KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Författare **Eva Werner, Touko Apajalahti, Jade Brouns, Tero Janatuinen, Sirpa Moitus and Hanna Väätäinen. Self-evaluation of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences edited by Tarja Kettunen.**

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Audit of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences

Abstract

Title of publication

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The Higher Education Evaluation Committee’s decision

VAMK passed the audit on 16 June 2021.

The Quality Label is valid until 16 June 2027

The audit team’s evaluation of the 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 VAMK

Working life cooperation

Theme and partner for benchlearning

Theme: Efficient thesis writing process for timely graduation

Partner: Novia University of Applied Sciences

Key strengths and recommendations

Strengths

- VAMK has well-managed and comprehensive processes of developing education and renewal of curricula. These processes follow a clear and well implemented planning cycle in which the participation of various stakeholders is firmly anchored.
- VAMK is aware of the responsibility it has as an HEI for its societal impact. The aims of

societal impact are strongly rooted in VAMK's strategy and connected to regional networks, business life and regional strategies.
- Quality policy and quality management effectively support the management of the UAS and the strategy implementation, with strategic indicators enabling diligent knowledge-based management and monitoring.
- Working life cooperation is strongly connected to VAMK's institutional strategy, to companies and institutions in the region. Strategic partnerships effectively capture the needs of working life and cater to the provision of qualified workforce through practice- and competence-oriented education.

Recommendations

- VAMK should pay attention to ensuring more balanced learning experiences for students regarding international learning environments and integration of working life experiences into teaching of all degree programmes.
- To magnify the societal impact of its RDI work, VAMK should explore the possibilities to build longer-term joint research programmes and platforms with its partners and to take a more proactive role in facilitating and creating RDI ecosystems.
- Attention should be paid to staff well-being and workload management as the ambitious strategic goals especially in the field of RDI, continuous learning and internationalisation increase challenges for VAMK's staff.
- VAMK should further develop and expand the provision and forms of continuous learning and thus create added value for the renewal and upskilling of the labour force in the region.

Tiivistelmä

Julkaisun nimi

Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulun auditointi (Audit of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences)

Tekijät

Eva Werner, Touko Apajalahti, Jade Brouns, Tero Janatuinen, Sirpa Moitus ja Hanna Väätäinen. Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulun itsearvuointiraportti (toim.) Tarja Kettunen.

Korkeakoulujen arviointijaoston päätös

Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulun auditointi on hyväksytty 16.6.2021**.**

Laatuleima on voimassa

Laatuleima on voimassa 16.6.2027 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 – VAMKin valitsema arviointialue

Työelämäyhteistyö

Vertaisoppimisen teema ja kumppani

Teema: Sujuva opinnäytetyöprosessi – valmiiksi määräajassa

Kumppani: Yrkeshögskolan Novia

Keskeiset vahvuudet ja kehittämiskohteet auditointiryhmän mukaan

Vahvuudet

- VAMK kehittää koulutustaan ja uudistaa opetussuunnitelmiaan hyvin johdettujen ja kattavien prosessien avulla. Koulutuksen suunnitteluprosessit ovat selkeitä, ja ne

perustuvat hyvin toteutettuun suunnittelusykliin ja eri osapuolten vahvaan osallistamiseen.
- VAMK tiedostaa vastuunsa yhteiskunnallisesta vaikuttavuudesta. Yhteiskunnallista vaikuttavuutta koskevat tavoitteet näkyvät vahvasti VAMKin strategiassa ja kytkeytyvät alueellisiin verkostoihin, yrityselämään ja alueellisiin strategioihin.
- Laatupolitiikka ja laadunhallinta tukevat hyvin ammattikorkeakoulun johtamista ja strategian toimeenpanoa. Strategiset indikaattorit mahdollistavat aktiivisen ja huolellisen tiedolla johtamisen ja toiminnan seurannan.
- Työelämäyhteistyö on vahvasti yhteydessä VAMKin strategiaan, yrityksiin ja muihin alueellisiin toimijoihin. Strategiset kumppanuudet tavoittavat hyvin työelämän tarpeet ja tukevat käytännönläheistä ja osaamislähtöistä koulutusta ja osaavan työvoiman tuottamista.

Kehittämissuositukset

- VAMKin tulee varmistaa, että opiskelijoilla on tasavertaiset mahdollisuudet kansainvälisiin oppimisympäristöihin ja työelämässä hankittaviin oppimiskokemuksiin kaikissa tutkinto-ohjelmissa.
- Vahvistaakseen TKI-työnsä yhteiskunnallista vaikuttavuutta VAMKin tulee selvittää mahdollisuuksia rakentaa nykyistä pitkäjänteisempiä tutkimusohjelmia ja -alustoja yhdessä yhteistyökumppaneidensa kanssa. Lisäksi VAMKin on mahdollista ottaa nykyistä proaktiivisempi rooli TKI-ekosysteemien luomisessa ja kehittämisessä.
- Henkilöstön hyvinvoinnin ja työkuormituksen johtamiseen tulee kiinnittää huomiota, koska VAMKin kunnianhimoiset strategiset tavoitteet erityisesti TKI-työssä, jatkuvassa oppimisessa ja kansainvälistymisessä lisäävät haasteita henkilökunnalle.
- VAMKin tulee jatkaa ja laajentaa jatkuvan oppimisen tarjonnan ja sen eri muotojen kehittämistä ja luoda siten lisäarvoa alueen työvoiman osaamisen päivittämiselle ja uudistamiselle.

Sammandrag

Publikationens namn

Auditering av Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulu (Audit of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences)

Författare

Eva Werner, Touko Apajalahti, Jade Brouns, Tero Janatuinen, Sirpa Moitus och Hanna Väätäinen. Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulus självvärdering (red.) Tarja Kettunen.

Beslutet av sektionen för utvärdering av högskolorna

Vasa yrkeshögskola godkändes i auditering den 16 juni 2021.

Kvalitetsstämpeln är i kraft till och med

Kvalitetsstämpeln är i kraft till och med den 16 juni 2027.

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 VAMK valde

Samarbete med arbetslivet

Tema och partner för kollegialt lärande

Tema: Arbetslivssamarbete

Partner: Yrkeshögskolan Novia

Auditeringsgruppen identifierade följande som VAMKs främsta styrkor och utvecklingsområden

Styrkor

- VAMK har väl förvaltade och omfattande processer för att utveckla utbildning och förnya läroplaner. Dessa processer följer en tydlig och väl implementerad planeringscykel, i vilken delaktigheten av olika intressenter är fast förankrad.
- VAMK är medveten om sitt ansvar som högskola för sin samhälleliga påverkan. Målsättningarna för dess samhälleliga påverkan är starkt kopplade till VAMK:s strategi och till regionala nätverk, affärslivet samt regionala strategier.
- Kvalitetspolitiken och kvalitetshanteringen stöder förvaltningen av yrkeshögskolan väl och genomförandet av strategin. Strategiska indikatorer möjliggör omsorgsfull och kunskapsbaserad förvaltning och uppföljning.
- Samarbete inom arbetslivet är starkt förknippat med VAMK:s institutionella strategi samt till företag och institutioner i regionen. Strategiska partnerskap uppfyller väl behoven av arbetslivet och stöder tillhandahållandet av kvalificerad arbetskraft genom praktisk och kompetensinriktad utbildning.

Utvecklingsområden

- VAMK bör fästa uppmärksamhet vid att säkerställa mer balanserade inlärningserfarenheter för studerande när det gäller internationella inlärningsmiljöer och integration av arbetslivserfarenheter i undervisningen i alla utbildningsprogram.
- För att betona den samhälleliga effekten av dess FoU-arbete bör VAMK utforska möjligheterna att bygga långsiktigare gemensamma forskningsprogram och plattformar med sina partner samt ta en mer proaktiv roll i främjandet och skapandet av FoU-ekosystem.
- Uppmärksamhet bör fästas vid personalens välbefinnande och förvaltningen av arbetsmängden i samband med att de ambitiösa strategiska planerna särskilt inom FoU, kontinuerligt lärande och internationalisering ökar på utmaningarna för VAMK:s personal.
- VAMK bör ytterligare utveckla och utvidga tillhandahållandet och formerna av kontinuerligt lärande och således skapa mervärde för förnyandet och kompetenshöjningen av regionens arbetskraft.

The premise and implementation of the audit

The work of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is based on the principle of enhancement-led evaluation and producing impactful information which contributes to the enhancement of education.

The purpose of the audit model is

- to evaluate whether the quality work in the HEI meets the 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, and
- to accumulate open and transparent information on quality work at Finnish HEIs.

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

The implementation of the audit

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

- Professor, Rector Emerita **Eva Werner**, IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, Austria (Chair)
- Higher education Policy Advisor **Touko Apajalahti**, Technology Industries of Finland
- Bachelor Student **Jade Brouns**, Fontys Institute for Applied Sciences, the Netherlands
- Quality Manager **Tero Janatuinen,** JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

Sirpa Moitus from the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre acted as project manager of the audit and Hanna Väätäinen from FINEEC acted as her pair and backup. The audit is based on the material submitted by the higher education institution, self-assessment report, additional material requested by the audit team and the audit team's virtual visit to the institution 23–24 March 2021. The audit team also had access to essential electronic materials and systems.

The main stages and timetable of the audit were:

Agreement negotiation	14 November 2019 Amendment: 16 April 2020
Appointment of the audit team	22 April 2020
Submission of the audit material and self-assessment report	31 December 2020
Audit visit	23–24 March 2021
Higher Education Evaluation Committee's decision on the result	16 June 2021

Publication of the report	June 2021
Concluding seminar	23 June 2021
Follow-up on the enhancement work	2024

Evaluation criteria

The 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, stakeholders, or both. The HEI presents compelling examples of successful enhancement activities.

The level *good* for the 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, the evaluation areas I–III should reach at least the level *good*.

The organisation and strategy of the HEI

Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) is a working life and business-oriented UAS, which caters to the needs and trends of changing working life. Our location is in Vaasa on the Palosaari campus. The City of Vaasa (84%), the University of Vaasa (8%) and the Ostrobothnian Chamber of Commerce (8%) own Oy Vaasa University of Applied Sciences – Vasa yrkeshögskola Ab . VAMK's net sales in 2019 were EUR 16.7 million.

VAMK offers education in three different fields as we have Degree Programmes in Technology, Business Economics and in Social Services and Health Care. We got two complete English Degree Programmes Information Technology and International Business. Next year the number of our master degree programmes will increase to four, as we will be the first UAS in Finland to start a master's degree programme in industrial robotics. This is a result of close co-operation with working life trends and an indication of social impact.

