criteria are set by the Education Council. The criteria are published on the UVA Admissions website and in Studyinfo. University services coordinate the application process from submission to selection decisions and guide the applicants, supporting to ensure fairness and transparency. To enhance equal opportunities, applicants are offered individual arrangements in entrance exams.

UVA has policies and procedures in place for recognition of prior learning (RPL), and accrediting studies or competencies acquired outside of UVA degree programs. The RPL decisions are made based on the learning objectives of the study unit.

## Learner-centered course delivery

Teaching and assessment methods must be aligned with the ILOs defined for the course and the programme, as well as the course content and workload. All courses apply a syllabus, which is discussed at the beginning of the course, ensuring that the students are well acquainted with the ILOs, methods, and content of the course, as well as their and the teacher's roles and responsibilities.

A variety of teaching methods are utilized, such as traditional lectures, applicatory projects, and exercises, flipped classroom techniques, Harvard-style case teaching, problem-based learning, student projects for real-life case companies, and business simulations. Collaborative learning is emphasized in group discussions, poster presentations, activating dialogues, simulations, and various other forms of presentations. The selected teaching methods provide a comprehensive and varied approach to instruction, ensuring that students are actively involved in their learning process and can achieve target-oriented learning outcomes.

Assessment and grading policies are in place to ensure consistency. Clear grading policies and rubrics are set, and double marking is used for master's theses. The assessment regime is monitored, and standardized syllabi and rubrics are used to maintain consistency in standards.

## Feedback to students on their learning

Feedback is an integral part of supporting learners' achievement of targeted learning outcomes. It offers students ways to understand their strengths and evaluate their progress and develop learning strategies. The programmes utilize various methods to provide feedback: Continuous feedback, including immediate feedback on generic skills. Feedback is provided on assignments, such as learning diaries, essays, projects, and case assignments.

## Smooth progress in studies and integration into working life

Degree-, programme- and course-level ILOs are all designed to equip the students with skills and competences that are relevant to working life and foster students' ability to continuous self-development in a rapidly changing environment. Studies include real-life learning opportunities such as industry projects and cases, excursions, mentoring programmes, workshops, and labs in close cooperation with the surrounding industry. Many master's students conduct their theses as company commissions. All UVA degree programmes grant credits for internships.

Career Services support students in their career planning via career counseling, mentoring, financial support for internships, working life courses, workshops and information sessions, recruitment events, and job announcements. UVA promotes the employment and integration of international students in the region through special initiatives (e.g. Talent Hub, Spouse Programme).

## Services, guidance, and well-being to support study progress and learning

UVA offers comprehensive guidance and support services, including study counselors, study psychologist, and other guidance and well-being services. (Figure 5). UVA offers low-threshold services, e.g., drop-in counseling on campus and remotely to support proactive services and the adequacy of resources. UVA is enhancing its services through initiatives like the ”Annie Advisor” chatbot to identify individual student needs. Throughout the year, academic staff remain accessible and approachable. Counselors and teachers monitor the progress of students' studies through Personal Study Plans and guidance sessions, as well as the new Fokus tool that facilitates student tracking and early intervention actions. In terms of accessibility policy, students are offered individual arrangements to accommodate their specific needs.

UVA also places importance on the successful *integration of new students* into the university community. These include orientation and induction programs, student tutor programmes in cooperation with the Student Union. UVA supports students' *sense of community and well-being* by supporting the students' own actions to strengthen the community. The “Buddy” project starts in autumn 2024 to support the integration of our international students. UVA works in close cooperation with Student Health Services, the City of Vaasa and other network services to promote well-being. Guidance and support services, as well as other support actions, are also accessible to the students studying outside the main Vaasa campus.

UVA ensures the availability of physical and digital resources, such as well-equipped classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and online learning platforms like Moodle, to support learning and research activities.

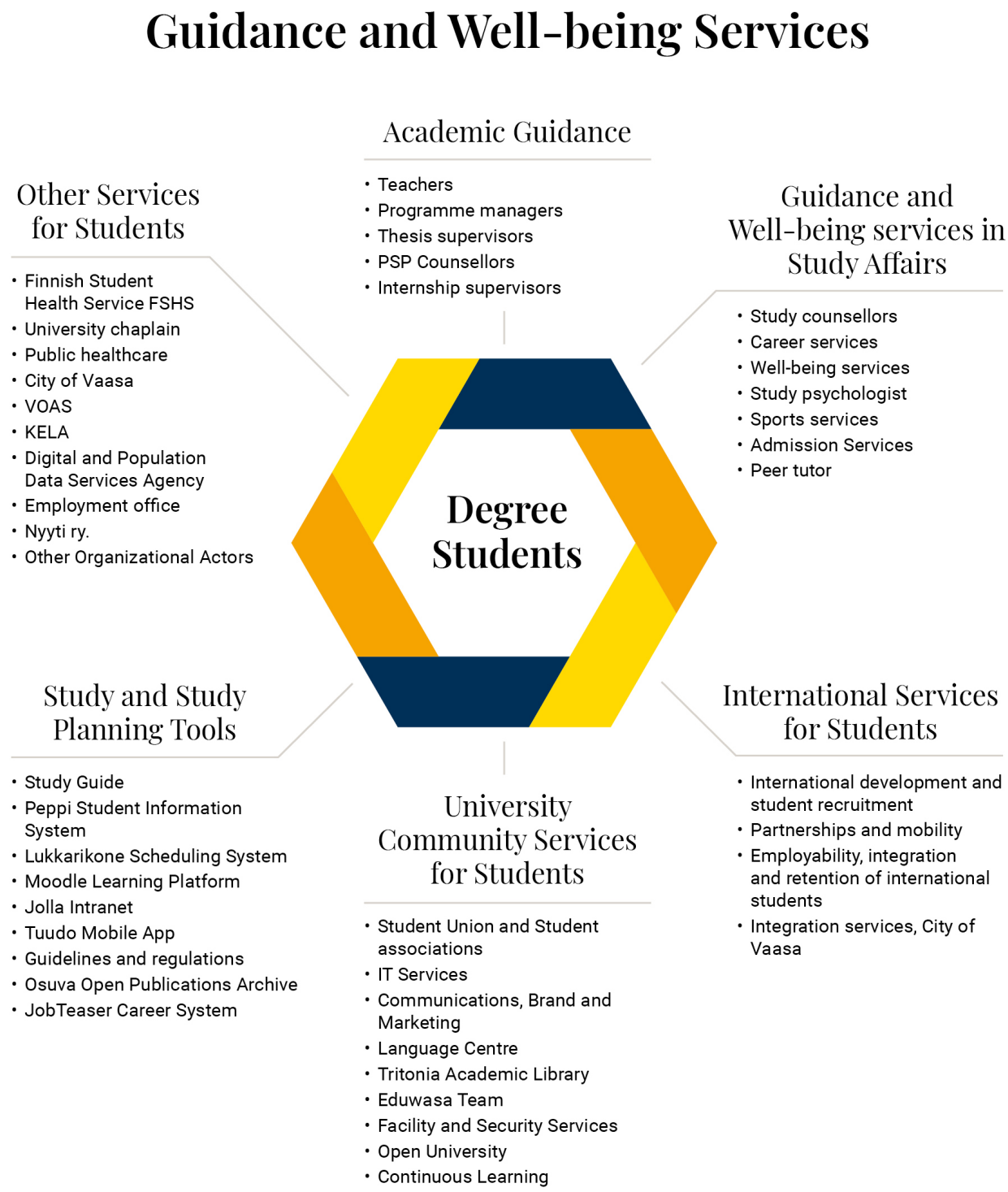



**Figure 5.** Guidance and well-being services

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| Structured annual cycle for the management and implementation of student intake decisions, student selection criteria, and degree targets | Coordination and leveraging of working life partnerships and alumni networks |
| Diversity of forums for students to meet the university and school leadership and the involvement in bodies that shape the development of education | More effective utilization of digital tools in educational processes (e.g., teaching scheduling, student admissions) |
| Introduction of new technology-enabled channels and tools to support students | Greater consideration of accessibility and equality (e.g., internationaldiversity age diversity, neurodiversity) |

# 1.2 The implementation of education

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

## Learning experiences are well co-created and supported

According to the self-assessment report, admission criteria are set by the Education Council. The criteria are published on the UVA Admissions website and on national Studyinfo webpages. The student life cycle at UVA begins with transparent procedures for student admission and the recognition of prior learning. UVA has policies and procedures in place for recognition of prior learning (RPL), and accrediting studies or competencies acquired outside of UVA degree programs. The decisions of recognition of prior learning are made based on the courses' intended learning outcomes. During the courses, study progress and degree completion are consistently monitored through the system of study guidance, as established in the Programme Management Principles. Similarly, UVA supports students well in their integration into professional life through versatile career support services during and after studies. According to the audit visit, students are aware of these tools and appreciate them. Students are well employed during the summer and as interns in local companies.

According to the audit visit, students are members of working committees and advisory boards, including those for the development of the UVA strategy. Based on the student accounts, a variety of pedagogical methods are used that allow for student-centred and practice-oriented learning. Also, according to the audit visit, teachers often invite external lecturers from companies, municipalities, and other employers. Students prepare their thesis projects and do their internships in local companies. This has been much appreciated by students.

Based on the student workshop, students receive timely and sufficient feedback on their learning and feel supported in the learning process. In some courses, students also receive feedback from peers and older students. However, based on the workshop, academic faculty could improve their responsiveness as regards coursework and assignments, particularly for courses where the number of students is steadily increasing.

According to the workshop, students particularly appreciated the feedback they received, the flexibility of the studies, the language courses, the group works, the low threshold for contacting professors by email, the enthusiastic teachers, the diversity of teaching methods and learning materials and the opportunity to study with international students. On the other hand, students would like to have more interaction with others, more face-to-face courses, and a balance between the number of courses in Finnish and English. The audit team recommends that UVA reflect on the ability of the academic faculty to handle an increasing number of student population. The university should allocate additional resources to support quality course delivery and encourage teachers to use innovative pedagogical methods more actively for teaching and learning. According to the staff workshop, many teachers are willing and able to implement more

innovative methods.

UVA offers adequate counselling and services to support study and learning progress. The audit visit indicated that the university provides sufficient support to students in matters related to student orientation, well-being, physical and digital resources for learning and research, alongside language studies and integration courses for non-Finnish students. The audit team recommends that UVA continues to build learning trajectories, establish peer support groups, and support career development. These tools should also cater more to the interests of international students. According to the audit visit and workshops, more study counsellors are needed. First-year students in particular need a lot of guidance.

The audit team was delighted to hear from international doctoral students and their Finnish peers how happy they were with the inclusive atmosphere of the UVA community. According to the audit visit, UVA has been successful in integrating international students into its community. UVA has the potential to be one of Finland leading universities in internationalisation. The regional culture and bilingual community of the Vaasa region can be a great advantage as regards supporting the UVA community culture in the future.

However, international students are not able to participate sufficiently in Student Union activities. The audit team encourages the Students' Union to address this challenge together with UVA and recommend that career services for international students be further enhanced by offering more internship vouchers and interview coaching, facilitating connections with local students, networks and employers, and extending language training towards socially relevant situations. According to the audit visit, the Vaasa region has the lowest unemployment rate in Finland, so Finnish and international students have good opportunities to stay and seek employment in the region.

The university's work on supporting student well-being is organised in a systemic and systematic manner. UVA provides a wide range of support services in student well-being, e.g., a student psychologist, well-being weeks and events, a campus pastor, sports and healthcare facilities. It conducts well-being surveys for students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a particularly high number of them.

The central goal for the UVA's Equality Plan is to reinforce an equality-positive atmosphere and to effectively communicate equality matters to the students and staff. According to the audit visit, students know who the contact persons in case of harassment, discrimination or bullying. UVA also has the Accessibility plan for 2024-2026.

# 1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

## - Högskolans självvärdering

### Intended learning outcomes and evaluation

Programme ILOs are designed based on UVA's Programme Management Principles to ensure that graduates have the requisite knowledge, skills, and competences to succeed in the graduate labour market, and to enable continuous self-development in a changing work environment. The Programme Management Principles require that the curriculum and delivery of a programme should include transversal aspects of ethics, responsibility, sustainability, international outlook, and sense of community. The ILOs are structured so that the overall degree and programme learning goals are reflected in the course-specific ILOs. UVA has introduced an assurance of learning (AoL) system to measure individual student achievement of learning goals (see below for further details).

UVA utilizes various QA processes to analyze the achievement of learning outcomes. The processes include internal and external assessments. On an annual basis, feedback from students and teacher input are used to monitor the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment within Programme Committees and teachers' meetings. In terms of internal, programme-level assessment, UVA has conducted periodic (3-5-year) programme 'programme inspections' in its' international master business programmes. In terms of external assessment, most programmes at UVA are operating to an international accreditation standard (e.g., AACSB, ASIIN, EFMD, EDAMBA), which involves periodic evaluations from independent international experts and involves UVA management, teaching faculty, students, study administration, and external stakeholders (e.g., alumni, UVA corporate partners).