In 2020, there were 3,237 students studying at VAMK of which 174 students were studying in Master's Degree Programmes. This year 577 students graduated from us. VAMK is an international, multicultural university and we have 88 partner schools in 35 different countries. 13% of our undergraduate students are foreign degree students. At the end of 2019, VAMK employed 160 people, full time equivalent 155, but the recruitment that we have already partially implemented for 2020-2021 will increase the number of employees. Our agile and lean organization is described below (Figure 1.).



Figure 1. VAMK's organisation chart

VAMK's vision is to be your main partner in Expertise. Our strengths are robot automation and smart grids. Focus areas – VAMK's profiling expertise are

- Smart energy efficient electrical engineering: Design expertise, modern digitalised production technologies and project management
- Business competence in the export industry
- Socially sustainable, ethical and reforming health care and social welfare services
- Design of market-oriented and sustainable product and service systems, as well as industrial, and health care and social welfare services



Figure 2. VAMK's strategy, vision, mission and values

VAMK's vision, mission and values are described above (Figure 2.).

Our strategic areas for development are:

1. Deepening cooperation with working life in the region
2. Increasing the volume and competence level of RDI and service activities
3. International work and study environment
4. Student success
5. Improving staff well-being at work

The content and indicators of strategic development areas we have described in more detail in our strategy brochure.

1 HEI creates competence

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The 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.

The evaluation area I as a whole is at the level good.

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

Strengths

- VAMK has a well-managed and participatory process for developing its degree programmes. Both the curricula development and the renewal process of education are strongly supported by the feedback from internal and external stakeholders.
- VAMK's student-centred approach is demonstrated in teachers' engagement to keep a close relationship with students and regularly gather student feedback. The student union VAMOK has a strong voice in the institutional dialogue.
- VAMK takes care of students' support and wellbeing through well-developed tutoring, individual coaching, and support services. Group tutoring has been developed as an effective method of mentoring and supporting students.

Recommendations

- VAMK should pay attention to ensuring more balanced learning experiences for students regarding international learning environments and integration of working life experiences into teaching.
- To improve the coherence of the descriptions of learning outcomes, VAMK should harmonise the way of writing learning outcomes across all curricula.
- VAMK should further develop and expand the provision and forms of continuous learning to create added value for the renewal and upskilling of the labour force and companies of the region.

1.1 The planning of education

- Högskolans självvärdering

VAMK’s strategy and emphases of the education reflect the profile of the region

Our ambition to be the main partner in expertise is crystallised in VAMK’s vision and mission. We want to be an interesting and creative partner, a link between the working life and the students. In our strategy, the competence that profiles us describes well our status as a partner of the operators in the international energy cluster in the region. This export industry, significant in the Finnish scale, gives VAMK a unique position together with a task to take care that we enhance our education with one eye continuously on the needs of the working life. The Vaasa region and its economic life is international and multicultural, and this can be seen not only in VAMK’s strategy and emphases, but also in those of the entire region, as well as in the population of the city. Last year, students from 44 countries were studying at VAMK. They accounted for 13% of the total number of students. In addition to strong engineering, the region requires expertise in business administration and health care and social services to develop its services and maintain its vitality. VAMK as a HEI contributes to the implementation of the regional strategy of Ostrobothnia (in Finnish), which envisions an Ostrobothnia with New Energy. The Ostrobothnia strategy describes the regional characteristics and the vision, towards which the actors in the region, VAMK included with its own activities, are working.

Cooperation with Working Life

The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment and Pohjanmaa TE office are our key partners when anticipating the need for qualified work force to enhance the vitality of the region. Active working life partnership materialises on several levels. VAMK has signed cooperation agreements with eleven most important employers in the region. The areas of cooperation and contact persons are named in these agreements. Every year we invite our teaching staff and working life partners to discuss and co-develop at meetings and workshops. This cooperation binds the RDI activities, commissions from working life and theses topics to development needs arising from the working life and helps us to utilize the latest knowledge from working life when we plan our education. With this operation model, we wish to integrate RDI more into the instruction and get more volume and doers into RDI activities. In the Health Care and Social Services and in the Business Information Technology the advisory committees are active in bringing their views into curriculum planning. Along with changes in work, the significance of continuous learning increases even more. VAMK has prepared for this by recruiting new employees to develop continuous learning possibilities at VAMK. Our objective is to increase our own provision of open education but also in cooperation with other operators.

Students involved in the Planning of Education

Being a channel for both students and working life means listening to the wishes and needs of both and aiming to implement them. We agree with Vamok, the Student Union every year on measures that support the students' possibilities to participate and to be heard in the enhancement of education. Vamok appoints student representatives to bodies and work groups and for example in degree programme meetings. A fresh view of the skills provided by the education is received from graduates and alumni who already have experience from the working life.

Versatile Learning Environments and Methods Support the Attainment of Learning Outcomes

Palosaari in Vaasa is the location of the joint technology laboratory Technobothnia, co-owned by three HEIs: VAMK, Vaasa University and Novia UAS. In addition to laboratory assignments for students, training in electrical engineering and robotics for companies is also arranged. The simulation facilities for health care and social services, jointly used by VAMK and Novia, are housed in the Alere building on the campus. This close cooperation provides students with an excellent opportunity to complete studies in health care and social services in Finnish and in Swedish. The equipment and software used in the instruction and simulations both in Technobothnia and in Alere are modern and the same as used in working life. The teachers choose the teaching methods used in courses based on their expertise and experience. When planning the course, the teachers regard the internationality and the regional impact.

Curriculum Planning and Quantitative Planning of Studies

In the curriculum planning, the starting point comes from the National Qualifications Framework, in which UAS Bachelor's degrees are defined to be at Level 6, and UAS Master's degrees at Level 7. The studies are measured in accordance with the ECTS-system, based on learning outcomes and the student's workload. The curricula are drawn up according to the annual planning cycle and they are approved by the Management Team. The learning outcomes are assessed on a five-step scale and the student's average workload is twenty-seven (27) hours per credit. The students can give feedback on the workload of each course in the final feedback of the course.

VAMK's Radar (in Finnish Tutka) survey has revealed that some students' workload can vary greatly on courses and during the academic year. This problem has been addressed by scheduling and improving the planning process. Our benchlearning project focused on enhancing the thesis process. As a result of the project, we have rescheduled the thesis process. The benchlearning project is described in Chapter 5. The new student administration system Peppi, recently introduced at VAMK, will facilitate this work.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Planning of education meets the needs of working life	Increasing the provision of continuous learning anticipatorily to meet the future needs
Utilising international and multicultural working and learning environment in the planning of education	Increasing RDI and integration into education
Cooperation between HEIs in Vaasa and with secondary education institutions	Teachers' cooperation in planning the workload of the simultaneously running courses

1.1 The planning of education

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

International mindset, future-orientation and cooperation serve as strategic guidelines for planning of education

The institutional strategy is firmly rooted in VAMK’s mission and vision to be a competent and expert partner for students and industry partners and provides an innovative and competence-enhancing environment for both. The interviews provided evidence that there is a clear focus on investing in students' success and providing a work and study environment which is inspirational, oriented towards the development of an international mindset and creates manifold opportunities for national and international students.

VAMK is strongly linked to the regional working life field through close partnerships and networks, and is thus well equipped to educate qualified workforce for the future. Development needs are taken up regularly, often through rather informal channels. Educational offers at VAMK are planned, designed, and evaluated in cooperation with partners from working life, for example through the advisory committees and alumni feedback. RDI and practical projects with regional partners, staff and students are also sources for input into education. Staff is also encouraged to actively take part in working-life projects and opt for a short-term working-life experience and integrate these projects as well as outcomes stemming from RDI and the newest research into teaching and learning. All of this feedback and insights feed into educational offers.

So far, the institution has made substantial efforts to create an international learning environment for students in the international programmes. The audit team encourages VAMK to continue these efforts and provide an international environment for all students and thus strengthen the international mindset throughout the institution.

Development and planning cycle are participatory processes

The starting point of the curriculum planning processes at VAMK is the annual planning cycle, starting point of the actual development process are the intended qualifications, the competence descriptors of the Finnish National Qualifications Framework, as well as national regulations. Qualification goals are translated into learning outcomes, teaching formats and assessment methods foster attainment thereof. As part of the curriculum drafting, the assessment criteria, assessment formats and didactic methods are aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

Renewal of the curriculum is a process of teamwork; adequate involvement of all is monitored by the management. Teams of experts consisting of teachers take care of the curriculum skeleton and working life representatives are involved in discussions on competence needs and the

curriculum.

VAMK's clear processes cater well for adherence to its guiding quality principles; both the development process and the renewal process integrate input from different stakeholders such as students, alumni, external partners, working life and staff. Feedback stemming from course evaluations, e.g., as to workload is also considered in the planning of educational programmes, and so are internationalisation, societal impact aspects and the latest research outcomes. In the interviews, the strong involvement of teachers, students, and external stakeholders in both the annual planning and the programme development cycle was confirmed. Students explicitly expressed satisfaction with their role in the curriculum development and renewal process.

All programmes and educational offers are finally approved by the Management Team; through its monitoring and checking role, the Management Team ensures that the educational provision is in line with the institution's strategy. Relevance for working life comes from the input of partners.

However, the auditors learned that students' learning experience is somehow uneven regarding active learning with working life representatives and the extent to which teachers provide current affairs' examples and up to date information in class. To foster continuous updating on course level taking account of developments in working life, to increase consistency over courses and programmes and to avoid overlap of content in courses within the same programme, VAMK is recommended to define more concrete content and learning outcomes already when drafting the skeleton of the curriculum – instead of allocating this task to the level of the course design by teachers.

With regard to course descriptions, the auditors recommend evening out the evident differences in learning outcome descriptions and follow the ECTS Users' Guide more closely and consistently with focus on competences to be achieved as outcome upon completion of a course. Concerning workload, VAMK should redirect attention to the calculation of student workload and use the workload calculator in a comparative way across the UAS departments, so that courses with comparable objectives and content bear comparable ECTS.

1.2 The implementation of education

- Högskolans självvärdering

Transparency in Student Admission

The criteria in our student admission are available for applicants and those interested on the Studyinfo.fi website and on our own website. Arene, the Rector's Conference of Finnish UASs publishes recommendation for admission criteria every year, which we comply with in all our full-time and part-time degree programmes. Before making decisions, the admission criteria are prepared together with the education units. In joint application, the Finnish UASs have a long tradition of common practices in various phases of the selection process. The network of the Heads of Admission and Student Services is a valuable support for the UASs. In addition to a wide-scale selection based on grades, VAMK utilises the joint online entrance examination in all its Finnish degree programmes. The applicant can find extensive information on these on the Ammattikorkeakouluun.fi website. At least half of the intake is reserved for applicants with vocational upper secondary qualification and those taking an entrance examination. VAMK has agreed upon special admission for students from secondary education institutions in Vaasa. For example, the admission to engineering degree programmes can take place through various paths, as described in the figure here (In Finnish).