### Student feedback supporting continuous improvements in education

Student feedback is collected through various means to improve learner-centered education. The course feedback system in the Peppi study information system allows students to evaluate course content, teaching methods, workload, and course material. Course feedback can also be collected through e.g., Moodle's gradebook, or orally from students during a course. Feedback is also collected from students in connection with graduation and later in alumni surveys. These surveys provide a valuable tool for regular degree- and programme-level evaluation and are utilized in curriculum design. UVA has student feedback guidelines in place.

To ensure transparency, the programme makes assessment criteria and rubrics publicly available through course syllabi and/or Moodle. Course objectives, integration of key themes, and feedback are discussed in teachers' meetings as a part of programme management. Teachers and programme management analyze course feedback and identify areas for improvement and the

effectiveness of each course. The programmes also seek input from representatives of industry on programme objectives, design, and outcomes, with a focus on graduate employability. Teachers are encouraged to inform students how previous feedback has been utilised in the continuous improvement process of the course. The Student Forum, chaired by the Vice Rector of Education, calls together student representatives of all disciplines to discuss the development plans of education.

## Regional, national, and international stakeholder involvement

UVA's active cooperation with the surrounding ecosystem of employers is an important feature in developing ILOs. University- and programme-level advisors provide input on work life trends and emerging competency needs. UVA uses industry representatives in various educational roles to support the work life relevance of UVA's education, as visiting lecturers, real-life cases, and thesis project providers.

International partnerships through different networks impact the development and continuous improvement of education. UVA draws on a wide provision of international exchange and double degree opportunities, which are intended to influence the development of curricula and equip students with skills and competences that will benefit their future careers. In utilising the international partnerships, UVA seeks to advance internationalisation at home and ensure an international learning experience through the development of COIL offerings (Collaborative Online International Learning), summer school programmes and BIPs (short Blended Intensive Programmes).

## University Services providing expert support in achieving the goals

The University Services units provide professional services for the entire university community and support the university's research and teaching activities and societal impact. UVA's University Services include Study and Education Services, and International Services. According to the service promise "Smooth service with a big heart through teamwork," expert support is based on active interaction with customer groups. Services are continuously improved by carefully listening to customer feedback and responding in a meaningful way and in cooperation with the whole university community.

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| Collaboration and communication across programmes, commitment and collegiality among teaching faculty and 'team teaching' | Enhancing the role of the Programme Development Committee (KOKE) as a forum for communication, developing UVA education, and sharing best practices. |
| Use of versatile data (feedback, learning analytics, student progression, self-assessments, accreditations, internal and external stakeholder cooperation) in the development of courses and programmes | Strengthening consistency and common approaches across all fields of study and interdisciplinary programs |

| | |
|---|---|
| Public course descriptions and harmonized course syllabus so students are provided with detailed information to help in planning studies | More systematic follow-up of graduate placement at programme/subject level and connections to curriculum development and planning |

# 1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

## Student feedback utilised systematically

Based on the audit visit, student feedback at UVA is appropriately collected and well processed. The university regularly conducts student surveys to measure their experiences and gather feedback on required changes through the Peppi system. Schools and teachers carry out feedback sessions and their own feedback surveys. Feedback is also collected through student forums. Students' communication channels with academic faculty and study counsellors are well established and operational. Students are reportedly aware of opportunities to contact their student representatives, including those in UVA's board and the student association board, who advocate for them and follow up on issues raised.

Student feedback is discussed by the academic faculty and study programme management in teachers' meetings, and it is considered in the curriculum process and when preparing for the upcoming academic year. The audit team welcomes UVA's recent piloting of AI for analysing student feedback, particularly for cases of cross-disciplinary and qualitative feedback. The academic faculty acknowledges the value of student feedback and perceives it as useful for study programme development. According to the audit visit, teachers have been instructed to select three areas for improvement and three things that are going well, based on feedback.

Students receive regular feedback on their feedback through student representatives, programme management or academic faculty. Based on the audit visit, teachers communicate the feedback received to students in the following year. Students are clearly aware of the changes implemented because of their feedback, either from the academic faculty or their peers. During the audit visit, students mentioned that their feedback had led to, for instance, the introduction of flexible and transdisciplinary study pathways, switching from end-of-course feedback to mid-course feedback, and running popular courses more frequently. According to the visit, teachers and students can also give feedback on support services on a regular basis through surveys. Student perspectives on support services and guidance are debated at student forums jointly with the UVA administration.

The good feedback culture of UVA is appreciated by both those who give and receive it. While students, teachers, staff members, external stakeholders and leadership are committed into the strong feedback culture, the audit team recommends that the university includes a more detailed description of the student feedback collection and utilisation process to the quality management manual. This would involve when and how students give graduate-level feedback, who is involved in designing the questionnaire, who delivers the survey, how feedback is collected, who is involved in analysing the received feedback, to whom the feedback is reported, and how feedback is communicated to graduates. In a few cases, the communication of feedback-on-

feedback could be further improved so that students better understand the quality culture.

Student feedback has a tangible impact on the study programmes at all levels, from undergraduate to doctoral. Along with the programme self-assessment tool, it is used to monitor and evaluate the degree programmes, especially bachelor's programmes. UVA uses national surveys to monitor the employment of master's and PhD graduates. It wants to ensure that students' competences remain relevant and up to date in terms of societal challenges, labour market needs and research results to address these challenges.

In addition to internal feedback mechanisms, UVA has a strong focus on external feedback encompassing international accreditations and benchmarks in developing its programmes. According to the self-assessment report and audit visit, UVA's education strategy is that all its study programmes have at least one international accreditation. Based on the audit visit, accreditations have contributed to the introduction of curriculum maps in programme design and planning and of the Assurance of Learning (AoL) tool to measure student learning achievements. The audit team encourages UVA to continue to use the results of accreditations in the development of study programmes and harmonisation of common procedures.

# 1.4 The HEI’s examples of successful enhancement activities

## - Högskolans självvärdering

### Curriculum maps & Assurance of Learning (AoL): Establishing a systematic framework for confirming ILO achievement

As part of its continuous improvement and work with international accreditations, many programmes now utilize curriculum maps in programme design and planning, and AoL to measure student learning achievements. The mapping exercise requires programme managers and teachers to indicate where ILOs and specific competencies are introduced (I), reinforced (R) and mastered (M), as well as where they are measured. This has produced the following enhancements:

- Programme managers and their faculty have greater clarity about the role of each course in supporting programme ILOs
- Programmes can see where the achievement of programme ILOs is occurring, or not, which is used to identify continuous improvement actions
- Education culture: Greater focus in discussions (between teachers, and with students) on learning, quality, and continuous improvement.

### Teaching allocation tool to support work planning and teacher wellbeing

A standardized teaching workload allocation tool has been developed that gives deans and programme managers an improved overall view of the teaching resources allocated to each programme, increasing transparency and harmonizing practices related to teaching resource allocation. The hourly allocations are based on a standardized formula that considers the course size, student numbers, whether it is a new course, and the mode of delivery. These totals are then entered into the formal work planning system (CATS) for approval by superiors. This has led to the following enhancements:

- Greater transparency and perceptions of fairness in workload distribution
- Greater visibility and compliance regarding how allocations align with collective bargaining agreements
- Helped to prevent teaching faculty stress and burnout.

### Finnish before Finland

UVA is attracting a growing number of international students. UVA recognizes that the international students need to acquire basic skills in Finnish early on, in order to find employment

and stay in the region. To cater to this demand, the Language Centre Linginno has created a beginner-level, 2-ECTS self-study Finnish course that international students can take fully online during the summer before their studies begin. The course has been successful in the following ways:

- The course connects the students to the university and helps them commit to their studies prior to arriving in Finland. Many students also reported that they have found friends during the course which supports the integration process.
- The course alleviates a significant amount of the pressure of beginner-level Finnish teaching in the fall.
- The course has proven increasingly popular, with more than 170 enrollments for the summer of 2024.

## Flipped learning to support flexible online learning and interactive classroom experience

UVA supports teaching innovations and encourages teaching faculty to experiment in curriculum design and delivery. A good recent example was a university-wide initiative to engage BSc teaching faculty in a programme of flipped learning (6 ECTS) in order to adopt more learner-centered teaching methods in large BSc courses. The positive enhancements were:

- Positive feedback from students on learning and flexibility
- Greater student engagement in classroom sessions on campus
- Teacher exchange about their experiences that outcomes on student learning that were published in a handbook
- Encouragement of other teaching faculty to adopt other kinds of new pedagogical approached.

# 2 HEI promotes impact and renewal

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

*Evaluation area II assesses the procedures used to manage and improve societal engagement, strengthen the impact of HEI's research, development, and innovation as well as artistic activities, and support an innovative organisational culture.*

Based on the audit team's evaluation, evaluation area II is at the level *good.*

The audit team identified the following strengths and recommendations:

**Strengths**

- UVA's diverse and vibrant cooperation with the industry in the Ostrobothnia region is based on ecosystem thinking and the regional heritage. The university benefits from the strong industry and work communities in the area.
- External stakeholders are involved in UVA's activities at many levels, from board membership, advisory board, and joint research steering groups to planning and implementation. UVA's research work is deeply connected to the industry and society.
- UVA combines private and public research activities.

**Recommendations**

- UVA should strengthen the systematic use of quantitative and qualitative metrics to monitor and enhance its societal engagement and impact in the short and long-term.
- UVA would benefit from greater involvement of small and medium-size enterprises, which would broaden its societal engagement and impact.
- Sustainable development activities should be integrated into UVA's quality management system to drive sustainable operation and outcomes. Indicators for societal engagement and impact should be more integrated with other quality management system indicators and with the UVA Strategy 2030.

# 2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

## - Högskolans självvärdering

UVA's profile is based around sustainable business, energy and society, a vision that emphasizes solutions to global challenges, and a mission that focuses on both the needs of society and the sustainable development of business. The University binds societal goals to the university's strategy, strategic development programs, the university's goal-oriented management, and the planning and evaluation of operations and faculty. These focus education, research, and innovation as well as internationalization, including knowledge dissemination, collaboration, innovation, and development actions.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on those that reflect UVA's position as a business-oriented, multi-disciplinary research university located in the Nordic´s leading cluster of energy companies (Table 1), act as strategic frameworks for the university's societal interaction and impact. Further guidance is provided by the United Nations' Principles of Responsible Management Education (UN PRME) and by recommendations from audits and accreditations. In addition, UVA is working towards the Finnish Universities Rectors' Council UNIFI's Theses on Sustainable Development and Responsibility (2020).

### The key Sustainable Development Goals at the University of Vaasa

| | |
|---|---|
| SDG 7 | Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all |
| SDG 8 | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |
| SDG 9 | Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation |
| SDG 11 | Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable |
| SDG 12 | Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns |
| SDG 16 | Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels |

The goals of societal interaction and impact are managed by the rectorate, the deans and unit directors, in accordance with the university's management system. The University has an

International Advisory Board, whose task is to act as a group that guides and supports activities towards both scientific and societal impact. UVA's plan for impact and engagement is featured in the UN PRME Progress Report– University of Vaasa (2022).

The University reports societal impact to its Board. UVA also reports to the Ministry, who monitor the development of the results and impact goals towards the four-year agreement. The University monitors its operating environment via continuous interaction with stakeholders and higher education, science and innovation policy reports. It also monitors stakeholders' views, as well as the University's reputation and visibility through feedback, reports and media monitoring. The feedback is utilized in the planning of operations. The operational environment data is gathered and analyzed for the rectorate and management team by the service units: finance, research services, education and student services, marketing and communications.

Based on these analyses, the university monitors its key societal impact objectives and designs the measures to achieve them through deliberations involving members of the university's management team and representatives from academic units. The societal impact processes include strategic stakeholder engagement, the use of multidisciplinary research platforms to connect the university and the business community, the use of research, development and education activities as examples of societal impact, diversified science communication, and alignment with the strategic sustainability impact goals.

UVA also seeks to develop a more structured way of capturing its societal impact. To that end it is engaged in the Business School Impact System (BSIS) which offers a systematic approach of recording and analyzing institutional impact on society. UVA participates in societal impact rankings. In the THE Impact Rankings (2024), and aligned with its profile and mission, UVA is ranked 201-300 globally for SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 13: Climate action, and SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| Strategic approach: target setting, monitoring, and rewarding for societal impact are visible and clearly communicated in UVA strategy | Awareness of the university's many societal impacts among its stakeholders should be further translated into milestones and metrics to drive future activities |
| Close connections to external stakeholders for proactive monitoring of the operational environment | Diversify funding sources to enhance societal impact, including the roles that the research platforms play in promoting societal impact |
| Societal engagement and impact integrated into evaluations: UVA includes societal and scholarly impact into evaluation processes at institutional and individual level | Establish an institutionalized, visible framework for UVA's Industry-University collaboration (e.g., internships, project work, thesis collaboration) |

# 2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

**Goals and indicators for societal engagement are in place**

UVA's revised 2030 strategy encompasses the societal impact of research and education. It serves as the foundation for the vision and mission of the university which, along with its strategy, have been organised around a relevant and tangible core, sustainable business, energy and society. According to the audit visit, UVA is extremely important for the Ostrobothnia region. It acts as an anchor, driver and dynamo for the region. The region operates in a triple-helix model, with the university, government and industry working together.