Flexible Completion of Studies Speed up the Graduation

A well-communicated and implemented procedure for the recognition of prior learning speeds up the graduation of those students who have prior competencies related to their studies. The recognition of prior learning can be completed by giving skills demonstration or by credit transfer from another HEI. To promote credit transfer and to increase the students' possibilities to include studies taken elsewhere in the degree, we have signed agreements with other HEIs in Vaasa (Vaasa University, Åbo Akademi University, Novia UAS, Helsinki University Vaasa Unit for Legal Studies) as well as with Seinäjoki UAS. CampusOnline, the joint digital platform for Finnish UASs, provides online studies from other UASs and enables studying all year round. We are also planning to increase the provision of International Online Learning (IOL) studies. The first implementations have already been collaborated with our Dutch partner university Hogeschool Avans. A 30- credit minor subject module intended for Business students takes into account sustainable development in its implementation and contents.

Active and Motivated Student

At the beginning of the course, the teacher will explain the contents, aims, assessment criteria and what the students are expected to do to achieve the learning outcomes. Each teacher chooses the most suitable teaching methods for the courses s/he teaches. In full-time

programmes, interactive contact teaching is emphasized and we encourage our students to be present. During the classes, the teacher will monitor the progress of the students' learning through discussions, assignments, midterm exams and feedback. Assessment given on assignments and exams is feedback on the student's learning. According to the Radar survey, students feel that they do not get enough feedback on the progress of their learning but giving individual feedback otherwise than in context of assignment and exam assessment has been practically impossible due to big student groups.

Acknowledging the students' skills level motivates the students to be present and participate actively. Many students have found the feedback received in working life-related projects from the representatives of working life very valuable. Feedback is useful for those at the beginning of their studies but also for part-time students taking a degree alongside their work. For many at the final stages of their studies, studification of work could be a meaningful way to complete the studies. We will promote these possibilities in the future especially in those fields of engineering and technology where the graduation is delayed due to the student having got a job at the final stage of studies. If there are challenges with the progress of the studies, the tutor teacher will contact the student and if needed, he guides the student to the study counsellor.

Group Tutoring supports the progress of studies

We wish to introduce every student to the studies and the requirements as well to our practices right at the beginning of the studies. A Vamok student tutor will support the first-year students; each group will also be appointed a tutor teacher. During the first six months there will be grouping activities and briefings held by various experts who introduce their respective student services. The tutor teacher will invite every student to a starting discussion during which it is ensured that the student has a good start for the studies. In addition, the tutor teacher invites the students to an appraisal discussion every year to see how the studies are progressing. The student's plans to go for student exchange, summer jobs, practical training and career plans are also discussed. The last appraisal discussion will be held during the final year.

In difficulties, the students will get help from the study counsellor. If for some reason the studies do not progress, or plans change, the student can consider the options together with the student counsellor and the Head of the Degree Programme. To promote the students' well-being, we are engaging in close cooperation with Vamok, and Vamok on their part arranges sports and leisure activities for students. The student body has appointed two harassment contact persons to encourage low threshold reporting in harassment cases. Student health care and the University Chaplain take care of the students' physical and mental health.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Heavy input in practical contact teaching	Studification of work

Systematic model for group guidance	Better utilisation of IOL studies
Modern learning environments and equipment	Provision of study psychologist services

1.2 The implementation of education

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Transparent student admissions procedures and flexible learning pathways are in place

Study applicants can find ample information on the web – both on the national study information website as well as on VAMK's website. Various entry ways to VAMK's programmes are possible depending on the type of previous education as well as on the programme to enter. In all its admission requirements, VAMK complies with those recommended by the Rectors' Conference of Finnish UASes, and also refers to good practices stemming from joint application with other UASes. Special agreements with other HEIs, clear regulations as to RPL as well as credit transfer possibilities ensure flexible learning and study completion paths for applicants and students. In the interviews, students confirmed that these processes work well and that they do make use of the opportunities given.

All relevant information is easily accessible and transparent. Prior to publication on the website, admission criteria are discussed and agreed upon with the educational units of the institution. The audit team confirms that admission criteria are openly shared and found that they were written in clear and comprehensible language. Clear process descriptions as well as written guidelines provide a sound basis for transparency and equality in the admission procedures. Furthermore, personal guidance provided by VAMK's admission service is also available for applicants.

Student-centred teaching approach supports students' competence development

Teaching and learning at VAMK are impregnated by the institution's ambition to develop skilful graduates for working-life needs, thus enabling competence development through project-based and practice-oriented teaching. The research-practice nexus is monitored through diligent guidance in the thesis process. Interactive teaching intends to foster student's self-competence, while frequent feedback in class, on assignments, homework and exams shall stimulate students' learning ambition and monitor the students' progress.

In the student interviews and workshops, it became clear that students highly appreciate interactive teaching and learning methods. Examples mentioned by students include group work as a teaching method, a wide range of courses and campus.online offerings, input from visitors from working life, team-teaching experiences and services of the Tritonia science library. As the interactive teaching forms particularly support students in attaining the set learning outcomes, the auditors recommend that teachers apply interactive methods regularly in their courses when

appropriate.

For every teacher, self-development hours are available to engage in continuous learning to keep their practical knowledge and pedagogical skills up to date, and so is the opportunity to go for a working life period. Teacher's competence development with regards to the implementation of online studies is supported by Edulab, a service centre for digital pedagogy. Particularly due to the Covid19 pandemic, it has become a necessity for all VAMK teachers to offer online courses and studies. Edulab can support the long-term success of the participating higher education institutions which focus on how to use digital pedagogical tools effectively.

An example of good practice concerning the development of teaching skills is the team teaching, fostering learning from each other and helping students to deal with different perspectives. The auditors encourage VAMK to explore and expand these forms of professionalisation even more.

Furthermore, it would be important to provide teachers with opportunities for pedagogical renewal, for example, through coaching programmes, or further collegial support from peers as this could even out the differences experienced by students in the quality of courses. While the interviewed students were mostly pleased with the quality of teaching, and the wide range of courses as well as the availability of online provision, in some cases, teaching methods and material would need refreshment and updating. Based on the audit, VAMK is aware of these issues and is actively addressing them through projects.

Student well-being and tutoring are well taken care of

The institution’s student-centred approach, which begins while designing educational programmes that aim at developing students’ competences for work-life and practice, is fostered by various opportunities of flexible learning paths. This flexibility is facilitated through cooperation agreements with other HEIs, ECTS credit transfer and recognition of prior learning, as well as by institutional support for learning and learning progress.

At VAMK, tutoring is widely used to monitor the students’ progress, study abroad and practical training plans and to gain and provide feedback. The annual appraisal meetings organised by the teacher tutor for all students of a cohort is an example of VAMK’s student-centred approach. In addition, teacher tutors regularly monitor the progress of studies of the students within their tutor group by using a standardised monitoring sheet and a digital tool called Peppi. The first student experiences of this newly reformed group tutoring approach were very positive. The auditors consider this uniform improved approach to tutoring and monitoring student success and progress as an example of good practice.

Student representatives from VAMOK also engage in tutoring fellow students, in organising leisure and sport activities and supporting fellow students in critical situations, such as harassment.

As for the equality and non-discrimination plan within VAMK, a corresponding plan pertaining to

students is included in the student well-being programme. However, the 2021 programme published on the website does not refer to equality and non-discrimination. VAMK should check that the principles of equality and non-discrimination concerning students are up-to-date and published adequately.

As a point for further development, VAMK should ensure that all information is available in English for the sake of international students.

Support systems and services for students work well

A competence-enhancing and motivating study environment also means provision of efficient and flexible support services. To provide more flexibility as well as more time for personal service and support of students, VAMK has largely digitised its services by introduction of an automated student affairs service (ATOMI) as well as a graduation service called VALO. In the audit, students expressed their satisfaction with the digital services as they are handy to use and well accessible. Through regular meetings and cooperation with the educational units, areas of further development as to services are identified and solutions are discussed.

1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

- Högskolans självvärdering

The Student’s Opinion Is Important

In the autumn of 2020, the old e-form based course feedback system was replaced with a new feedback system (Spark feedback service). The new system is integrated into the newly adopted student management system Peppi. The advantage of the new system is that those courses we wish the students to give feedback on are visible on the student’s desktop. The student’s final feedback and the teacher’s feedback-on-feedback are already in use. From the beginning of the next year new features, continuous feedback and intermediate feedback, will be adopted. Of all these features, each teacher can tailor the best combination for her/his purposes. We believe that the new system will motivate the students to give more feedback because having given feedback the student will see how the other students have evaluated the course and the teacher’s feedback-on feedback.

In addition to the national AVOP Graduand Feedback Questionnaire and the career monitoring survey, we also do the Radar survey every year, the results of which are compiled on the UAS level but also for each unit, degree programme and group. The tutor teachers receive a summary of the results of their respective groups and they are instructed to go through them with the group. Feedback is also received through the Feedy system, which is a feedback and initiative channel for all, student and staff. Feedback can be given through Feedy anonymously, but all those who give their contact information will be replied personally. We also encourage the students to contact our personnel directly. The informal relations between the teachers and the students enable the direct feedback.

Students’ Success a Strategic Area for Development

The success of students has been included as one strategic area for development at VAMK. The achievement of the objectives set for the degree programmes are evaluated in the Management Team, units, and degree programme meetings, utilising the student feedback mentioned above, indicators of educational activities recorded in the strategy, statistics and feedback from working life. The indicators with which we measure the success of students are degrees taken within the target duration, feedback from the graduands, attraction and the percentage of employed graduates one year after the graduation. The prizes and honourable mentions received by students also depict the success of students. VAMK students have received prizes for example in Project Management and in enhancing the management in health care and social services. The majority of our graduates find employment right after the graduation, which is the most important indicator. In future, we will pay special attention to the employment of our international students in the Ostrobothnia region. An indicator for this is under development.

The feedback from working life received by the Management and teaching staff is evaluated and the curricula are reviewed and reformed annually, taking into account the changing need of the society and working life. In continuous learning, we provide single courses or larger modules as open UAS studies. Through working life connections, we hear about needs for further or specialised training. UAS Master's degrees also provide a good path to continuous learning, and we have received good feedback on these programmes from our students. To increase the provision of continuous learning opportunities the President has invited a team of experts to discuss how to enhance our activities in this. In addition, we have recruited more staff and consolidated our competence in the design and coordination of continuous learning.

Digital Support Services

Student services have been enhanced in a student-centred manner by digitalising the most frequently used services as well services that require person-to-person contact. This was implemented by introducing ATOMI, automated student affairs office. The service produces quickly for example e-signed documents that students need for various authorities. The next development phase is the introduction of VALO graduation service, which enables the e-signing of the diploma. The graduation process becomes clearer for students when they can track their application for degree diploma online. In future, the student will receive, in addition to the traditional diploma, an e-signed digital diploma. All new e-services will be integrated into the Peppi service.