UVA developed societal engagement and impact strategic frameworks using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). In its strategic plan for impact and engagement, UVA has defined the steps towards reaching the sustainability priorities and objectives set for 2030. Based on interviews and the strategic plan, UVA considers societal engagement and impact holistically. Sustainability is seen as a horizontal layer throughout all activities driving UVA's impact and is well presented in its strategic plan for impact and renewal. According to the audit visit, these include ecosystem and partnerships, commercialisation, intellectual assets management, education, and competence development. According to the audit team, UVA's sustainability framework based on these horizontal layers is well established and has a positive impact on the university's societal impact.

At the leadership level, the goals of societal engagement and impact are integrated to the management system. According to the self-assessment report, the management system is led by the board, rectorate, deans and unit directors. UVA reports on its societal impact to its board. UVA also has an International Advisory Board, whose task is to guide and support scientific and societal impact. According to the audit visit, schools and degree programmes can also have their own advisory boards. Involving external stakeholders, monitoring operations, collecting feedback from industry and follow-up reporting tied to the Ministry of Education and Culture provide a good management framework to steer the societal impact of the university's activities. Committing to a sustainable future, pursuing carbon neutrality and the principles of internationalisation and inclusion outline a clear long-term strategic intent for UVA.

The strategic plan for impact and engagement defines measures and key indicators, but not all of them have measurable goals. The audit team recommends setting strategic goals for key sustainable development dimensions, such as economic, social and environment, and integrating them into the UVA 2030 Strategy. This would help to ensure a strategic approach to sustainability. The strategic plan for societal engagement and impact in the medium and short term could be used as a road map for achieving strategic goals and its monitoring would be helpful in decision making. According to the audit visit, UVA's short-term goals serve the long-

term goals. The audit team recommends, in order to monitor such development, attention should also be paid to the monitoring of short- and long-term societal impact, including quantitative and qualitative metrics. According to the audit visit, UVA has also evaluated its economic impact. The audit team recommends better monitoring of student employment, in particular of international students, in industry and society in the region. This is critical for the long-term societal and regional impact of UVA.

During the audit visit, the audit team observed that there was only a limited summary of the CO2 calculation available and there was only one person who knew about the calculations. It is critical to integrate sustainable development into the quality system of UVA to ensure the quality, communication, and efficiency of the operation. The audit team recommends implementing a systematic way of controlling and tracking CO2 to manage the environmental impact of UVA's operation and research results. Such activities should also be continuously communicated to the UVA community and externally.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA's service units collect and analyse operational environment data for the rectorate and the management team. Based on these operational environment analyses, UVA monitors its key societal impact objectives and plans measures to achieve them. This is done through discussions between UVA's management team and academic units. The audit team recommends that strategic decision-making would benefit from a more balanced approach to strategic, tactical and operational goals and key performance indicators, considering the economic, social and environmental impacts of sustainability.

# 2.2 Research, development and innovation activities as well as artistic activities with impact

## - Högskolans självvärdering

### Targets, goals for impact and follow-up

UVA has outlined research objectives in its strategic plans: increasing external funding, publishing impactful research, promoting interdisciplinary research, engaging external stakeholders, aligning research with the UN SDGs, and strengthening its research platforms. The implementation of the strategic plan, including the monitoring and evaluation of impact, is the responsibility of the rector and a dedicated vice rector for research, and the deans and platform directors at unit level.

UVA regularly evaluates the quality of its research, the research environment, and the conditions for conducting research. Research excellence is included in UVA's strategy, and is embedded in university- and school- level research evaluation criteria, tenure track and progression criteria, and research group evaluation criteria (RAE  2023). UVA has signed the DORA declaration, which seeks to improve the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated. It also has committed to the CoARA principles for advancing responsible assessment of research.

The annual reporting indicators for research include the number of PhDs, the amount and quality of scientific publications, international mobility of researchers, scholarly and societal impact, and external research funding. Publications, scientific tasks, and conferences are reported to the SoleCRIS research database. The university also collects annual data on employees' societal impact and engagement activities. All research project applications and grants are reported via a project management system (Thinking Portfolio). Information from these systems form the basis of UVA's business intelligence system (PowerBI) allowing UVA to create reports and forecasts.

To promote faculty engagement in societal impact activities, UVA gives out annual awards for Societal Impact and the Science Communicator of the Year Award. UVA launched an initiative 'Mission Possible' to showcase the positive societal impact of UVA research, including a platform for improved science communication activities. The 'Mission Possible' initiative includes a dedicated website in both Finnish and English where articles, news, events and learning resources connected to UVA's impactful research are presented. The site includes some of the societal 'impact cases' that were submitted as part of the university's research evaluation, RAE 2023.

The key accreditation bodies that UVA works with all include sustainability and positive societal impact as one of their key criteria.

## Innovation activities

UVA has established the Innovation and Ecosystems team in order to strengthen its research innovation activities and commercialization. The team identifies new ideas and research for commercialization, spars entrepreneurs and promotes co-creation across disciplines. It also cooperates with the innovation and entrepreneurship actors in the region. West Coast Startup was established by the University with VAMK Vaasa University of Applied Science to offer coaching for student entrepreneurs. A two-phased incubator programme and group mentoring in partnership with Demola also provide opportunities for students to solve industry challenges. UVA runs the European Space Agency's Business Incubator (ESA BIC) jointly with Aalto University. UVA also organizes workshops to raise awareness about research commercialization and familiarizing researchers with different IP approaches.

## Open and responsible science

The university has implemented a code of conduct policy promoting open science, ensuring high-level research in accordance with ethical principles, and establishing clear guidelines and procedures for handling research misconduct. UVA abides by The Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland 2023, Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. It is committed to the ethical principles of the humanities, social sciences and behavioural sciences in all its operations and applies the principles of the European Charter and Code for Researchers as well as the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. The Graduate School arranges courses on these topics for doctoral students as a part of their researcher training. The dedicated Research Integrity Advisor is available for consultation about research integrity issues.

The UVA Research Council, chaired by the Vice Rector of Research, is responsible for developing research practices and infrastructure. The Council is supported by the Research Services unit. It monitors and develops the university's scientific activities, the practices of research ethics, good scientific practice, open science, research communication and impact of research and innovation activities. There are committees and working groups for each of these core areas – Science Committee, Research Ethics Committee, Publishing Committee, Research Infrastructure Working Group and Steering Group for Open Science – that report to the Research Council.

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| Opportunities to collaborate with industry and the third sector in multidisciplinary research, driven by active ecosystem engagement | Refining the criteria, measurements and reporting requirements for research impact at university and individual level, as well as researcher training |

| | |
|---|---|
| Number and quality of scientific publications, including citations and international co-publications: RAE 2023 revealed that many UVA research groups are at a high international level, and international rankings place UVA among the top in Finland | Strengthening international research collaboration, with a focus on sourcing competitive external research funding from EU funding instruments |
| Responsible evaluation of research, as reflected in the inclusion of both scholarly and societal impact criteria at university and individual level | Ramp-up innovation and start-up incubation activities for researchers and students together with partners |

# 2.2 Research, development, and innovation activities and artistic activities with impact

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

### Research is deeply connected to industry and society

UVA has adopted the ambition of becoming an internationally recognised, high-impact research university. According to the self-assessment report, the university has outlined research targets in its strategic plans: increasing external funding, publishing impactful research, promoting interdisciplinary research, engage external stakeholders, align research with the UN SDGs, and strengthen its research platforms. The implementation of the strategic plan, including the monitoring and evaluation of impact, is the responsibility of the Rector and a dedicated Vice Rector for Research, and of the deans and research platform directors at unit level.

UVA's research and cooperation activities are organised in the research platforms Vebic, Digital Economy and InnoLab, which are cross-disciplinary and connected to regional industry and global needs and trends. This is a promising approach to support university's closer engagement with the surrounding society and its impact in practice. According to the audit visit, UVA's board monitors the activities of the research platforms and their cooperation with schools.

UVA engages in broad and continuous industrial and regional cooperation based on joint ecosystem thinking. The cooperation focuses on regional heritage and strong industry and work communities. It is well harnessed in the building of a foundation for long-term development, research cooperation and innovation. During the audit visit, various ways of involving different stakeholders, including industry, in joint research projects at different stages were discussed. The audit team concluded that stakeholder collaboration is one of UVA's critical strengths and should be maintained in the future. The team also found that research and project work are deeply connected to industry and society.

### Research excellence is at the core of UVA's strategy

Based on the Quality Management Manual, the university's objectives for the quality of research are to support the strategic goals of the UVA and to ensure that research and innovation activities are impactful, high quality and responsible. The Research Council is responsible for the quality control of research outcomes by applying peer review methods. UVA Research Platforms operate in extensive cooperation with partners and the public sector. Several vital actors are responsible for high-quality and impactful research at the university: the Vice-Rector for Research, the Management Group of the Graduate School, Research Groups, Research Platforms, and others. Key stakeholders are involved in research planning and the implementation of research activities.

Research excellence is at the core of UVA's strategy. It is also embedded in university- and school-level research evaluation criteria, tenure and progression criteria and in the external research assessments of research groups (RAE 2015 and 2023). According to the self-assessment report, UVA regularly evaluates the quality of its research, the research environment, and the conditions for conducting research. The evaluation of tenure researchers is based on the tenure track criteria and annual development discussions guided by the appointment committee and personnel services staff. According to the self-assessment report, as well as the audit visit, research is assessed based on peer review, the number of PhDs, the amount of external research funding, the amount and quality of scientific publications, the international mobility of researchers and the scholarly and societal impact. These are collected in the Solecris research management system.

Performance excellence and building UVA's profile and brand create a strong driving force for creating a network of internal and external researcher communities. This is essential for open science and research quality. A combination of private and public research activities creates great opportunities for joint research activities with external stakeholders and the practical results of the research activities contribute to the evaluation of the university's outcomes.

## The Research Council monitors research ethics and open science

The Research Council is responsible for the quality control and development of research, doctoral training and innovation activities. It monitors and develops publication activities, research funding, research cooperation, and the quality management of research projects. It also monitors and develops research ethics, good scientific practice and open science practices.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA has implemented a code of conduct policy promoting open science, ensuring high-level research in accordance with ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research, and establishing clear guidelines and procedures for handling research misconduct. According to the audit visit, the research ethics course is compulsory for doctoral researchers. UVA is transparent about the open science principles and approach, as the relevant information is publicly available on its website. The audit visit found that open science is a key priority at UVA. It is also appreciated by funders and industry, although sometimes IP agreements have to be negotiated. UVA has also signed the DORA declaration, which seeks to improve the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated. It has also committed to the CoARA principles for advancing the responsible assessment of research. The audit team recommends that systematic procedures for ensuring the responsible conduct of research be included in the Quality Management Manual.

The strength of industry in the region may lead to a situation where most of the research at UVA is tied to short-term demand-based activities and subjects. The university has excellent practices to showcase the positive societal impact of research, while creating inclusive communities and reinforcing networking in the region. These include the Mission Possible programme, Vaasa future festival, Energy Week, Science Festival and Science Day. According to the audit visit, UVA could

be even more visible within and outside the region. Many of the challenges of today and tomorrow require a multidisciplinary and future-oriented approach in research. The research activities of the UVA could be strengthened by increasing multidisciplinary and future-oriented research. The university also needs to ensure a balance between its short and long-term research activities.

# 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## Diversity and inclusiveness supporting renewal

Building on its core values of community, courage, and responsibility, the university actively promotes equality and well-being on campus and across the community. Faculty, staff and students are represented in all decision-making bodies, ensuring the consistency of the Mission and objectives with the voice and expertise of the whole community. Gender equality and the integration of international personnel and students into the UVA community are essential for UVA's objectives in social sustainability. The university's performance and progress in diversity, equality and inclusiveness as well as its operating culture are reviewed via biennial workplace well-being surveys. A new internal networking and communication channel Viva Engage will enable more low-threshold idea sharing and connecting with others

As part of an extensive campus development project, UVA has modernized its workspaces to accommodate new ways of working (e.g., collaboration and cross-boundary team working, use of technology). Most university functions are located on the same campus within walking distance, which contributes to easy daily interactions.

## Innovative culture via international mobility and multidisciplinary collaboration

As a part of the university's internationalization strategy, members of staff are encouraged to participate in international conferences, staff exchanges and assignments abroad during distinct phases of their careers. UVA also participates in international programmes such as Erasmus+ and Fulbright. There is a considerable amount of outgoing and incoming staff mobility, both in terms of academic research and teaching faculty and professional service staff. Equally, UVA welcomes visitors to strengthen teaching and research, international cooperation and societal impact. UVA has a long history of inviting part-time, international professors. The new professors of practice also bring in high-level practical expertise and societal knowledge.

UVA's multidisciplinary research environment enables researchers from various fields to work together to find solutions to complex problems. UVA actively encourages collaboration among researchers and faculties across different disciplines and research groups. The multidisciplinary research platforms (VEBIC, Innolab, Digital Economy) serve as an integral tool in the transformation and renewal of the University's operations with the goal to combine strong disciplinary knowledge with prevailing global trends.

## Alumni engagement

The university recognizes the importance of alumni engagement and involves alumni in activities such as mentoring programs, fundraising and marketing through e.g. alumni career stories. Alumni also actively contribute to UVA operations by sharing their expertise as guest lecturers and experts, and act as reputation ambassadors. They are reached through newsletters and events providing opportunities for networking and engagement. Alumni are also one of the key target groups for the university's social media including the LinkedIn group "Alumni of Univaasa." After completing a master's degree, a UVA student can apply for an alumni study right for open university studies or normal degree courses to supplement the degree. Additional activities such as regular 'Home coming' days and inviting UVA staff to meet up with alumni living abroad are under preparation.

## Cooperation with national and international networks

The University is engaged in several international partnerships and networks to support the renewal of its culture. In managing networks, potential partners are reviewed to ensure the institutions' common interests, long-term commitment, and alignment with UVA's strategy. Criteria based on national and international rankings (e.g., Times Higher Education) and accreditations (e.g., AACSB) are also applied. Of the key networks, the EUNICE alliance membership seeks to strengthen educational and research collaboration on a European level. Engagement with networks such as HERMES and GBSN via the national Global Pilot initiative supports UVA's members to connect globally. The membership in multiple Nordic networks, such as Norek, Nordtek and Nordlys, offer another framework for student and staff exchange.

The University has signed student and staff exchange agreements with about 160 partners in nearly 50 countries. The students' exchange destination interests are followed up on a yearly basis and agreements are scrutinized based on the students' behavior. UVA's commitment to the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education ECHE represents a benchmark In European collaboration. Partnership agreements are reviewed before a possible renewal.

Engagement in international accreditations allow UVA to review its practices and share good practices with external peers for development. For example, the HRS4R development process (the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment) is used as a tool for advancing a working environment that is conducive to research, embraces diversity and supports the career development of all personnel.

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| As a relatively small university with a low hierarchy and everyone based on one compact campus, wellbeing results and external evaluations highlight collegiality as a strength of UVA's operating culture | Develop a more structured approach towards diversity, equality and inclusiveness (DEI) activities to support the greater inclusion of international faculty in decision-making bodies |

Inclusive communication via regular briefings and information events in both Finnish and English. Regular meetings among university management and student representatives

Opportunities for stakeholder engagement via a strong regional ecosystem and membership in high-quality international networks

Work more closely with alumni, including a review of how technology and social media can be utilized to improve engagement

Develop a more integrated approach towards developing strategic partnerships, including a CRM system and institutionally harmonized forms of collaboration

## 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

### - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

UVA carries out actions aimed at establishing innovation and ecosystems that support cultures and practices at the university and in the wider society. These are excellent ways of promoting a culture of creativity and innovation that contribute to the societal impact of research and education. UVA's culture reflects a strong sense of community and belonging.

According to the audit interviews, UVA has a strong focus on sustainability and the courage to do things differently. Examples include the installation of a new energy system as part of the renovation of the UVA campus, which also led to more efficiency in the use of space. During the audit visit, many interviewees emphasised activities related to the discovery and encouragement of new ideas and research results, commercialisation and interaction with entrepreneurs, and the promotion of multidisciplinary cooperation.

Vaasa has a total of six higher education institutions. According to the audit visit, cooperation between UVA and Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) will be stepped up in the future. For example, the cooperation with VAMK and other higher education institutions in Vaasa includes establishment of the West Coast Startup to offer coaching for student entrepreneurs. These are great ways to create a problem-solving culture that supports the societal impact of UVA's research and education, while helping and encouraging students to find and create jobs. The audit visit also found that the region has a competence committee and other regional programmes. The culture of the UVA community is reflected in the different activities carried out which aim to share best practices and to reward, support and motivate people in their studies and research.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA is engaged in several international partnerships and networks to support the renewal of its operating culture. The audit visit confirmed that the university is an important partner in the region's ecosystem and EU projects. It is a member of the EUNICE Alliance, and participates in HERMES, GBSN (Global Business School Network) and several Nordic networks. UVA has signed student and staff exchange agreements, e.g., Erasmus agreements, with about 180 partners in nearly 50 countries. Engagement in international accreditations allows UVA to review its practices and share good practices with external peers for development. The KiVANET network, LITO (Basic Business Studies) courses and national research schools were also frequently mentioned during the audit visit.

The strong heritage of the Ostrobothnia region's industry and community serve as an inspiration and practical foundation for sustainable development at UVA. The university is strengthening its position as a business-oriented, multidisciplinary research university in a region with a leading cluster of energy companies and food industry. This provides a practical strategic framework for UVA's societal engagement and impact that is well-connected to society.

Projects implemented together with industry take place mostly in collaboration with large enterprises. According to the audit visit, companies in the region have donated professorships to UVA. That cooperation is mainly with large enterprises is understandable given the region's industrial ecosystem. The audit team recommends that UVA also engage with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to support future growth in the region and at national level. According to the audit visit, the growth of the SME sector has already been successful in the Vaasa region.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA has recognised the importance of alumni engagement and involved alumni in activities. According to the audit interviewees, UVA still has unused potential to increase the participation of alumni as guest lecturers in education and research activities. However, university alumni were satisfied with the cooperation and the number of alumni messages they received. The self-assessment report also found that after completing the master's degree, a UVA graduate can apply for an alumni study right for open university studies or degree courses free of charge for one academic year. The university could make more use of technological solutions and social media, in particular LinkedIn and apps used by the younger generation, to further improve its alumni engagement.

UVA is still in the process of developing procedures for managing and updating stakeholder relations and cooperation networks. According to the self-assessment report, the university is developing a holistic approach to the development of strategic partnerships, including a CRM system and institutionally harmonised forms of cooperation.

# 2.4 The HEI’s examples of successful enhancement activities

## - Högskolans självvärdering

### Adoption of holistic and responsible criteria in research evaluations

UVA periodically evaluates its research activities via invited international panels of independent scientific experts in order to strengthen the quality of research internationally, to advance the scholarly and societal impact of research, and to further develop the research environment. The most recent research assessment exercise (RAE 2023) evaluated the research environment, research cooperation and funding, publications, and scientific activities including societal impact. In addition to the CWTS analysis prepared by Leiden University, SciVal analyses on Scopus publications against SDGs were performed for each unit, as well as results from AI-analysis of the themes of open access publications.

Similarly, UVA’s tenure track and progression evaluation criteria cover publications, scholarly impact (e.g. citations), as well as societal impact, which must be demonstrated.

The enhancements via the above include:

- Creation of ‘impact cases’ as a means for research groups to demonstrate impact as part of RAE; these cases were subsequently published on UVA’s main webpage under the ‘Mission Possible’ science communication campaign
- Greater alignment with DORA and CoARA policy and recommendations
- Greater visibility and importance attached to positive societal impact at institutional and researcher level
- Graduate School training on ‘impact through research’ and ‘effective science communication’ for all doctoral students
- Alongside accreditations, UVA is a member of PRME and has entered EFMD’s Business School Impact System (BSIS) as a continued commitment to measuring and reporting impact.

### Creation of research platforms to foster multidisciplinary, innovative and impactful research

In line with UVA’s mission to advance sustainable business, energy, and society, three research platforms were established to address key societal challenges in the areas of energy and sustainable development, digitalization, and innovation. The platforms are each led by a Research Director, who are all part of the UVA Management Group. They have complemented UVA’s strong disciplinary expertise in the following main ways:

- Increased high-quality academic research output and quality;
- Promoted impactful, phenomenon-based and cross-disciplinary research;
- Supported researcher collaboration across subject areas and schools; and
- Stimulated research project development in high-potential areas for external funding from competitive national and international funding bodies
- Example: Via the Digital Economy platform, UVA is home to the international ESA Business Incubation Centre (ESA BIC) Finland Vaasa Site. ESA BIC Finland runs the European Space Agency's business incubator activities in Finland. The ESA BIC network aims to inspire young entrepreneurs to commercialise space-related business ideas.

## 'Vaasa Energy Week': Mission-driven engagement of multiple stakeholders to support innovation, networking and impact

UVA organizes and participates in a number of stakeholder-oriented seminars and events. The most significant is the annual Vaasa Energy Week – Finland's leading international energy conference. Energy Week gathers energy business stakeholders – academics, practitioners and public officials – from all over the world to share information, hear about the latest news and most interesting cases, extend their networks and do business. Energy Week focuses on renewable energies, smart energy, gas energy and energy storage. Topics of interest include digitalization, batteries and storage, circular economy, future smart cities, energy regulation, business and innovation. At Energy Week, UVA is engaged in a variety of forums, either hosting or presenting at seminars and events. This has facilitated several enhancements:

- New project development with new and existing industry and academic partners
- Forum for business, university, city officials and regional development agencies to meet
- Knowledge dissemination between researchers and industry representatives
- Career opportunities for experts and researcher in the energy sector.

## Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Model (CoDoc)

UVA's Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Model (CoDoc) addresses companies' research-based operation, process, and service needs. Within this model, the company partner funds the four-year PhD research with the University. CoDoc covers cooperative funding, scheduling, coaching, and supervision to add value for all partners. With CoDoc, the university is the first in Finland to provide venture capital-funded PhD scholarships.

## Talent Boost activities for talent attraction and retention

The University is coordinating Talent Boost activities in Vaasa. The aim is to facilitate the integration of international degree students into the regional labour market. UVA wants to promote the integration of international talents into Finnish society. All the HEIs in Vaasa jointly organize Talent Forum Vaasa, a recruitment and career event for higher education students.

# 3 HEI enhances quality and well-being

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

*Evaluation area III assesses the functioning and development of the quality system and how the system is used in strategic management. The procedures used to support the competence development and well-being of staff are also assessed.*

Based on the audit team's evaluation, evaluation area III is at the level *good.*

The audit team identified the following strengths and recommendations:

**Strengths**

- The active participation of staff in quality assurance activities demonstrates a high level of commitment to further improving UVA's activities.
- A quality policy, Quality Management Manual and quality governance bodies are in place. Many quality enhancement activities are carried out, such as staff well-being surveys and the involvement of students and external stakeholders in development.
- The responsibilities for developing staff competence and well-being are clearly stated in the Quality Management Manual.

**Recommendations**

- UVA should adopt a more systemic, systematic and strategic approach to the enhancement of the quality management system.
- UVA should build a shared understanding of the meaning of quality, set strategic quality goals and monitor progress towards them regularly. The university should also reflect on quality management and governance structures to further operationalise quality improvement measures at institutional level.
- The development of staff competences should consider the changing and individual needs of staff. In addition, UVA should make sure that the development of staff competence aligns with the university's strategic development priorities.

# 3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## General description of the UVA quality management system

At UVA, the quality system is integral to the management and implementation of the university's strategy. UVA's quality policy serves as a foundation for the university's quality assurance. It defines the university's quality goals, key players in quality management and a participatory quality culture. The quality management system, described in the Quality Management Manual, compiles UVA's principles of quality management, the elements of the continuous improvement culture, the most important guiding regulations, and the most important operational processes and responsibilities. It ensures the quality of UVA's activities, including research, education, and societal impact at institutional, school and education programme levels (Figure 6). The task of the Steering Committee for Quality Management and Accreditations, chaired by the Rector, is to oversee quality monitoring and development at the university.

UVA's quality management is in line with the principle of continuous development according to the European EFQM reference framework. The university's operations are structured using the quality circle, or the PDCA circle – PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT.

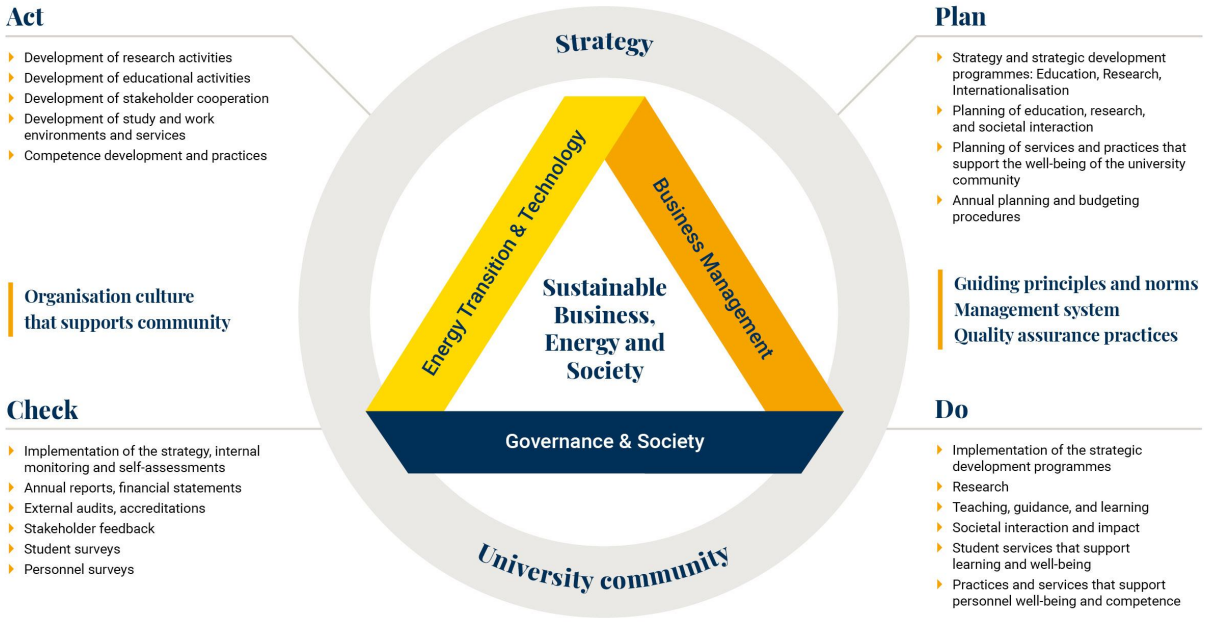



**Figure 6.** The PDCA Model of the UVA Quality Management System

UVA's mission, vision and strategic objectives were developed in a participatory process,

engaging the whole university community. The process is guided by universities' statutory obligations and the strategic targets agreed with the Ministry, which include degree targets, internationalization, and the profiling of research. This is supplemented by the national financial model for universities.