For the student, the digitalization of the services means flexible service, and it enables the use of services outside the office hours. The study affairs office still provides person-to-person services according to the situation and the needs of the student. The working hours freed due to the digitalization will be directed to guidance and for person-to-person services to those who have a special need for it. The functioning of support services will be enhanced in cooperation and interactively with the education units. Once a month, the President and the Administrative Director call a meeting to discuss and deal with current issues in the support services.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Good employment of graduands	Services for students in need of special support
Student feedback services include a possibility for anonymous and immediate feedback	To make feedback a natural part of teaching and learning process
The success of student a strategic area for development	Increasing the impact of course feedback to enhance the education

1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Enhancement of education is based on diverse feedback

Evaluation and further development of VAMK educational provision is based on various channels of feedback as well as institutional data and expert opinions. Important assessment data are derived from regular course feedback, the student Radar Survey and the graduate feedback questionnaire (AVOP), as well as from feedback from the labour market. Furthermore, all degree programmes are evaluated using performance indicators derived from the financial model, audits and self-assessment. The more efficient Radar feedback system concerning teaching methods was introduced in spring 2021 with results being handled in the unit meetings and by the teacher tutors. The audit visit confirmed that the assessment processes as well as the information derived from feedback and surveys continuously enhance teaching and learning and help to provide education that meets the needs of working life.

Students' and graduates' success are strategic areas for institutional development, thus both close cooperation and feedback from working life are essential indicators. Management and teaching staff receive regular feedback from working life through surveys, experts, master's students, and project partners. Recently, VAMK has approached alumni for more feedback on achieved competences and their value for working life. The audit interviews confirmed that in this way, needs for change, amendments or new offers are taken up regularly as well as feedback on the assessment of the curricula and programmes on offer.

In the interview with VAMOK representatives, students described their experiences concerning feedback and discussion on the quality of teaching. They feel that teachers truly engage in building connections with students, and regularly gather student feedback during classes. The auditors also learned that VAMOK feels heard and involved. VAMOK has student representatives in all departments and they discuss feedback with students in different units. They experience that they have a significant influence within VAMK.

Students should be provided with feedback on their feedback

Recently, VAMK has implemented a new system for gathering student feedback on different levels within the institution: Spark for course feedback and the Radar survey for general feedback. The system is quite new, but students are positive about their first experiences with the new system. This system could support VAMK in gathering more structured feedback from students to enhance quality management.

VAMK staff is encouraged to discuss feedback with their students. As the institutional culture is impregnated by a collegial spirit and relations between teachers and students are rather

informal, direct feedback is easy to place. A point of development, also indicated by students, is the provision of feedback on feedback. The institution gathers feedback regularly and reacts upon the feedback, but the transparency to students about follow-up actions could be more structured and consistent.

Continuous learning is a strategic development target for VAMK

Continuous learning is offered in different formats and covers training for working life partners as well as competence enhancement for staff, alumni, and students. Furthermore, open UAS studies offer a pathway to apply for bachelor's degree programmes.

VAMK has started several initiatives to foster lifelong learning within the regional working field. Thus, professionals can attend courses of the degree programmes and some programmes also offer additional courses on specific relevant topics. The four main forms of continuous learning include open studies, specialisation studies, in-service education, and preparatory training for immigrants.

The audit interviews indicated that development of lifelong learning is partly based on VAMK teachers' proposals for courses that may be of interest and relevance to stakeholders, and partly on specific requests from companies. The auditors encourage VAMK to further develop different forms of continuous learning on a more systematic basis and follow periodic needs analyses as well as predictive market trends analyses; thus, VAMK can react systematically and timely to learning needs in the region.

1.4 The HEI’s examples of successful enhancement activities

- Högskolans självvärdering

Student Guidance Process

VAMK has developed an operation model for group tutoring, the objective of which is to follow up the progress of the student’s studies and intervene at an early stage if the studies seem to be delayed. In this model, teachers, the group tutor and the student counsellor cooperate. The teachers follow up the progress of the groups they teach, especially the first-year students, and inform the group tutor if there are students that seem to have difficulties with their studies. The group tutor looks into the situation and if necessary, contacts the student counsellor. The student can easily make an appointment with the student counsellor online. The guidance process has been regarded important at VAMK to address the situations where a student is in a danger to fall behind or even drop out.

Cooperation between HEIs in Vaasa in a Unique Learning Environment

The HEIs in Vaasa cooperate to provide their students with various alternatives in studies. The Flexible Study Right offers VAMK students studies from Vaasa University, Novia UAS and Åbo Akademi University, Hanken School of Economics and Helsinki University Vaasa Unit for Legal Studies. Technobothnia is a joint technology laboratory co-owned by VAMK, Vaasa University and Novia UAS. The Alere building houses modern simulation facilities for students of Health Care and Social Sciences at VAMK and Novia. With simulations, the instruction has taken a more concrete form. In a simulation, the student is in a situation emulating real life and needs to seek solutions in many different ways. This enhances applying the learned knowledge in practice.

There is cooperation between VAMK and Novia in the advanced studies for students of Juridical Administration and in Health Care and Social Services in multilingual education and for example, in specialisation studies. In Electrical Engineering and Information Technology, VAMK and Vaasa University implement the two first study years in cooperation. In language teaching, VAMK and Novia have had an externally funded Tandem course in Finnish and Swedish for seven years now. West Coast Startup, a joint business incubator for VAMK and Vaasa University, operates in the Design Centre Muova. The purpose is to help students and staff to start up a business.

Examples of wide cooperation between HEIs:

- Flexible study right between HEIs
- Technobothnia joint laboratory
- Alere simulation facilities

- E-commerce course organised by Vaasa Entrepreneurship Society for students of VAMK and Vaasa University
- Tandem course VAMK- Novia

International Cooperation Enriches the Instruction

International cooperation networks at their best bring substance, cultural competence and international teamwork, either face-to-face or distant, into students' lives. Currently we are testing IOL studies with our Dutch partner.

Examples of international cooperation:

- Cooperation with universities in Siberia
- Cooperation with Hogeschool AVANS
- Mindful Managers project to enhance managership in the public sector

Cooperation with Finn Power as an Example of Working Life Cooperation

The cooperation with Finn Power started in 2014 on the initiative of R&D Manager Esko Petäjä, the company's Product Development Manager. What is new in this cooperation is the integration of an entire product development course into the activities of an R&D company engaged in export operations. The company arranges an annual product development competition, based on a real product development need in the company. The company appoints four to six mentors who guide and give feedback to the student teams during the project.

The product course implemented as a product development competition has been a great success. The students have received guidance from professionals in the field, and they have been extremely motivated every year; therefore, the results have also been good. The company has also rewarded the teams that have succeeded best. The feedback received from all participants of the projects has been positive and honest, which encourages us to continue with the projects. According to the mentors, the concrete advantages and solutions to the given challenges have improved over the years. The students have been satisfied with being able to work with professionals and they have learnt much during the projects. VAMK benefits from this kind of activity where learning takes place in real life assignments. So far, approximately 190 VAMK students have participated in these projects. In 2019, VAMK chose Finn Power the Key Partner of the Year. The Key Partner award is given to an operator who has shown excellent cooperation skills, commitment and insight in the cooperation with VAMK.

2 HEI promotes impact and renewal

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

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

The evaluation area II as a whole is at the level good.

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

Strengths

- VAMK is fully aware of the responsibility it has as an HEI for its societal impact. The aims of societal impact are strongly rooted in VAMK's strategy and connected to regional networks, business life and regional strategies.
- VAMK sees the change of organisational culture as a strong basis for quality and a key precondition for successful implementation of its strategy. There is a clear aim to build a community of working together.
- VAMK has a good understanding of the challenges it must overcome to reach its ambitious goals regarding RDI. VAMK's brand new RDI development programme includes a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and determined actions for development.

Recommendations

- VAMK gathers a lot of valuable information about its operating environment through various, often informal channels. To streamline and systematise information, VAMK should use the new interdisciplinary platforms which are promising and could serve as a needed place to aggregate information for different institutional users and to identify longer term trends and global developments.
- To magnify the societal impact of its RDI work, VAMK should explore the possibilities to build longer-term joint research programmes and platforms with its partners and to take a more proactive role in facilitating and creating RDI ecosystems.
- VAMK should seek ways to bring more value from its international networks to the development of RDI work, to its partners and to its societal impact. The alumni network could be utilised more extensively in the activities of VAMK.

2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

- Högskolans självvärdering

Towards Managing Societal Impact

The President of VAMK has given a statement, which crystallises the involvement of each member of the community in societal engagement and impact. Our aim is to practise regional development and research, development innovation activities, which reforms the regional economic structure. The basis of our societal impact comes from the quality of our activities and active co-operation with working life.

We are engaged in an active, partnership-based dialogue with our long-term and committed partners. Our model of partnership is systematic, fruitful, proactive and dialogic. Continuous analysis of operational environment with the operators in the region is anticipatory, and thus we are able to produce competence required in the region.

We provide education and continuous learning in extensive networks and thus participate in building Competent Finland; international connections are part of everyday activities. We promote the integration of our international students into Finnish society and working life. Societal impact is present in the daily work of each member of our community, as is dialogue with our partners and alumni. The student union is a key partner for us, with whom we build our recognition and engage in dialogue to increase our societal impact. At VAMK, we examine the societal impact and engagement from the point of view of education, working life cooperation and regional impact, as well as RDI (Figure 3.).

In accordance with our strategy, our vision is that we are the main partner in Expertise. Our values, Openness, Sympathy, Pioneering and Customer-driven, include a will to societal impact and engagement. Our activities on part of societal impact are functioning, which is proven by the high employment rate of our students in regional companies. We are a part of a Consortium of Higher Education in Vaasa, formed by six HEIs. In co-operation with Vaasa University, Novia UAS, Hanken School of Economics, Åbo Akademi University and Helsinki University Vaasa Unit for Legal Studies, we all promote the availability of qualified work force and anticipate the needs for it in the region.

The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia is a significant partner to us. The attached video shows several of our undertakings and learning environments. Our common challenge is to ensure competitiveness in the digitalised world, together with the manufacturing industry in Ostrobothnia and the entire education system.

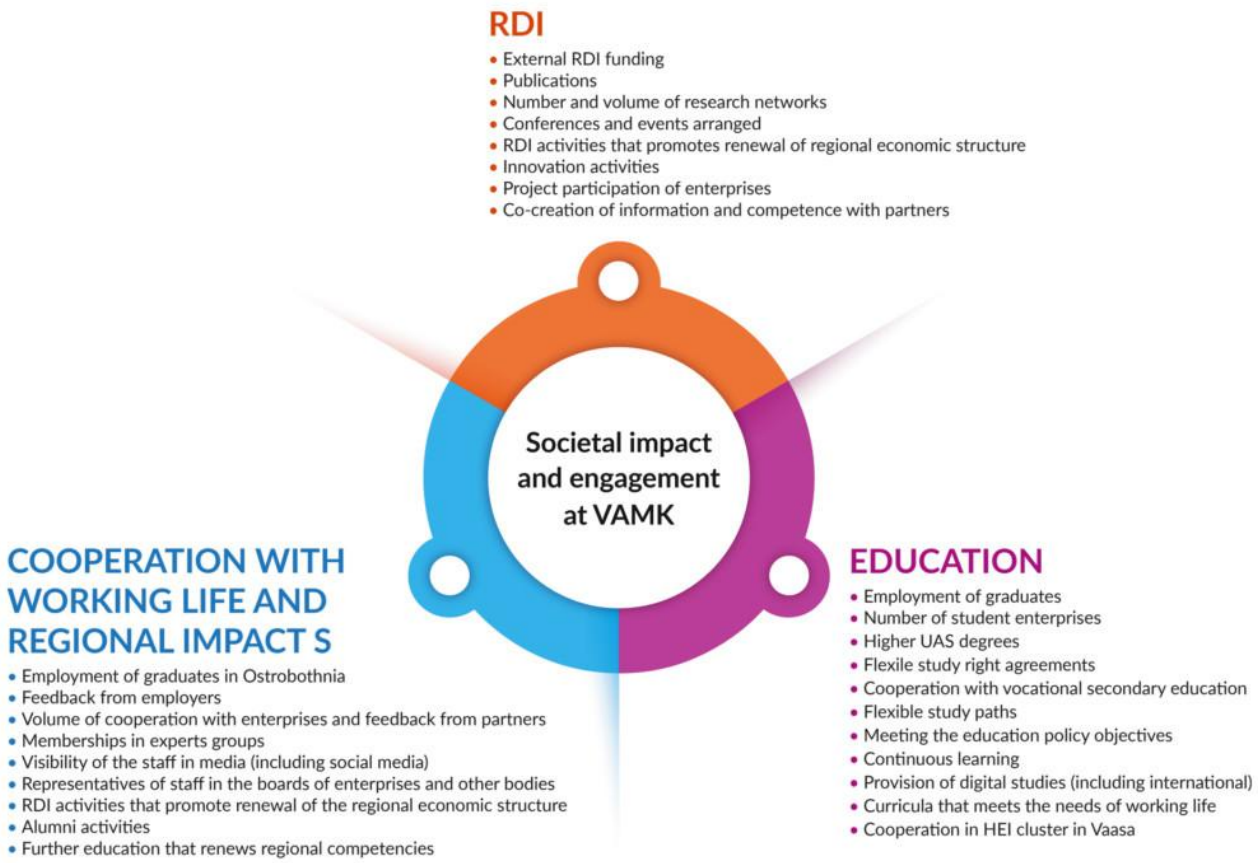


Figure 3. Societal impact at VAMK, University of Applied Sciences

Dialogue with the Operational Environment

VAMK is part of the employment ecosystem in Ostrobothnia. The Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment organises the activities in this ecosystem. TE office (the local employment and business services) is also strongly involved. In this cooperation, we anticipate, react and develop education and our RDI activities to meet future needs.

Similar dialogue is also implemented with our key partners. Our partnership model is based on a systematic model in which we develop the current and future education and increasingly our RDI activities together in co-operation with working life operators. In the planning phase we take into account both Finnish state and regional guidelines in order to implement education that meets the labour policy situation at the time. An example of this is the high unemployment rate of secretaries in the region, to which we are reacting by arranging retraining, if funding is arranged.

Impact with Knowledge

Our strategy has been built as a participatory and dialogic process with the staff. We have advanced to a phase where a working map is created. The realization of the strategy is followed

up in the Board of UAS, management team and in the units from different angles to receive an overall picture of the advancement. In the next phase, we will build a digital dashboard to provide the quantitative information in real time. Then we will move on to create an indicator system to measure societal impact. In future, systematic models need to be built for gathering and utilising qualitative feedback.

The procedures for managing societal impact and engagement are functioning but many of them are still at an early stage of development. Only with time and after creating the indicator system and model for societal impact and engagement can we draw any definite conclusions (President and Ceo Kati Komulainen´s interview in the Finnish News Agency STT). It is clear, however, that we educate exactly right type of experts for needs of working life and thus, our models are functioning.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Societal impact is an important part of strategy and activities	Creating an indicator system for societal impact
Dialogic partnership with operational environment	Better use of analysis methods for qualitative measuring
Co-operation in Vaasa Consortium for Higher Education	Strengthening RDI networks

2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Societal engagement is rooted in the strategy and based on dialogue

VAMK is highly aware of the responsibility it has as an HEI for its societal impact and its impact on the region. For VAMK, societal engagement does not only support the implementation of its overall strategy – it is a central element of the strategy. VAMK's President's firm statement on societal engagement and impact shows the direction of the development. The aims of societal impact are strongly rooted in the institutional strategy and connected to regional business life, networks, and strategies. VAMK staff have a common understanding of the importance of societal interaction and impact, and managers are aware of the goals and challenges that VAMK has to this regard. Societal engagement is interpreted throughout the institution as a horizontal activity that should be considered in all core duties.

The student union VAMOK has a strong position within the institution. Expanding RDI work would provide students with a broader platform to participate in the social interaction of the university. Overall, VAMK has defined clear ways to reach the goals it has set. These include partnerships, new interworking platforms and active networking in the region. The challenge is to make networks and partnerships more visible and to develop them systematically.

The interviews confirmed that VAMK has a good understanding of the developments in its operational environment. The understanding stems particularly from open dialogues that VAMK systematically undertakes with its partner organisations. Because of these close ties to stakeholders, VAMK gathers information through many channels: individual one-on-one discussions, advisory committees, joint RDI projects, student placements, student projects, surveys, networks, partnerships, etc.

A more systematic approach to information would support societal impact

The big question for VAMK seems to be: how can the waves of techonogical and societal change be grasped both sooner and better? Based on the interviews, VAMK would benefit from more systematic ways to analyse and synthesise the information that it gets from various networks and partners. The new interdisciplinary platforms are promising and could serve as a needed place to aggregate information for different institutional users and to identify longer term trends and global developments. In addition, if the new key account managers for parnerships are able to successfully network, it could ensure that the information from partnerships flows efficiently and effectively across the organisation and add further insights to the partnership process.

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

- Högskolans självvärdering

Openly and Responsibly

Our president and CEO has stated the outlines, commitments and procedures for open science and organisational culture at VAMK, University of Applied Sciences. An expert group on open science and research is operating at our UAS. Openness as a value has been recorded into our strategy and it is part of our organisational culture. Our staff have received training on various sectors of open science and research. We have made significant advancement on part of open science and research and organisational culture during the past year. The work has based on the feedback on the assessment of the maturity level of open organisational culture.

We are committed to comply with the guidelines of Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK on Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland. A principal lecturer has been appointed at VAMK to support and help the staff in questions regarding responsible conduct of research. The students are introduced with the guidelines in the thesis instructions. Our web site on open science and research, open to all, guides the visitor to material on this subject.

Continuously Renewing Innovation Platform

The project planning is preceded by the examination of funding programs and the financier's needs, the follow-up of the situation of the surrounding society and global megatrends and a dialogue with the regional working life. The strengths, emphases and emerging research platforms are considered in project proposals. In projects utilising applied research, new insight and knowledge is created and the organisations are renewed. This competence is utilised in development and training projects in which methods and operating models are enhanced further. These new methods are introduced into business services and thus innovative competence is put into practice in working life. Continuous interaction with businesses helps to recognise development and research needs that arise from companies and organisations. This is utilised in project planning, and project proposals meet the future challenges of businesses.

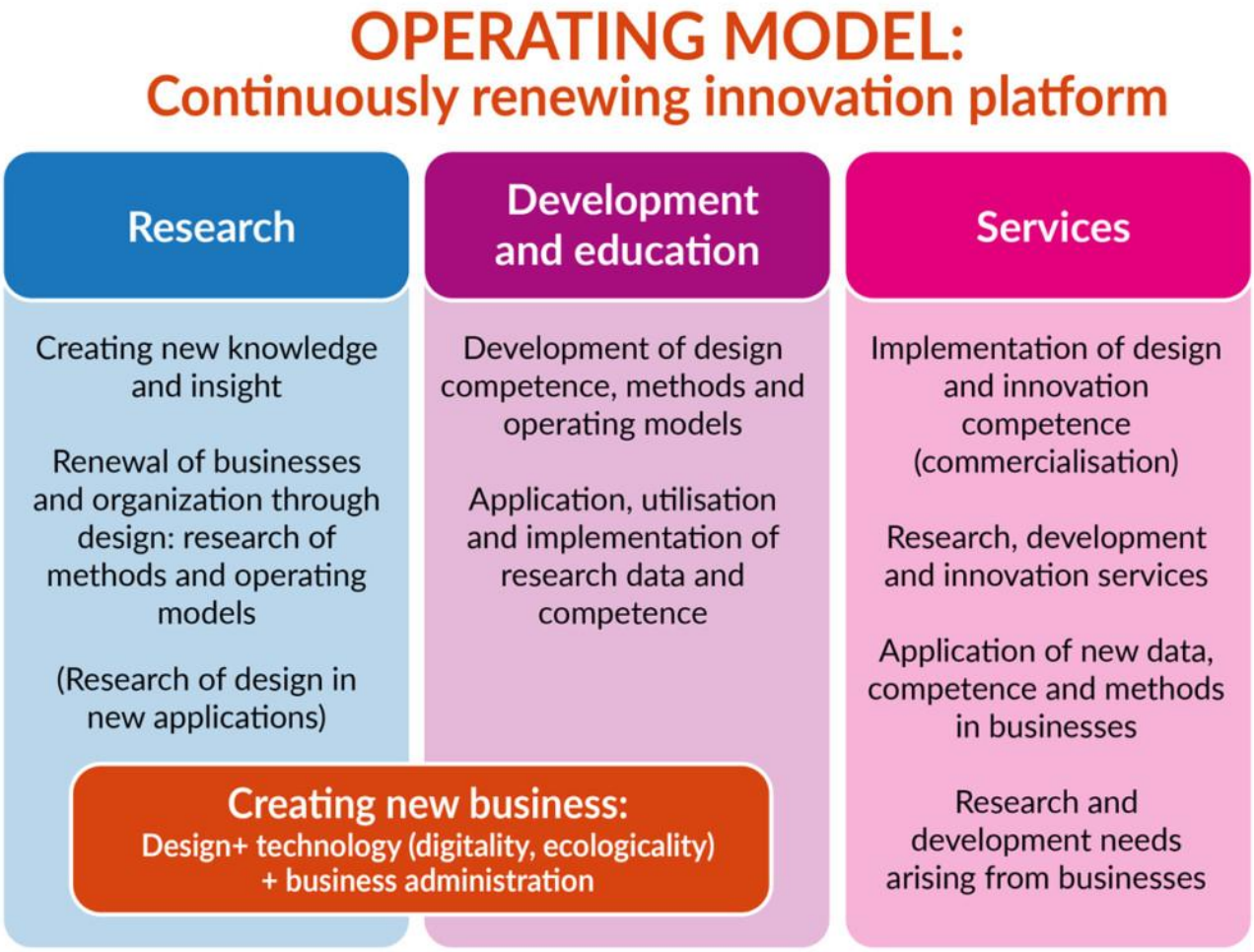


Figure 4. Continuously renewing innovation platform

The Objectives of RDI Activities Base on Strategy and Regional Needs

VAMK's vision is to be the main partner in expertise. The vision challenges VAMK to raise the level of competence in applied research and development of creative solutions and to follow up the changes in the surrounding society. Two most important development projects in our strategy focus on developing RDI activities. We will deepen our cooperation with regional working life. The indicator in this is the number of high-quality and strategically significant key partner agreements and development of various functions in continuous learning. Naturally, we follow up the development of workforce and future competence needs, together with the regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. Secondly, we want to increase the volume of our RDI and service activities and through that the level of competence in the region. The indicator for us in this is the increase in external funding, number of business involved in the RDI projects, number of publications and volume of sold business services. We will monitor the development of the situation in Ostrobothnia in close collaboration with the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, TE office

and local operators and businesses.