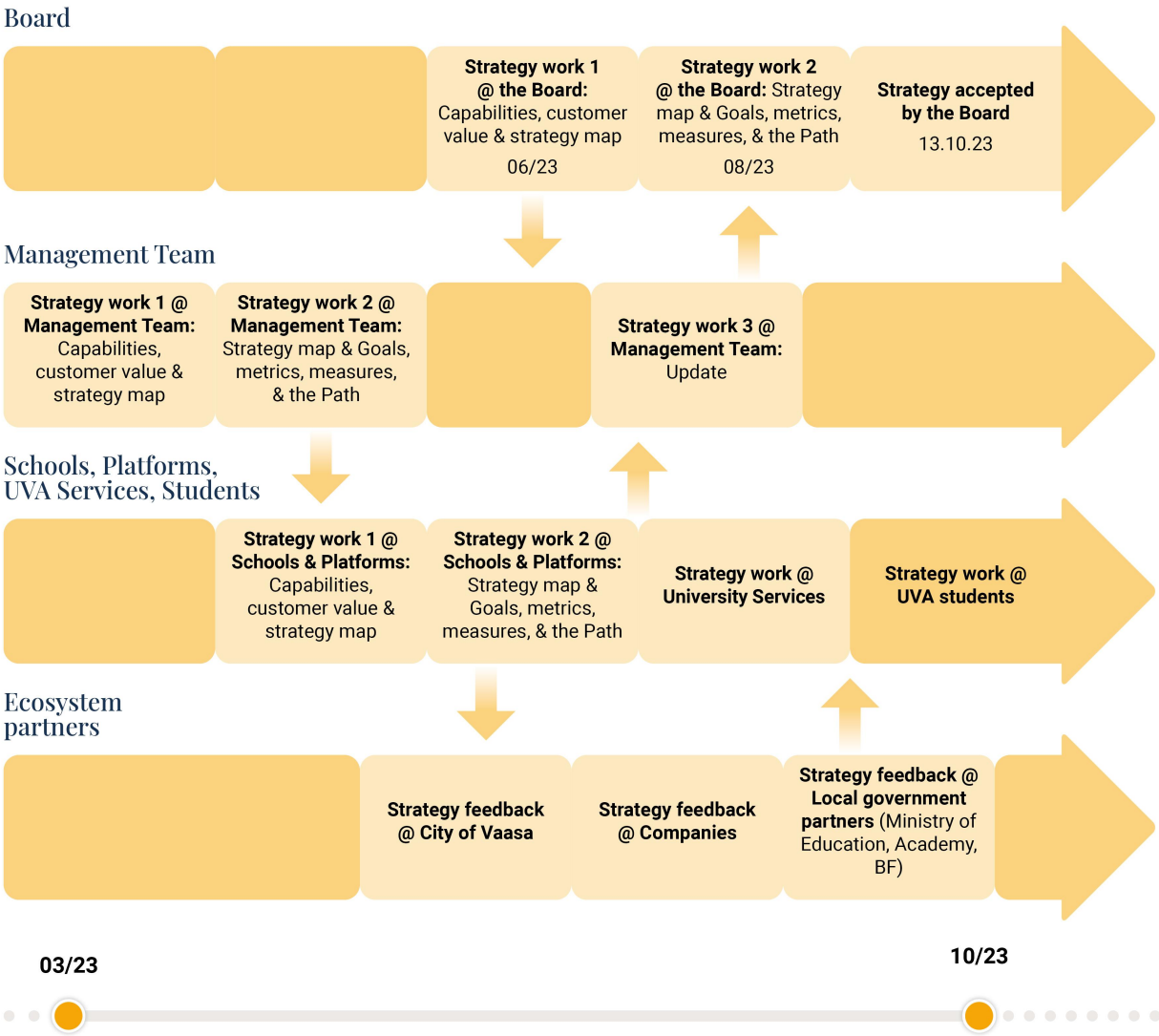



**Figure 7.** UVA strategy review process (2023)

The performance agreement with the Ministry sets out objectives and targets for UVA, emphasizing responsible and open science, research excellence, sustainable development, and societal responsibility. Strategic planning serves as the basis for the annual budgeting and strategic review process, ensuring successful implementation. The information gathered from stakeholders, strategic planning, and resource allocation processes help shape the direction of UVA's activities. UVA also focuses on resourcing its growth plans by continuously improving its resource allocation model and performance-based management system. This includes developing a resourcing model and expanding the use of existing key performance indicators (KPIs) reporting

system.

UVA employs an annual operating and financial planning process (TTS process), which involves consultations between the schools, the service units and the rector, thus ensuring that goals, actions and performance are aligned with strategic objectives. The annual strategy and budgetary review allow schools, platforms, and services to report on goal achievement and plans for the next year, ensuring alignment with UVA's strategic goals.

UVA engages different stakeholders in its strategic planning and management. The university bodies have representation from all groups in the university community, with a variable composition in Education and Research Councils. In addition to members of the university community, the Board engages external stakeholders. The bodies and representations are featured in Table 2.

| | UNIVERSITY COLLEGIUM | UNIVERSITY BOARD | EDUCATION COUNCIL | RESEARCH COUNCIL | SCHOOLS' MANAGEMENT GROUPS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students** | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2* | 3 |
| **Professsors** | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| **Teaching and research staff Other personnel** | 5 | 2 | 7 | 9** | 3 |
| **External members** | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | 15 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 9 |

* including undergraduate and graduate students
** including deans and platform directors

**Table 2.** Stakeholder representatives on university bodies

The bodies provide a platform for faculty and staff to contribute to UVA's strategic direction. The rectorate and the deans have regular meetings with the student associations, and student representatives sit on all the main decision-making bodies of UVA. Student Forum, chaired by the Vice Rector of Education, gathers the student union and student associations with university lead and student services for regular discussions. Alongside the international science networks, input from regional and local stakeholders (local municipal government, city bodies, employment agencies, industries, employers and interest organisations) is used in various ways. External stakeholders are represented on the UVA Board, UVA International Advisory Board, Programme-level Advisory Boards and the research platforms.

**Strengths** **Enhancement areas**

Quality management system is designed to promote and incentivize continuous improvement throughout the institution

Quality management system provides a clear framework, including roles and responsibilities, for coordinating quality management activities

The quality assurance actions in the university, school and programme level are steered towards UVA strategic goals

Development of external benchmarking practices to supplement stakeholder input

Aligning the programme-specific quality assurance and good practices to build harmonised, university level quality management practices in all programmes

# 3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

### The Quality Management System supports the profile of UVA

UVA positions itself as an international, business-oriented, and multidisciplinary research university focused on sustainable business, energy, and society. The university aims to become an internationally recognised high-impact research university in order to provide a transformative learner experience and have a positive social impact. Information on UVA's vision and mission is included in the Quality Management Manual and other documents, such as the UVA Strategy 2030. The strategic management of activities at UVA is reflected in the systematic implementation of the university's strategy through the quality management system, which supports the achievement of UVA's strategic objectives related to the core activities and the implementation of its strategy.

UVA has long focused its quality work on the accreditation of study programmes, such as AACSB, EQUIS, EFMD, EDAMBA and ASIIN. The university's quality policy was developed and approved by the University Board in June 2024. It is a part of the Quality Management Manual, by decision of the Rector in June 2024. The quality policy is also publicly available on UVA's website.

There are slightly different versions of the quality policy statements in the Quality Management Manual and the quality policy on the UVA website. There are some discrepancies between the quality policy and the Quality Management Manual. The audit team recommends that UVA ensures that the two documents align. The quality manual needs to be clarified so that it can be separated from the quality policy. In the version on the website, there is a section on the quality policy and a separate section on a quality management and continuous development model. UVA has defined the critical elements of the quality policy (principles, objectives, and responsibilities) and the key elements included in the Quality Management Manual. The audit team recommends further reflection on the Quality Management Manual by including all necessary elements under the quality policy. The quality policy enhances understanding and commitment and thus provides an excellent everyday basis for quality work.

The quality management system covers education, research management and societal engagement activities to ensure quality. The Quality Management Manual covers all aspects of UVA's quality work and thus supports its strategic management. Processes are in place to aggregate data from the information systems for the different decision-making levels at the university. The audit team recommends that data aggregation processes be incorporated as part of the Quality Management Manual and complemented by other data collection procedures. Interviewees during the audit visit also felt that the Quality Management Manual should be more specific and descriptive in terms of processes and responsibilities.

The effectiveness of using information generated by the quality management system could be improved if clear strategic goals for quality work are formulated and later monitored. The UVA Strategy 2030 sets strategic goals for JUFO points, the number of students who graduate, and attracting competitive funding. The strategic plan is in place to support the realisation of the UVA Strategy 2030. The university's strategic objectives for quality improvement would help to organise quality work and decision-making better. The board regularly discusses the achievement of quality objectives. On the other hand, the audit interviewees would like to have more precise quality goals and their measurements. In addition to monitoring its current indicators, UVA could benefit from more systematic monitoring of student and alumni feedback, staff well-being and societal impact. The audit team recommends that UVA consider setting objectives in these areas and monitor their achievement.

## The quality management system includes description of the system, governance and principles

The quality management system of UVA is based on a cycle of continuous improvement (Plan-Do-Check-Act). The system is built to support the university's profile, achieve strategic goals and fulfil its vision. According to the Quality Management Manual, the quality management system's objective is to help ensure that UVA can operate according to its objectives. The manual states that the overall responsibility for the quality of results lies with the Rector. The Rector is responsible for the quality system as a whole and its functionality and reports to the university board. Each employee and student is responsible for the quality of results and activities in their task and role as a part of the university community. Internal and external stakeholder participation in the various stages of continuous development is envisaged.

UVA applies national quality assessments and international accreditations to support quality enhancement. The quality governance bodies include the schools' management group, the educational council, the research council, the research group, the deans, the directors of units, the director of university service, the university management group, and the quality working group. The management group monitors the overall functionality and development needs of the quality management system.  Based on the audit interviews, the work of the committees could focus on internal quality management and its integration with external quality management. The audit team recommends that these quality governance bodies are mentioned in the quality policy.

The audit team recommends that UVA specify principles of continuous development and consider integrating other principles of quality management in the quality policy, such as a process-based approach, evidence-based decision-making, leadership, and engagement of people and others, which would lead to revisiting existing quality management practices, harmonising critical processes, and improving the quality management manual. Thus, such an approach would support the better organisation of the quality management system and its leadership.

According to the audit visit, UVA’s strategy has been developed collaboratively, involving the board and all staff. The strategy is discussed at all board meetings. UVA successfully ensures that staff members recognise the connection between their work and the university’s strategic goals. According to the audit visit, UVA has committed staff who are proud to work for the university. Involvement and participation in quality activities demonstrates a high level of staff commitment and engagement to further improve UVA’s activities. Societal engagement and impact are an integral part of UVA’s activities at institutional and programme level.

# 3.2 Supporting the competence development and well-being of the staff

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## Supporting staff competence development

UVA's staff training and competence development are based on the strategy, annual operating and financial planning process, changes in the working environment and the results of the well-being survey. The collaborative planning of competence and well-being actions involves a work community development plan prepared together with employee representatives.

UVA has a career model with position-specific eligibility and promotion criteria for teaching and research staff that guides faculty development across three different career paths: a tenure track path towards professorship, a path in project and research work, and a teaching-oriented path. Faculty development needs are identified (a) as part of the annual strategy review process between the schools and the rector, and (b) in the evaluation of personal performance and development discussions. All faculty and professional staff receive systematic reviews of their performance as part of their (a) development discussions, and (b) salary reviews. As part of the Finnish University Salary System (USS), grounded in the General collective agreement for universities, both faculty and professional staff are evaluated based on their demand level and personal performance.

UVA encourages staff to participate in courses, seminars and national and international conferences to support their professional development. Internal training covers well-being, management and leadership, working methods, and communication and language skills (eg., Personnel Training). Besides university-level training, schools reserve an annual budget per faculty member and doctoral researcher for conference travel and competence development. Research Services and the Graduate School support competence development in research funding, good scientific practice, open science, and project management. Regular Research Cafés offer information and opportunities for discussion on topical issues.

UVA's Support Network for Teaching and Learning (EDUWASA) enhances the development of teaching skills through consulting, training and co-development. Besides pedagogues, it covers experts in digital teaching and learning, IT experts and mentors within each school. Self-paced online courses on e-teaching and learning are offered in the Howspace virtual environment.