VAMK's RDI activities support the renewal of the society and the economic life in the region. VAMK has a long-term collaboration, both nationally and internationally, with HEIs and research institutes. The objective in applied research and development projects is to enhance and renew regional working and economic life but also the entire society. The themes of the projects come from significant trends in the society, which have an impact on businesses, and society on a large scale: intelligent and energy-efficient electrical engineering, robotics, digitality, sustainable development, reform in healthcare and social services and design of sustainable products and services. VAMK is involved in resolving global challenges in the chosen fields. The themes of our RDI activities support VAMK's strategic objectives. In addition, Design Centre MUOVA provides versatile solutions for enterprises to enhance their operations.

Developing Communications

VAMK is in an ongoing dialogue with operators in the region: our staff is represented in development and strategy teams and networks that plan the future strategy and vision of the region. VAMK follows up its operating environment regionally, nationally and internationally, for example, in context of projects. In context of business services VAMK receives information on future challenges of businesses. Businesses also are involved in research and development projects.

In the autumn of 2020, we have launched an online magazine Energy which serves as a low-threshold platform for our staff to publish. Design Centre MUOVA also publishes its own publication MUOVAAJA, which is available for everyone. We are developing our video and podcast production. The ongoing projects have their social media channels and web sites.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Systematic follow-up of indicators	Open science part of everyday work
Open online publication platform	Activation of RDI-work in educational units
Strong collaboration with stakeholders, especially with businesses and in design, testing and dissemination phases	More systematic survey of future and megatrends

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

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

A new RDI development programme gives structure to development work

VAMK is committed to an ambitious increase in RDI volume and the impact of its RDI on the region. VAMK's financial situation has improved, and after a few tough years, it is now possible to allocate more human resources to RDI. In the interviews, the biggest opportunities were seen in connecting VAMK’s RDI work and especially the new interdisciplinary platforms even more steadfastly to the RDI programmes of the big RDI intensive companies of the region. In addition, opportunities related to stronger multidisciplinary RDI were brought up, such as a combination of health and technology to support the implementation of the national social and health care reform in the bilingual region together with VAMK's partner organisations.

VAMK is aware of the challenges it must overcome to reach its goals regarding RDI. Its brand new RDI development programme includes a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and clear actions for development. One of the challenges brought up in the interviews is how to free up permanent staff’s time for RDI when finding qualified part-time staff is difficult. VAMK could seek alternative solutions to this, such as agreeing to have part-time teachers from its working-life partners or doing joint planning and implementation of teaching with other higher education institutions that teach the same fields.

In the interviews it became obvious that there are great expectations for the new interdisciplinary interworking platforms. The Design Centre MUOVA has long-term experience of a systematic approach to RDI & services, and it also serves small companies and the development of entrepreneurship. MUOVA’s experience can be utilised when building up the new RDI platforms. On the individual project level, VAMK also has systematic practices that ensure, for example, that projects have clear links to regional development and that they are conducted responsibly.

VAMK has potential to be a stronger player in RDI ecosystems

The operating environment and VAMK’s connections to selected companies in the region offer VAMK great potential to increase its RDI activities. However, given its vision to be the main partner in expertise, it could take a more proactive role in emerging ecosystems, and also in engaging smaller companies. A proactive role could include actions such as creating shared purpose, aligning objectives of ecosystem partners, or identifying potential impacts and the expected value of taking part in an ecosystem.

In order to magnify the societal impact of its RDI work, VAMK could benefit from connecting its

RDI projects to build long-term joint research programmes and platforms with its partners and with the local higher education consortium. These programmes could be designed to offer opportunities for student projects, for continuous learning, for staff exchange between VAMK and its partners, and also for new business generation and startup incubation. These are all activities that VAMK already does, but bringing them together more steadfastly together can open up new, previously unseen links between them. The programmes could also help to obtain more funding from national and European funding sources.

VAMK has a good set of quantitative indicators for RDI that it uses for improvement but these could be complemented with assessment of more qualitative information that describes the nature of the impact the RDI is having to reform society. Qualitative indicators can bring a stronger frame for the development of RDI.

Commitment to open science is turning into action

VAMK is committed to advancing open science, as is evidenced through its declaration of open science and research. The interviews confirmed that commitment to open science is starting to turn into action: training workshops for staff are organised and new online publications have been generated for the dissemination of RDI outcomes. VAMK is also committed to following The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) guidelines on Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland. In practice, these are taken into account by project-level guidelines that steer the conduct of RDI projects at VAMK.

When increasing publishing activity through the online magazines Energy and Muovaaja, VAMK should pay more attention to defining the target groups for them and steering the development of the magazines more to the needs of these target groups. Overall, it would be beneficial for VAMK to differentiate between the communication of the results and the impact of the RDI projects according to the target group to be addressed, for instance, working life partners and/or the public.

2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

- Högskolans självvärdering

Reforming Organisational Culture

A new organisational culture is being developed at VAMK that is confidential, responsible and encourages taking on challenges and excelling oneself. Interworking platforms have been developed for multi-field collaboration in which themes for research and development projects are brainstormed with a national or international network. Various design -thinking methods are utilised in the brainstorming and the brainstorming often takes place in an interdisciplinary team. Articles are also co-written with project partners on virtual platforms.

Discussions held by the President are interactive and encourage dialogue. Many ongoing development projects enable participatory interworking in the organisation (research platform working, OSR, project management tool). Due to our evolving organizational culture, the intranet is in a phase of change and we will introduce a new one by the end of 2021. To follow up and utilise new experiments, the management team monitors the advancement of the projects. A person in charge has been appointed for all development themes. The aim is agile development according to the guidelines set for strategic development projects. Experimental organisational culture is supported by the management and for example, one criteria of salary bonuses is work done to promote strategic development projects.

Muova houses the Co Proto Lab, which was created for interworking purposes for researchers, businesses and students. In autumn of 2020, student teams took part in the Nasa Space Challenge in a global virtual hackathon to co-create their entries on a virtual platform. New methods are also tested and developed with a network of business partners.

Vaasa HEI Cluster

VAMK is part of Vaasa Consortium for Higher Education the members of which, in addition to VAMK, are Novia UAS, Vaasa University, Hanken School of Economics, Åbo Academi University and Helsinki University Vaasa Unit for Legal Studies. We collaborate in RDI, promote flexible study paths and meet the competence needs of regional economic life. A good example of this is flexible study right agreements between the HEIs, making the entire provision of studies within the consortium available for students.

Furthermore, we have collaborative agreements with Centria UAS and Seinäjoki UAS. We participate in large-scale development projects with representatives from the entire HEI network in Finland. We also co-operate in several international networks.

Co-development networks

We are part of the employment ecosystem in Ostrobothnia. The work is based on the anticipation of the need of qualified work force in the region, analyses and working with various services. A central area is allocating funds for continuous learning in fast experiments.

An example of international co-development worth mentioning is a module of online studies developed due to the corona pandemic in collaboration with Avans University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands) and Wärtsilä, the global leader in sustainable solutions for the marine and energy markets. These IOL studies are a concrete example of a need arisen in a prevailing situation and of a fast reaction to it.

Our staff have good relations with businesses in the region. Many of them are active in working life through for instance steering groups or through similar influence groups. Enhancing the competence together is a natural way of working to us, and our staff can take a work practice period in companies and we have for example guest lecturers from companies. Sharing the competence is part of our community spirit. Collegial help and support is natural for everyone. However, it is evident that systematic procedures are needed to manage the competence and collaboration. We have explored acquiring a CRM system and the advantages it would bring.

Cooperation takes place in several national and international networks. Cooperation with HEIs in Ostrobothnia, Vaasa Consortium of Higher Education and businesses especially is active and reciprocal. Our new online magazine Energy enables expanding our impact and enhancing our visibility among the operators in the region and nationally but also internationally, since the magazine is trilingual.

Developing Alumni Activities

Alumni activities at VAMK are developing; we have begun to create systematic activities and platforms. However, we have always had cooperation with our graduates, since they find employment in businesses in the region. This interaction is mainly based on personal relations; the alumni network that we have started enables more organised activities. We have also activated interaction with alumni in social media. More than 5000 persons have registered as VAMK alumni on VAMK's page on LinkedIn. The five biggest employers of these alumni are Wärtsilä, ABB, Danfoss, VEO and Hitachi ABB Power Grids, all our strategic partners. Hundreds of our graduates are working in these companies, with which our staff co-operates on a daily basis.

In future, we will expand out alumni network abroad and will utilise it more in RDI and continuous learning supply. On the other hand, we are already doing this activity through our key partners, which are employers of the majority of our graduates.

Strengths	Enhancement areas

Strategic key partnerships	Better utilisation on alumni network
Co-development networks	Expanding the experimental culture to the entire community
Start-up -activities encourage to entrepreneurship and innovation	Strengthening the interworking competence

2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Successful renewal of the organisational culture is a priority

VAMK sees the renewal of its organisational culture as a strong basis for quality and a key precondition for the successful implementation of its strategy. The interviews provided evidence of an overall commitment to this renewal and a common aim to build a community of working together. This is a clear strength of the institution. As a good practice, the President's discussion events with staff are said to happen in an open atmosphere and thus diligently support institutional change management.