## Recruitment

The recruitment principles and eligibility criteria are based on the University Regulations. Open positions are advertised via many channels, including social media as well as academic and field-

specific portals. In addition to interviews of applicants, assessment by external experts as well as teaching demonstrations provide further input into the selection process. School-appointed nomination committees handle the selection process for Professor, Research Director and tenure track positions.

Since 2014, UVA has participated in the European Commission's quality program HR Excellence for researchers (HRS4R). It received recognition for its efforts in improving researchers' working conditions and career development in spring 2023. The Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) section of the programme pays particular attention to practices related to the recruitment of researchers.

## Occupational Health and Safety

UVA employs an Occupational Health and Safety Committee tasked with assessing the work environment. It identifies disturbances and make proposals for their remediation. Relevant health and safety trainings (e.g. first aid training) are organised based on the work of the committee.

Occupational healthcare is provided by Pihlajalinna and comprises extensive medical care as well as preventive occupational health. Preventive care includes, for instance, workplace surveys and visits assessing working conditions, ergonomical aspects and staff training. Occupational health nurse and physiotherapist services are offered on campus. The occupational health offering also includes work counselling and short-term therapy.

## Equality and wellbeing

An equality plan guides UVA´s development activities on promoting gender equality as well as the statuary obligations stated in the non-discrimination act. The aim is to reinforce an equality-positive atmosphere and effective equality communication among students and personnel of the university.

Actions for the development of accessibility are summarized in the Accessibility plan.

Regular well-being and pulse surveys (in cooperation with the occupational pension company Varma) are key tools for measuring and promoting wellbeing. The results from the surveys are used in planning and carrying out required unit-specific and university-level wellbeing actions.

UVA adopts a workload allocation model that uses a common formula for how to allocate teaching and supervision based on position, course size and anticipated extent of curriculum renewal. These are discussed with teachers before being included in their personal work plans. Contributing to work-life balance, UVA staff benefit from flexible working time arrangements and opportunities for multi-location work. Guidelines for remote work abroad were completed in 2023.

UVA´s annual benefit offers vouchers redeemable at sports and culture venues throughout the country. UVA's sports services provide activities, including (but not limited to) a gym, group

exercises, tennis, and swimming to staff either free of charge or at a discounted price.

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| Career model that provides transparent expectations for eligibility and promotion along each path | Follow-up on individual target setting and quality of development discussion dialogue |
| Induction processes and activities supporting the integration of employees and their families arriving from abroad (including Spouse Programme) | Updating common rules for multilocation and flexible work |
| Staff benefits and brand new, accessible campus facilities on an attractive seaside campus | Digitalization of select parts of the induction process to support information flow and socialization |

# 3.2 Supporting the competence development and well-being of the staff

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

## Staff competences are developed in versatile ways

The responsibilities for developing staff competence and well-being are clearly stated in the quality management manual. The university has transparent procedures for staff recruitment. The manual also states that a plan for competence development is drawn up for each employee in connection with the target and development discussion. According to the staff workshops, supervisors enable and support employee participation in training in accordance with the plan. Annual staff performance assessments, pedagogical training and support staff training are offered through various training courses, such as IT, HR, working methods, communication and language training, and leadership and management training for different levels. According to the audit visit and self-assessment report, there is the opportunity for a particular unit to request tailored courses. Funding is also available to schools for competence development and participation in international conferences and networking.

UVA has functioning procedures in place to identify development needs concerning staff competence and to support the development of this competence. According to the staff workshop, staff can learn from the experiences of others and share their own by participating in conferences, both in Finland and abroad, and collaborating with colleagues. According to the staff, UVA supports and enables pedagogical development, including pedagogical mentors.

UVA offers various pedagogy-related courses in cooperation with various partners. According to the staff workshops, the range of pedagogical courses available varies too much from year to year, making it difficult for good time management planning. Pedagogical courses are extensive and demanding and difficult to complete alongside other work. The staff wanted more permanent and flexible training package that better considers the busy schedules of faculties. They also wanted shorter and more intensive pedagogical courses, which they considered would increase participation rates in pedagogical training. In addition, they wanted pedagogical training to go deeper into specific topics, such as artificial intelligence.

According to the staff workshop, the pedagogy courses offered by UVA take little account of the realities of so-called mass courses, where it is more difficult to implement time-consuming teaching methods. The audit team recommends that staff development is better aligned with UVA’s strategic development priorities and the impacts of UVA’s strategic growth goals also consider in terms of changing needs for staff development.

## Staff well-being is regularly monitored

The staff well-being survey is conducted bi-annually. There is a high staff response rate (85.5%) to the survey. The survey has had the same format for a long time, allowing trends to be traced and forming a sound basis for decision-making. Results of the survey are analysed and feedback on the developmental discussions is gathered. However, according to staff, these results do not always have an impact on the university's well-being activities. The audit team therefore recommends that feedback to staff on the surveys be improved. The occupational health company Pihlajalinna and the occupational pension company Varma have their own survey on health trends.

UVA has systematic procedures to support staff well-being, equality, and non-discrimination. According to the self-assessment report, an equality plan guides the university´s development activities. The aim is to reinforce a non-discriminatory and equality-positive atmosphere as well as effective equality communication among students and personnel. The audit visit found that staff well-being and motivation are important at UVA. Staff are also rewarded for training, projects, and publications. According to the visit, staff feel that their ideas and voices are heard. This shows that UVA is a staff-centred organisation. The development of staff competences and well-being also contributes to staff engagement, involvement, and participation in the quality improvement of the university's activities.

Well-being is explicitly considered at the university and well governed based on strategic processes and management. The audit visit shows that there is a good communal spirit at UVA. Staff pointed out that their work and well-being at work is supported by the various social events organised by the university both formally and informally, at different levels in schools, research groups and teams, such as breakfasts, lunches, school quarterly meetings, Christmas parties, well-being weeks, lunch discounts, guest lectures on stress and conflict management, and harassment. There are also many initiatives to support well-being, such as Smartum vouchers. An Occupational Safety and Health Committee, as mentioned in the self-assessment report, also organises activities to safeguard and increase staff well-being. The self-assessment report also states that UVA has developed and implemented three career pathway models: a tenure track pathway towards professorship, a path in project and research work, and a teaching-oriented pathway. These are well appreciated by staff.

# 3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## Quality system supporting the achievement and enhancement of key functions

UVA has a comprehensive quality system covering all core activities: research, research-based education, and sustainable societal impact. The system is an integral part of its management system, which determines the key institutional goals. The annual operating and financial plan process (see 3.1. for details) is the main tool in setting both quantitative and qualitative targets and monitoring their progress. Each member of the UVA community and its bodies are responsible for carrying out the actions needed to reach the targets as they pertain to their specific areas of responsibility (see the Quality Management site of the university).

UVA carries out systematic risk assessment as part of its annual strategic planning, including maintaining a risk register that is used as part of the annual strategy and budgeting review process (TTS). Financial risk assessment is one core part of the overall risk management process. Financial projections are systematically created that consider different scenarios in state and external funding to assess the potential impact on university operations. As part of the TTS process, the rectors and management group perform an institutional-level (UVA) risk assessment, and the deans perform a school-level risk assessment. This culminates in risks being classified into low/medium/high likelihood of occurring, impact if risk occurred, and severity based on impact and likelihood within a colour-coded risk register. Mitigating actions and responsible parties are identified for each risk. Risk registers are created around the core activities of: Education, Research, Internationalisation, and Impact and Engagement.

The quality system is regularly evaluated both internally and externally through accreditations, research evaluation exercises and other assessments at multiple levels (institutional, school, programme, research group, services). These processes monitor and enhance the quality covering both KPI’s and strategic goals. The system identifies areas of development, allowing UVA to focus on resourcing for growth and quality. The system supports the achievement of objectives set for the core duties and enhances them through resourcing, faculty sufficiency strategy and curriculum management processes.

Evidence speaking to the effectiveness of UVA’s quality system is its performance in a variety of international rankings, accreditations and evaluations. For example:

- UVA is ranked third in Finland in 2023 THE World University Rankings (201-250 internationally), as well as the Shanghai Global Ranking of Academic Subjects (18th internationally), for business administration, and received the highest evaluations for

citations of any Finnish university.

- UVA is ranked 18th in the Times Higher Education (THE) Small Universities Ranking. Among the Nordic universities, UVA is ranked 4th.
- In the THE Impact Rankings (2024), UVA is ranked 201-300 globally for SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 13: Climate action, and SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.
- All three of UVA's international masters programmes in business studies have received the maximum 5 years accreditation from EFMD.
- Business studies is pursuing AACSB accreditation (accreditation visit carried out in April 2024), and the University has started the EQUIS accreditation process. Programmes in the School of Technology and Innovations are either ASIIN, EUR-ACE- or Euro-Inf –accredited.
- The most recent annual study by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research put UVA in first place in its university 'fitness test'. The test is based on how the performance of Finnish universities has changed in recent years (2019-2022). The criteria include student applications, graduations, headcount, student/personnel ratio, publications, publications/faculty, and total costs.

## Stakeholder participation in the quality system and quality culture

Continuous collaborative efforts with staff, students, and external stakeholders ensure that UVA's activities are continuously enhanced and aligned with the needs of industry, society, and the academic community. UVA fosters a participatory quality culture through active and comprehensive stakeholder involvement and representation, both internal and external, through a combination of institutional, and programme-level processes and committees. Development needs are identified by the quality system developed during these processes.

UVA values student input. Students provide feedback, participate in decision-making, engage in practical learning, and contribute to programme design and review. Student representatives are consulted about programme management and the student experience, and review the resulting improvement actions annually. UVA is also working on improving student communication and participation through the Jolla online student portal and new tools, such as Annie Advisor. Students also participate in various activities such as student hackathons, competitions, and mentoring.

| Strengths | Enhancement areas |
| --- | --- |
| Strong link from the strategy to quality assurance. Systematic use of international standards and experts (evaluations, accreditations) against which to benchmark the UVA quality system and receive developmental feedback | Inclusion of all parts of UVA under international (accreditation) standards to help ensure greater harmonization of quality practices and processes |

| | |
|---|---|
| Participatory and inclusive QM processes across core activities and decision-making bodies | Development of a more sophisticated business intelligence system to track and forecast performance across key indicators, and to facilitate more agile organizational responses |
| Comprehensive and balanced use of internal and external QM assessments | Greater emphasis on the student learning experience and graduate placement, especially among the growing population of international, tuition fee-paying students |

# 3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

## The quality management system needs to be further developed

UVA’s quality management system covers its core duties. Many elements of the system are in place, such as the Quality Management Manual, quality policy, and quality governance bodies. According to the audit visit, the system has been mainly based on the accreditation of study programmes. Recently, the university has realised the need to build a more coherent university-level quality management system. The audit visit found that UVA strives to harmonise and systematise the university’s standard practices. The quality management system helps the university to recognise development needs and to enhance its activities in a goal-oriented manner. There was evidence of the functionality and impact of the quality system as regards improving the core duties.

A robust programme-level emphasis on international accreditations is used as a tool for quality enhancement. The outcomes of international accreditations are used to improve the overall quality of work at UVA. However, according to the audit visit, there is room for improvement in quality management. The best programmes work in accordance with the accreditation criteria, but there is a lot of variation between programmes.

Based on the audit visit, the UVA would benefit from establishing a permanent structural unit at UVA to improve the organisation of quality management and enhancement at the university. The unit should be responsible for implementing the quality policy and coordinating and monitoring the daily quality management tasks. From the audit team’s perspective, such a structural unit responsible for overarching quality management activities would provide a holistic approach to quality management and continuous improvement.

Based on the audit visit, the quality management manual is quite general and repeats content in other documents. The audit team recommends that the manual be revised and clarified. The manual could include precise descriptions for key process descriptions and visualisations. They also suggest that UVA organises more quality management activities based on the PDCA cycle at the institutional and unit levels, e.g., on societal impact.

The audit team recommends improving the organisation of UVAs quality management system by describing key processes and responsibilities in more detail. During the visit, the audit team found that reflection on the organisation of quality management is still needed with regard to digitising quality system, visualising the critical quality management processes, and applying data analytics to provide the basis for data-driven decision-making. Access to such data should be given to all relevant parties. Benchlearning could be organised by learning from peer universities in Finland and abroad. UVA could also utilise more quality expertise within the

university, such as professors in the field.

## Quality culture is participatory and open

The quality culture of UVA is participatory and open. According to the audit visit, staff, students and external stakeholders are aware of quality and participate purposefully in enhancing the university's activities. During the audit visit, a strong quality culture was observed at UVA, referring to the collective beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours and practises regarding prioritising and promoting quality as a fundamental basis of its activities. The values of UVA are community, courage and responsibility.

The audit team believes that building a shared understanding of the meaning of quality among staff and students would help to enhance quality work, measurement and improvement at the university. Setting clear goals based on the shared understanding of quality for the diverse activities of UVA, teaching and learning, research, use of research results, and societal engagement and impact, and its systematic monitoring would enhance the decision-making of relevant bodies. These goals should become a part of UVA's overall strategy. This will allow the development of a more systemic approach to quality management and enhancement and the monitoring of the quality level achieved.