Many of VAMK's partner companies are large, innovative, global organisations who share the same goals for developing open, empowering, and inclusive workplaces. VAMK could aim to benefit from its partners as co-development partners when it comes to organisational development. Joint projects on the topic of organisational culture development could bring about new ideas.

Partnerships are the primary tool for stakeholder management

VAMK's partnership agreements essentially form its new partnership model. Based on the interviews, the agreements have made partnerships more systematic and have led to an annual cycle for planning and updating partnerships. They form a basis for capturing expectations from both sides and enable leveraging cooperation from the already existing good person-to-person contacts. According to the partners interviewed, the partnership model is not too rigid and VAMK is still able to flexibly meet the partners' needs.

In addition to partnerships, VAMK uses its regional networks beneficially for co-development, which is demonstrated in the examples of successful enhancement activities in VAMK's self-evaluation. The Vaasa Higher Education Consortium especially is an example of good practice where the six higher education institutions that operate in the city actively search for synergies in teaching and RDI.

International networks could increase VAMK's contribution to the region

The interviews confirmed that VAMK's international contribution now comes mostly through international students that it brings to the region. VAMK should seek ways to also use its international networks to internationalise its RDI work and identify global trends that will affect the region in the future. There is also further work to be done to succeed in keeping the international students in the region after graduation.

A new alumni network has just been set up. VAMK is starting to use the network for collecting information such as needs for continuous learning. The plans to include international alumni in the network are promising and the auditors encourage VAMK to follow these plans. The alumni network could be utilised more extensively in the activities of VAMK once these initiatives begin to bear fruit.

2.4 The HEI’s examples of successful enhancement activities

- Högskolans självvärdering

Building Open Science and Organisational Culture

Building Open Science and Organisational Culture commenced by recognising the most significant operators. Many things have been done for the benefit of Open Science and Organisational Culture at VAMK, but the data and functions have been scattered. In a multi-field team, cross-sectioning the entire organisation, experts started to work towards an entity. The work has been supported by the President’s outlines for Open Science and Organisational Culture and the entire staff has received extensive training on the subject. The expert team will continue to build the Open Science and organisational culture as well as strengthen the staff’s competence. Our aim is to raise our maturity level significantly in the next audit.

Enhancing the Customer and Patient Safety

Vaasa Hospital District has been appointed a task of establishing the National Centre for Patient Safety Improvement (No-Harm Centre) with the aim to enhance the patient and client safety all over Finland. (website link points to the newsletter on Vaasa Central Hospital reporting of the Center and cooperation). On the initiative of VAMK, we have signed a letter of intent on educational collaboration between Novia UAS and Åbo Akademi University and the Centre for Patient Safety Improvement. During the spring of 2021, we will create a nationally accessible trilingual e-learning training course. The aim is to train professionals of social security and health care around Finland widely and understandably.

Digital Growth (in Finnish Digikasvu)

In this ESR project coordinated by Muova, a toolbox and a training programme was developed for the digitalisation and servitization of industrial SMEs. Thus, digitality-based product and service innovation was supported in industrial SMEs. The final report of the project is available here.

The project produced a guidebook for the design of service development projects for SMEs**.** The project can also be followed up on Facebook.

The strategy tool, Service Map was launched in Industrial Services Into Action! The research report on digitality, service business and development in Ostrobothnian industrial enterprises.

Robocoast

VAMK is part of the Robocoast EDIH Consortium. The objective of the Robocoast Consortium activities is to enhance the growth and competitiveness of Finland's manufacturing industry and its subcontractor supply chains, as well as to invite top professionals and investments. The Robocoast EDIH Consortium comprises seven HEIs and provinces, and applies for a position of Finnish Digital Centre in the Digital Europe Programme.

Approximately 45000 degree students, internationally high-level research and several RDI environments related to robotics, data analytics, artificial intelligence, satellite positioning, smart energy technology and cyber security. Other spearheads of the program are AI, high performance computing and digital skills.

CoProtoLab

Design Centre Muova has collaborated with Vaasa University to develop a rapid prototyping environment for industrial services called CoProtoLab. The objective was to develop a research, innovation and demonstration environment for collaboration of HEIs and businesses. Co-ProtoLab brings together the most significant competence related to the development of industrial services: industrial processes, IoT and information management, Service Design and Interaction Design as well as Protection of Intellectual Property Rights. Co-ProtoLab is a both physical and virtual platform for rapid experiments. In a prototyping environment, interdisciplinary industrial solutions and digital technologies are created. In addition, Co-ProtoLab supports the commercialisation of digital tools for service innovations. The result of the project is an operations model for collaboration between HEIs and businesses and a physical and virtual research and innovation platform.

Ecolabnet

The objective of the Ecolabnet project is to create a network of service providers for supporting eco-innovations in manufacturing SMEs in the Baltic Sea Region. The project is funded by Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Design Centre Muova from VAMK is one of the main partners in the project.

Kaleidoskope and Reboot

The themes of two Erasmus+ projects coordinated by Design Centre Muova are related to preventing social exclusions and promoting employment of migrants. The objective of the Kaleidoscope is to increase the employment of migrant women in Europe. The Reboot project aims to teach skills and competencies needed in future working life for unemployed Higher Education Graduates.

3 HEI enhances quality and well-being

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The 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 the staff are also assessed.

The evaluation area III as a whole is at the level good.

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

Strengths

- VAMK has a new, clear strategy and five primary strategic areas for which strategic indicators have been set. Quality management efficiently supports the management of the UAS and the strategy implementation. Strategic indicators enable diligent knowledge-based management.
- VAMK’s change of operating culture significantly strengthens institutional life and collegial interaction. Thus, the renewed operating culture enables the community to develop in the direction of the ambitious strategic goals.
- VAMK has a well-articulated staff development plan which comprises diverse opportunities to further develop pedagogical and professional competences and up-date RDI and working life skills.

Recommendations

- The ambitious strategic goals especially in the field of RDI, continuous learning and internationalisation increase challenges for VAMK's staff. Attention should be paid to staff well-being and workload management so that everyone is kept onboard and remains committed to the change.
- New interaction forums and platforms need to be further strengthened to enhance sharing of knowledge and good practices in the work community. As part of staff development, VAMK should equally ensure the transfer of tacit knowledge within the institution.
- Based on information produced by the quality system, VAMK has identified development needs and has also defined development measures. However, VAMK could manage the practical implementation of development measures more systematically.

3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Högskolans självvärdering

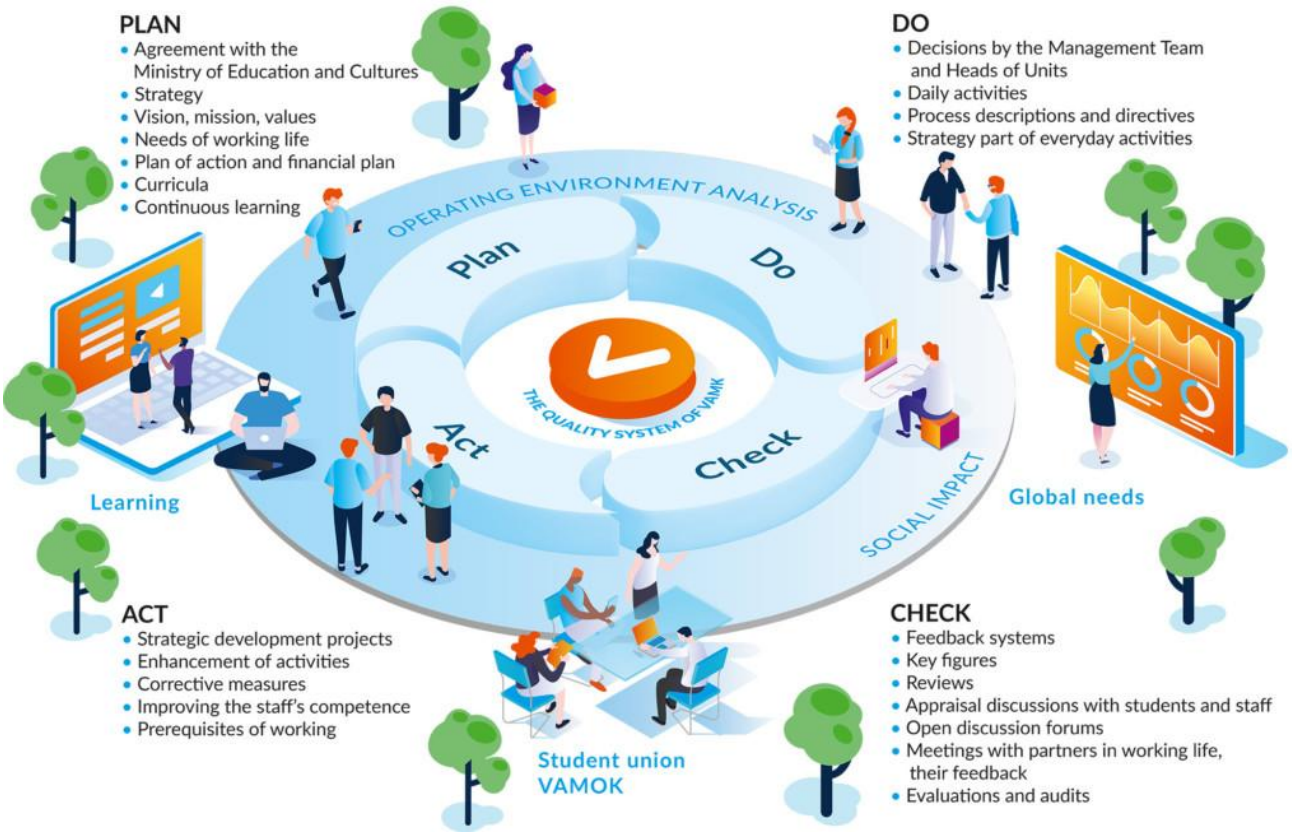


Figure 5. VAMK's quality system

Strategic goals give a direction to activities

Our vision, mission and values highlight competence and its continuous enhancement. This applies to the competence of our students, cooperation partners as well as our staff and the development of VAMK as an organisation. Our strategy, published in the spring of 2020 and spanning to the year 2030, defines five targets, outlooks towards which we aim for through the enhancement areas connected with them. All five enhancement areas have been assigned main indicators with the Ministry of Education and Culture (henceforth MoEC), which make the achievement of the targets concrete. These indicators and related enhancement areas are listed in our Quality Handbook.

Quality System as a Tool for Management and Leadership

The quality system with related process descriptions, procedures in quality management, annual

planning cycles, indicators and feedback systems is a tool for the management and leadership to attain the strategic goals. The budget and action plans drawn up in accordance with the instructions given by the Management Team are based on the agreement signed with the MoEC and previously mentioned enhancement areas. The goals of the previous year and their achievement are assessed in the unit reviews held in October-November, and the goals stated in the action plan of the unit and the enhancement areas for the following year are reviewed. The budget proposal is created based on the unit budget meetings during the autumn. The President takes the budget proposal to the Board to be approved.