Building shared understandings about the meaning of quality and communicating it through different channels will help to further develop the quality culture at UVA. Students particularly welcomed the idea of their further involvement in quality enhancement activities at the university as part of student-centered learning. Doctoral students enthusiastically shared their research work based on which new study programmes or courses could be introduced. This requires organising open discussions with relevant parties on the directions and opportunities for further development in the light of study programmes portfolio revisions and further internationalisation of UVA.

# 3.4 The HEI’s examples of successful enhancement activities

## - Högskolans självvärdering

### Working with international accreditations: Adopting international standards as a benchmark and driver of QM

UVA’s education strategy is to have all its educational offerings under at least one international accreditation. This started with select international MSc programmes in business studies (EFMD accreditation) and has since encompassed programmes in technology (ASIIN), all programmes at all levels (BSc, MSc, PhD, MBA) in business studies (AACSB), and the next goal is the whole university portfolio (EQUIS) by 2026. These support UVA’s QA by adopting international standards, subjecting UVA QA processes to periodical evaluation by international experts, and all involve a multi-stakeholder approach comprising management, faculty, students (and student work), and support services. This has led to the following enhancements:

- UVA’s Programme Management Principles have been formulated out of accreditation experiences and have improved all aspects of programme design, delivery, and outcomes.
- Attraction of high-quality partnerships and prestigious university networks internationally
- Instilled a culture of continuous improvement
- Strong positioning in international rankings that support student and faculty attraction

### Stakeholder participation in UVA Strategy 2030 improves dialogue and engagement

The University’s strategy development process behind its Strategy 2030 incorporated the input of several different key stakeholders throughout 2023, involving faculty, staff, students, the city and industry. Participatory workshops down to research group and service team level involved the whole UVA community.

- The 2023 employee wellbeing survey revealed significant improvements in faculty engagement with and understanding of UVA’s strategic plans. Their understanding of UVA’s strategic choices improved from 3.1/5.0 in 2021 to 3.9 in 2023.
- UVA has strategic partnership agreements as well as diverse partnerships and forms of cooperation with companies,and has engaged a number of prestigious professionals from this process to sit on the International Advisory Board to help steer UVA towards its 2030 vision.

## Continuous improvements to reporting systems to support QM and results orientation

Competitive pressures in higher education, the need for a stronger performance orientation, and the demands of international accreditations and evaluations have all contributed to the need for UVA to enhance its management reporting systems.

As a response, UVA uses Microsoft's Power BI analytics and visualization tool for performance reviews and decision-making based on the latest information. This tool is compatible with several internal data sources (e.g., Excel files, cloud services, local databases), which enables extensive and versatile data utilization. This has produced the following enhancements:

- Reports and metrics are shared with the tool, which promotes collaboration, helps to understand operations better, and improves UVA's ability to track and forecast performance across its key indicators
- Improved UVA's ability to introduce transparent and strategy-aligned target-setting and data-driven decision-making
- Provides UVA with a platform to include progressively more key data into the tool across all its key operations, including future developments that could involve artificial intelligence and more sophisticated business analytics

# 4 HEI as a learning organisation

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

*Evaluation area IV assesses an area selected by HEI where it wishes to receive feedback for the enhancement of its activities.*

UVA selected management of the portfolio of study programmes as evaluation area IV.

The audit team identified the following strengths and recommendations:

**Strengths**

- UVA has established functional feedback practices and systems to support continuous learning and the management of the portfolio of study programmes.
- UVA has a clear rationale and understands the economic implications of renewing the portfolio of study programmes.
- UVA's management and operational administration are aware of further collaboration skills development amongst its faculty staff.

**Recommendations**

- The renewal of the portfolio of study programmes should be well monitored and supported.
- UVA should strengthen the role of its external stakeholders in the development of the portfolio of study programmes.
- UVA should ensure that the newly developed study programmes address crucial societal needs.

# 4.1 Management of education programme portfolio

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## Focus and concrete objectives of the assessment

By the year 2030, the university aims to increase the number of degree students to 7,500 and the share of international students to 35%. The University of Vaasa has proposed to the Ministry of Education and Culture ambitious degree goals for the years 2025 – 2028. By doing so, the university is responding to Finland's goals to increase the proportion of people with higher education and skilled R&D professionals. Achieving the higher degree goals necessitates actions to support smooth and fast study pathways, and a significant increase in the number of students from Finland and internationally. It is important to maintain high quality teaching with available resources.

The management and renewal of the education programme portfolio was selected as a self-assessment area in the Karvi audit because of its importance and complexity. By programme portfolio, we mean our degree programmes for bachelor's and master's degrees. In this self-assessment, we specifically focus on the renewal of the portfolio. In addition to this, we carry out development activities to improve pedagogical development, guidance and supervision, smart digitalization, student recruitment, and marketing.

The objectives of this self-assessment are: i) to describe the required activities and procedures for programme portfolio development; ii) to identify the strengths in the process; and iii) to identify enhancement areas. The self-assessment also includes a bench-learning case.

## The development actions for programme portfolio renewal

The renewal of the programme portfolio includes several simultaneous processes to be managed: i) merging and scaling the programmes and courses to achieve critical mass, ii) developing the curricula to form lean and coherent programmes with synergies between the programmes, and iii) renewing the programme management practices for flexible study pathways and delivery. In addition, we are working on iv) enhanced proactive methods for data-driven growth management) processes for timely and fluent student recruitment and admission.

This development work is carried out in the programmes and schools, in the joint development and decision-making groups for education (KOKE and Education Council), and in the UVA management group. The process is led by the Vice Rector for Education, together with the Deans. The processes are supported by the Education and Student Services.

## Assessment of strengths and enhancement areas

The strategic development programmes have started, and the university community is engaged to them. Quality management approaches facilitate development processes. Faculty and students are committed to ongoing improvement. The faculty and staff is working towards the same goal. The change processes have already started, for example with programme mergers and management structure renewals. To meet the targets, thorough programme and curriculum changes are further required. More exact planning and scheduling are required to coordinate the renewal processes and comply to the university's decision-making procedures.

## Benchlearning

BI Norwegian Business School (BI) in Oslo was chosen as the bench-learning organisation. It is a non-governmental business school that offers bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees to 22,000 students. The University of Vaasa management group conducted a bench-learning tour in December 2023. BI has an education programme portfolio management system in place, as well as uniform programme and course frameworks throughout the school. For the first basic courses, all curricula can use common core content. The Business School bundles related programmes into larger blocks, facilitating the sharing of digital core information for professional studies. The Business School has achieved critical mass and quality by restricting the number of distinct curricula and individual courses. Management responsibilities are organised by education level (BA, MSc, PhD), programme ownership, course ownership, and teaching responsibilities. The lean planning and operating strategy enable the BI Business School to provide a high and consistent quality education to many students. The bench-learning provided the University of Vaasa with significant insight into the synergetic development of degree programmes and their delivery to meet an increasing number of students.

| **Strengths** | **Enhancement areas** |
| --- | --- |
| Faculty, staff and students have a constructive attitude towards change | Enhanced, continuous change management is needed to ensure engagement and commitment to the change |
| Proactive knowledge management has started. Performance objectives are clear and actively lead | Need to continue work to reduce degree programmes' vulnerability and teacher dependency |
| Larger, more effective study modules are being created. The delivery of educational programmes has been improved and proactive modifications have been made. The ability to collaborate has improved. | Need to increase student enrolment to reach ambitious degree targets, which necessitates significant steps. During the phases of putting change into action, the emphasis will be on anticipating student numbers, forecasting, and managing growth. |

# 4.1 Management of the portfolio of study programmes

## - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

## The University of Vaasa prioritises renewing the portfolio of study programmes

UVA has chosen the management and renewal of the portfolio of study programmes as an evaluation area. The university aims to increase the number of bachelor's and master's degree students based on the national objective of expanding higher education. This goal is well aligned with UVA's strategic development. According to the self-assessment report, the process is led by the Vice-Rector for Education and the deans. It is supported by the Education and Student Services. UVA also carried out a benchlearning project with BI Norwegian Business School in the evaluation area. As described in the self-assessment report, the benchlearning provided UVA with significant insight into the synergetic development of degree programmes and their delivery to cater for increasing number of students.

According to the audit visit, the renewal of UVA's degree programmes has a key impact on the efficient use of available resources and the diversification of the students' population. UVA has provided sensible arguments in favour of resource optimisation, as not all existing programmes manage to produce a sufficiently high numbers of graduates. This situation has led to a reduction in UVA's funding in the national performance-based funding allocation model. Similarly, according to the audit visit, the need to account for more diverse students, such as international students and continuous learners, requires the creation of core study programmes with versatile deliverables suitable for multiple student groups.

According to the self-assessment report and the audit visit, programme mergers have been conducted in an inclusive and collaborative manner by engaging students, academic faculty, and programme leaders. Needs and ideas for the portfolio of study programmes are discussed openly and continuously at various levels, i.e., on the Programme Development Committee, in meetings with teachers, students, administrators and in feedback sessions. The academic faculty seems to have sufficient understanding of the interconnections between various study programmes. According to the audit visit, international accreditations have also supported the reform of study programmes. However, staff expressed a need for more sharing of good practices between schools and study programmes.

UVA is committed to preserving and improving its quality, while expanding the study offer. This is achieved through internal budget reallocation from administration towards tenured academic faculty. The increased use of teaching assistants and collaborative teaching in several programmes have good potential as regards maintaining a sufficiently high level of teaching with the growing student numbers. The university's expansion strategy is promising as regards the

employability of its own alumni as teaching and research professionals. UVA focuses on increasing the number of sufficient teaching and research staff if student numbers increase by 30%. The audit team recommends that the same attention be paid to administrative staff as their workload also increases. Enough attention should be paid to ensure that the quality of education is not compromised for the sake of increasing the number of students and graduating time.

## Establishing change management processes and procedures to streamline the work

Based on the self-assessment report, additional materials and the audit visit, the renewal of the study programme portfolio requires a more systemic and systematic approach to managing the change at the university level. Faculty and students have a constructive attitude towards change based on the audit visit. UVA has certain tools for forecasting the growth of student numbers, such as the Programme Development Committee's regular meetings and the real-time dashboard with the key performance indicators. Based on the audit visit, staff is urged to constantly monitor the database for key performance indicators. These tools, however, do not substitute lack of a coherent approach in implementing the change.

UVA is carrying out multiple, simultaneous activities to merge, scale up and renew its study programme. The audit team therefore recommends that the university develops a dedicated change management strategy and implementation plan for monitoring and evaluation activities. UVA should also further develop its process documentation. Process descriptions should streamline the work of renewing the study programmes and support staff understanding of the processes. Such process descriptions would be particularly useful for new employees. According to the audit team, defined processes and procedures should also be conducive to raising greater awareness and a more structured and sustainable engagement among UVA stakeholders in the change management process. Interviewees during the audit visit also expressed a need for guidelines for the different phases of study programmes, such as the life cycle of programmes, planning and budgeting. Staff and students feared that as student numbers increase, the quality of education and teacher well-being will decline.

## Collaborative efforts of academic faculty, students and employers are key

During the audit visit, UVA acknowledged the need to develop collaborative competences among the university community as part of bridging the gap between varying programmes' quality and sharing good practices. Teachers felt it would be a challenging task in the future. During the visit, it was also found that there will be a certain number of hours per course that teachers can devote to it. Teachers should learn pedagogical methods related to how to teach a given content for a given number of students in each number of hours. This also allows managers to monitor better the amount of teaching provided. It was also emphasised during the visit that training on the use of digital technologies for more efficient teaching was beneficial for the growing student-staff ratio and the large share of students studying online or hybrid. Other recommended support

areas are training for delivery of the English-language courses and multicultural skills.

Providing programme managers and academic faculty with guidelines on standardised good practices across various UVA units has also been underscored in order to facilitate the change management process. The audit team recommends closer involvement of students in decision-making on the portfolio of study programmes. According to the self-assessment report, study programme changes are communicated to the students once formulated.

The role of external stakeholders in curriculum preparation should be solidified. During the audit visit, the collected evidence recognises their involvement in UVA's steering bodies and in providing work-related internships and case studies.  According to the visit, the degree programmes' learning outcomes and the labour market expectations in terms of employability are not fully aligned. The audit team therefore suggests that external stakeholders be more closely and practically involved in detailing the competences that UVA study programmes deliver.

UVA has made considerable efforts to review the study programmes and in implementing their plan to increase student numbers. According to audit team, its updated portfolio should address crucial societal challenges. According to the audit visit, the academic faculty recognises the need to develop students' competences in view of present and future societal relevance. The key topics highlighted as useful in the study programmes include digital technologies, responsible use of AI, sustainability, and geopolitics. Focusing on societal challenges has implications for UVA's future work on pedagogy and teaching methods, with flipped learning, learning by doing, simulation exercises, project-based learning and experiments reported as good practices. According to the audit visit and the self-assessment report, international students also get support for their integration through the Talent HUB programme.

# 5 Benchlearning

## - Högskolans självvärdering

## International student recruitment

UVA selected international student recruitment for the target of its benchlearning project to support its goals for internationalisation and a diverse and inclusive community. Jönköping University with its long-term and well-established activities in the area provided an excellent partner for the project.

## Background for choosing the target and partner

In its Strategy 2030, the University of Vaasa (UVA) visions to be an internationally recognised research university, with 35% of its students and faculty being international. The target is to establish international student recruitment as a new, financially self-sustaining function by designing a comprehensive and integrated international student recruitment process. It also involves development of an internationally competitive programme portfolio with enhanced support for international students as future specialists to integrate into the regional labour market and society.

Jönköping University (JU), with internationalisation as a strategically important priority, has a multicultural environment with 2,400 international students from about 120 countries. It has a well-established and successful process for international student recruitment. Approximately 50% of the students and faculty at JU Business School are international. Likewise, JU has well-established international programmes, with education in English at all levels from Pathway Education to postgraduate level. JU's profile is also close to the UVA profile. Their International Business School and School of Engineering represent institutions and scientific areas that are equally strong at the University of Vaasa.

## Aims of the project

The aims of the benchlearning consisted of:

- comparing the aspects of strategies for internationalisation and international student recruitment
- learning about the key aspects of JU's successful international programmes
- learning about the key aims, targets, benchmarks, and procedures of JU's international student recruitment activities
- learning about organisational engagement behind JU's activities

- sharing best practices, and
- discussing the universities' challenges in the area.

## Process and timeline

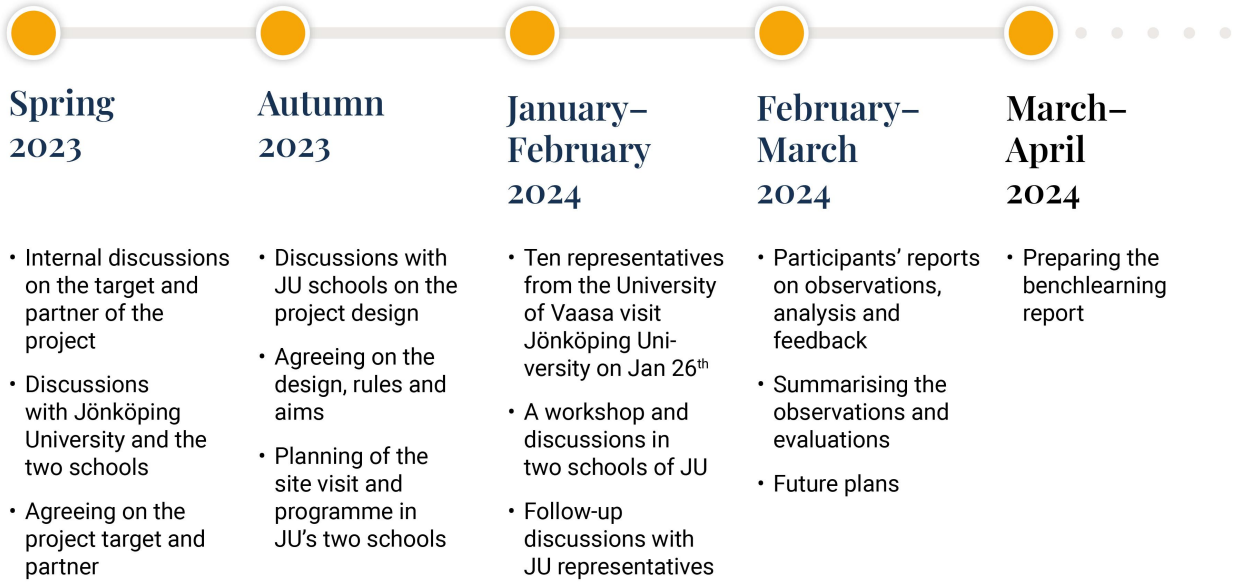



**Figure 8.** Agreeing on the aims and process with JU.

The coordinators and key persons agreed on the programme and schedule of the site visit in the two JU schools on January 26th. The workshop with the International Business School (JIBS) was organized in the morning and the afternoon workshop took place in the School of Engineering (JTH). More specific questions on the topics were sent to the representatives before the site visit. JU International Services' team provided answers to supplementary questions after the site visit.

## Organisation and participants

UVA's core team consisted of two managers from the International Services led by the Vice-Rector of International Relations. Director of Quality and Accreditation of the JIBS acted as the JU's core and contact person, with contributions from the Head of Department of JU's International Office. In addition to UVA's core team, four representatives from Study and Education Services and three faculty members from the schools participated in the site visit. A member from the International Services attended the workshops remotely. The administrative personnel attending the site visit are involved in the international student recruitment process. All participating faculty members are engaged in UVA's international education programmes and/or in supervise international students.

Before the first workshop, the visitors had a short tour in the JU's premises. Both workshops started with introductions of the participants and were followed by short presentations of the two

universities' strategy, aims and procedures in their international student recruitment. Questions and enthusiastic discussions took place flexibly and intensively during and after the presentations. JU units' comprehensive approach to internationalisation and its strategic, long-term work and data driven procedures in international student recruitment were very appealing to the visitors. UVA representatives took home plenty of new perspectives and ideas to accommodate to the existing practices.

## Assessment of the project

The site visit and learning about the two schools' practices in internationalisation and international student recruitment were considered highly fruitful among all visitors. After introductions, the participants exchanged experiences and identified shared challenges. Learning about the work of JU International Office, JIBS's successful international programmes and the industry collaboration of JTH shed light on JU's strategy, systems, and partnerships in international student recruitment, including active monitoring and organizational engagement. The visitors also got valuable insights in the JU's path to the current approach and practices. After the site visit the visitors listed their take-aways from the site visit. They also compared the best practices between the two universities, which are summarized in the table below.

| Good practices of UVA | Good practices of JU |
|---|---|
| Financially and environmentally efficient recruitment results | Well-resourced and organized international recruitment teams |
| Updated website for enhancing the university's brand; a welcome webpage for new students | Website set up with customer in mind; clear information about the programmes |
| International agenda and strategy with data and evidence applied | Strongly data-driven and evidence-based recruitment approach |
| Timely admission processing period for prospective applicants; selection criteria allowing for students at a later age to have a chance | Efficient local admission process also at use, including interviews to determine fit and skills level |
| Strong recent input and progress in the international student recruitment activities | Collaborative approach to international recruitment covering all levels of the university; regular meetings with administration and schools |
| Strong local strategic partners to collaborate with | Strong ties with industry and projects helpful in attracting quality students; International Campus |
| Increasing English programmes at both undergraduate and graduate levels | Diverse programs in English, a more flexible approach to English language evidence |

**Application**

- Further increasing admission and after admission information on the website
- Clarifying admission criteria and prerequisites for programmes for efficiency and transparency.
- Allowing for some discretions and flexibility in terms of English credit requirement for admission, connected to new national guidelines in 2025
- Ensuring advanced data-based forecasting, careful design of the actions, and communication among academic units and university services.

## Audit team’s comments

UVA's strategic goal is to recruit more international students as part of its growth strategy. The goal of becoming internationally recognised lies at the core of the UVA Strategy 2030. This was also continuously mentioned during the audit visit by multiple stakeholder groups. The university selected international student recruitment as the target of its benchlearning project to support its goals of internationalisation and a diverse and inclusive community. The audit team considers that choosing this topic as the benchlearning target was justified and well aligned with UVA’s strategic development.

UVA chose Jönköping University (JU) as its benchlearning partner. The universities are well matched in that they have similar institutional profiles, particularly in the fields of business and technology. They also share the same internationalisation objective. The selection of the benchlearning partner and the benchlearning visit engaged all key UVA stakeholders involved in the international student recruitment process. The audit team recommends that, in further work, UVA considers closer involvement of international students, both on the part of UVA and the benchlearning institution.

Current international recruitment practices at UVA are evidence-based, making good use of market analysis and local agents. UVA also understands the potential of internationalisation at home and the efficient use of resources needed to attract more international students. The quality of support services for international students has been found to be good. The audit team also received evidence that sufficient attention is paid to the academic progression of international students.

UVA is tasked with integrating international students into the UVA community. However, their integration in the decision-making process remains challenging, as is evident from the Equality Plan and the audit visit findings, largely due to Finnish language deficiencies. According to the audit visit and the self-assessment report, international students can study Finnish online even before they arrive in Finland. As the number of international students is increasing, the audit interviews also highlighted the availability of student accommodation and sufficiently detailed information about Finland. UVA also has support services for spouses and families.

The audit team recommends that UVA continues to support the employability of international students. During the audit visit, career guidance services were considered beneficial. However, the audit team recommends that international students receive more assistance in order to obtain first experiences in the Finnish labour market and to develop employability competences. The team also recommends that UVA consider providing targeted merit-based financial assistance for talented students from non-EU and non-EEA countries to leverage full-cost tuition fees. In this way, students would benefit from regional needs in terms of better human capital for further economic growth.

# Appendix 1. Evaluation criteria for the level good

## 1 Evaluation area I: HEI creates competence

### 1.1 The planning of education

The degree programmes and other provision are planned with clearly defined learning outcomes. The planning process ensures that the educational provision is in line with the HEI's strategy and relevant for working life. Aspects concerning internationalisation and continuous learning needs are ensured in the planning process. In terms of degrees, it is ensured that they correspond with the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. The education is planned so that the teaching methods, assessment of learning, and learning environments support the achievement of the learning outcomes. Students and external stakeholders participate in the planning of education in a purposeful manner. Research, development, innovation and artistic activities are integrated in the education in a way that links research-based information to the education in a relevant way. The students' workload is defined according to the principles of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). The HEI has systematic procedures for approving the plans for degree programmes or other study entities.

### 1.2 The implementation of education

The HEI applies the provisions and regulations concerning student admission, the recognition of prior learning, progress of studies and completion of degrees consistently and transparently. The education is implemented in a manner that supports target-oriented learning and the active role of students in their own learning process. Students receive feedback on their learning which helps them achieve the learning outcomes. The procedures connected with the implementation of education support the efficient progress and completion of studies as well as the integration of students with professional life. The well-being and equality of students are promoted throughout the student's study path. The HEI provides adequate resources, counselling and other services to support the progress of studies and learning.

### 1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

The HEI systematically collects and uses feedback data on the needs of students, the implementation of the education and the progress of studies in order to enhance the education. Feedback-on-feedback, i.e., information on changes introduced based on student feedback is provided to students in an appropriate manner. The HEI monitors and evaluates the degree programmes and other provision to ensure that they are up to date with regard to the latest research findings as well as the changing needs of the society and working life. Opportunities for continuous learning are ensured in the educational provision. In the degree programmes and

other provision, how well the intended learning outcomes are achieved is analysed. Feedback and evaluation data is used systematically in the enhancement of education. The needs of staff and students are considered in the development of support services.

### 1.4 The HEI's examples of successful enhancement activities

The HEI is able to present examples of successful enhancement activities.

## 2 Evaluation area II: HEI promotes impact and renewal

### 2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

The HEI enhances its societal engagement and impact, and this is also supported by its management system. The HEI has defined goals for its societal engagement and ways in which it attempts to reach those goals. Information produced by the HEI's analysis of its operational environment is used to set the direction for its activities. Appropriate procedures help to ensure that societal engagement supports the implementation of the HEI's overall strategy.

### 2.2 Research, development and innovation activities as well as artistic activities with impact

The HEI's research, development and innovation activities as well as artistic activities contribute to reforming society. Targets have been set for the impact of the HEI's research, development, innovation and artistic activities. The HEI collects relevant information regarding the societal impact of research, development, innovation and artistic activities, and the information is used in the enhancement of these activities. The HEI has systematic procedures for ensuring the responsible conduct of research. The HEI enhances open science.

### 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

The organisational culture of the HEI encourages experimental activities with partners and strengthens the conditions for a creative atmosphere. The HEI seeks opportunities to engage with stakeholders in activities which enable renewal and enhancement. The HEI has functioning procedures that support the use of the competences possessed by its staff and students. The HEI has target-oriented cooperation with its alumni and it utilises the alumni in enhancement activities. Collaboration with both national and international networks supports the enhancement of the HEI's activities. The HEI has well-functioning procedures for managing and updating its stakeholder relations and collaboration networks.

### 2.4 The HEI's examples of successful enhancement activities

The HEI is able to present examples of successful enhancement activities.

# 3 Evaluation area III: HEI enhances quality and well-being

### 3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

The principles, objectives and responsibilities of the quality system constitute the HEI's quality policy, which is public. The quality policy forms a common basis for the quality work. The information generated by the quality system is used in the management of the HEI. The system supports the profile of the HEI, the achievement of its objectives related to the core duties and the implementation of its strategy. The HEI ensures that the staff recognise the connection between their own work and the goals of the HEI.

### 3.2 Supporting the competence development and well-being of the staff

The HEI has functioning procedures to identify development needs concerning staff competence and to support the development of staff competence. The HEI has transparent procedures for staff recruitment. The HEI has systematic procedures to support the well-being, equality and non-discrimination of staff.

### 3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

The HEI has a functioning quality system which covers its core duties. The quality system helps the HEI to recognise development needs and to enhance its activities in a goal-oriented manner. There is evidence of the functionality and impact of the quality system on the enhancement of the core duties. The system is developed in a systematic manner.

The quality culture of the HEI is participatory and open. Staff, students and external stakeholders participate in the enhancement of the HEI's activities in a purposeful manner.

### 3.4 The HEI's examples of successful enhancement activities

The HEI is able to present examples of successful enhancement activities.