The activities and results of the previous year are reviewed in May in supervisors' performance review when the latest statistics, indicator data and feedback summaries from the previous year are available. The observations and assessments made in the performance review produce the foundation for the Management's strategy seminar in which the assessments made in the performance review help in the decision-making of the enhancement areas, emphases and plans for staff training for the following year. To make the follow up of the activities systematic, annual planning cycles have been drawn up for both the Board and the Management Team, in which the most important tasks of the bodies have been written down. The responsibilities of actors in quality management are summarized in a table in quality policy. Figure 6. shows the most important tasks of the VAMK Management in an annual planning cycle for 2021.

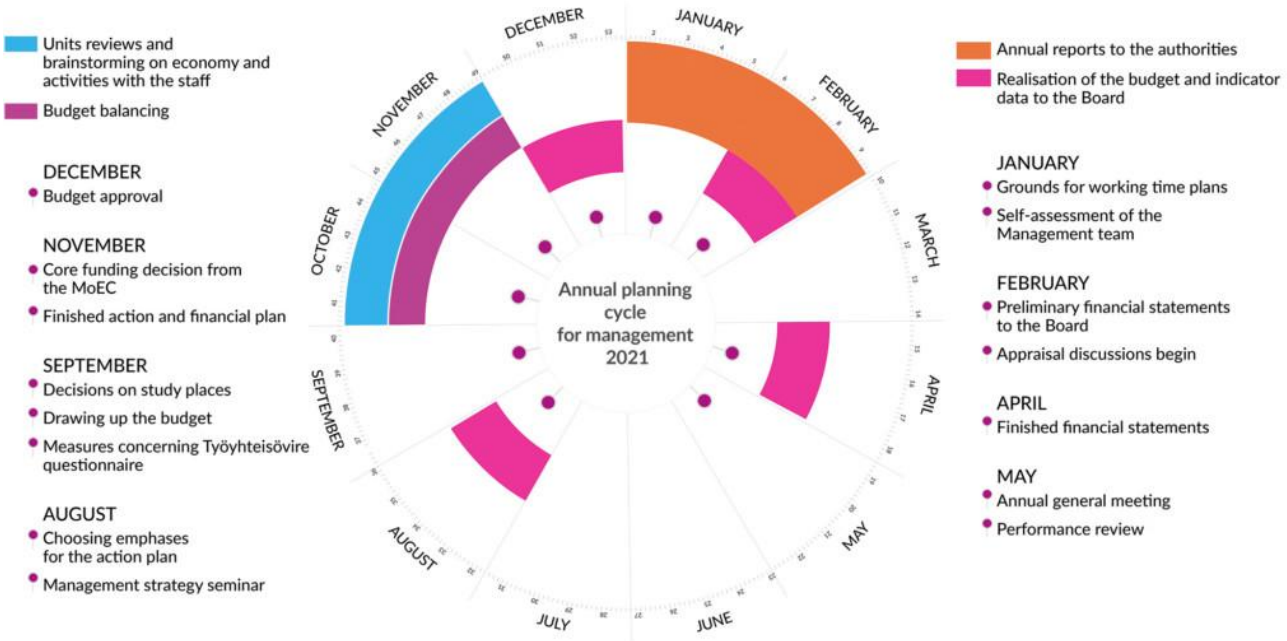


Figure 6: Annual planning cycle for the Management

Quality System Managed by Knowledge

The Board and the Management Team follow up the achievement of the targets agreed with the MoEC using the indicators four times a year. We will present the achievement of the

intermediate targets to the MoEC during their next visit in 2022. In addition to these, VAMK has its own indicators for the Board and the units. The Board supervises the development of financial affairs and the HEI's main tasks, education and RDI activities. The regional characteristics are manifested by the fact that the Board aims to promote the employment of our international students in the region after their graduation. The Board and the Management Team inspect the indicators quarterly. The indicators for the units show the goals and the enhancement areas set as emphases, such as number of publications, Master's degrees and strategic class A type cooperation agreements. The unit indicators are the ones the achievement of which the staff can contribute to with their own actions. The indicators that follow up the activities of the units are presented in the Quality Handbook in Figure 5.

Jointly Built Strategy

Compared to the previous strategy process, we have wanted our staff to have a more active role in the formulation of the strategy so that each team has had an opportunity to bring up their views on the matters important to them. This supports the commitment to the targets and helps our staff to see the significance of their own work to achieve the targets. The structure and the indicators have been modified to a more concrete form so that they serve better as tools for steering. At the beginning of the strategy work we used a joint dashboard where the participants could see and comment on the proposals made by others. In the autumn of 2020, the strategy process has continued to take the strategy into everyday work in workshops led by the directors and immediate supervisors. The indicators have been in use for a year now, and we will improve and develop them as need be, as the strategy implementation advances. The indicators followed by the Board and the Management Team quarterly will be built on a digital dashboard to facilitate the real-time follow-up.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Strategy, built together, which steers the activities	Quality system managed by information
Indicators that support various phases of quality system	Enhancement of knowledge production services
Our staff's educational plan supports the achievement of strategic goals	Active use of the budget and action plan in supervisors' work

3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

VAMK’s quality policy is in line with the institutional strategy

VAMK’S quality policy outlines the guiding principles of the institutional quality work and thus fosters the implementation of VAMK’S strategy. The links between strategy, quality policy and quality management are laid down in VAMK’s Quality Handbook, which is published both in Finnish and English on the website of the institution. This handbook describes the functioning of VAMK’s Quality system, which is based on the cycle of continuous improvement (Plan – Do – Check – Act) as well as the responsibilities of the various actors in an appropriate way. Process descriptions, procedures, as well as directives complement the Quality Handbook for actual use and are available on the intranet.

VAMK’s strategy 2030 is well-known among the staff members, students, and key partner organisations. In the interviews, staff members confirmed that the strategy was developed in a dialogic and collaborative process, thus ensuring that all staff are aware of the connection between VAMK’s strategic goals, their own work, and their contribution to quality enhancement. External stakeholders also had an opportunity to contribute to VAMK’s strategy.

The quality system provides a sound basis for the management of the institution

VAMK’s quality system produces appropriate information especially for management needs. Strategic indicators help to monitor the objectives set for each of the strategic areas for enhancement and have been adapted to the needs of each user group such as the Heads of Units, the Management Team, and the Board of VAMK. Annual planning cycles for the board and the management are clearly designed and highly appreciated as was confirmed in the interviews. Furthermore, the interviews brought evidence that the Board is highly committed to quality work and actively monitors the achievement of goals through the respective indicators.

The Management Team systematically reviews the results produced by the quality system. This enables a large-scale development and reduces the risk that minor details prevail and endanger development activities. Strategic indicators are reviewed four times a year. At the time of the audit visit, the supervisors still had to manually extract indicator data for their areas of responsibility. However, the auditors learned that the data production and the reporting of indicators will soon be automated by means of a new dashboard. Thus, more time will be available for the qualitative analysis of information and results. The auditors welcome this development.

The strategic goals are implemented through the economic and action plans of the units and the entire institution. The action plans define the targets for each unit which relate to VAMK's strategic goals and areas for enhancement. Monitoring of the action plans is based on information stemming from quality management and the use of the strategic indicators.

So far, VAMK has developed a fairly large number of quantitative indicators to measure the results of its strategic and quality work, yet none for societal engagement and impact. The audit team encourages VAMK to also develop indicators for this strategic area and to reconsider the strong emphasis of quantitative indicators. The auditors recommend finding a balance between quantitative and qualitative information, and also include qualitative indicators in their quality management toolbox.

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

- Högskolans självvärdering

New solutions for developing the competence

Deepening the cooperation with working life and increasing the volume of RDI and service activities obligate and encourage us to seek new solutions for developing the competence. Learning new is part of the work, as well as part of well-being at work. Self-development, maintaining and updating professional competence take place even more at work and in national or international networks instead of traditional education and training. Therefore, project cooperation and working life assignments during courses are important in maintaining and developing staff's competencies.

Changes Give Impetus to the Competence Development

The development of the staff's competence is considered from the point of view of VAMK's competence development, as well as from the point of view of the development needs of work duties and individual persons. VAMK has defined its own strengths and a set of new emerging fields. Our working life partners operate in the fields and the cooperation with them helps us to recognise our strengths and enhancement areas. We draw up a document on HR planning and training aims annually, which outlines the principles, needs and measures of staff competence development for VAMK.

In the appraisal discussions between teachers and their immediate supervisors, one area discussed is how the teachers have developed their own professional and pedagogical competence. Other topics covered in the discussion are VAMK's criteria for pedagogical competence, the teacher's own wishes and needs and feedback from the students. Aims are set for the following academic year and a plan for competence development is made. The support services staff also have corresponding appraisal discussions. The HR system to be introduced during 2021 will improve the current discussions process and it will enable an automatic summary of staff competence needs.

Methods of Development

Teachers have had a possibility to gain support for the development of pedagogical competence from Edulab, a service centre for digital pedagogy. In addition to digital pedagogical services, Edulab arranges intensive courses and extensive studies in digital pedagogy, as well as ordered training for member HEIs. Many teachers at VAMK have a solid competence in substance obtained in working life, and to maintain it, we have wanted to support our teaching

staff's short-term working life periods in our partner enterprises. We encourage our staff to participate in projects and service activities. Competence development has been included in the teachers' yearly work plan and an allocation per each unit for it has been reserved in the 2021 budget.The administrative and support service staff can use up to 70 working hours for degree-oriented studies. In addition, our staff can utilise our provision of studies freely. More attention needs to be paid to the sharing of competence, experiences knowledge and skills in the future on our common forums.

Significance of Well-being is Emphasised in the Strategy and Activities

Enhancing the well-being of the staff has been chosen a strategic enhancement area at VAMK because the economy measures in the recent years have burdened the staff and their well-being. Well-being at work is followed up with an staff survey, called Työyhteisövire, the results of which are discussed with each team. The progress and effects of measures are followed up in the Management Team and assessed in the survey the following year. Occupational health service surveys the staff's well-being with a questionnaire, the results of which is also followed up by the Management Team. The occupational health steering group anticipates the need support services of the staff and supervisors alike. With the early intervention model, we strive to prevent any severe problems in well-being. Well-being at work is brought up in appraisal discussions and following up the well-being is part of supervisors' everyday work. Occupational health service assesses the working conditions and safety of the workplace with workplace surveys.

Flexible work and working hour arrangements support and help to reconcile the work and other life in various life situations. Extensive occupational health services and disability management together with occupational health services and employment pension insurance company promote the achievement of the goals of well-being at work. We also subsidise the physical exercise and cultural activities of the staff with the ePassi employee benefit services.

Equality through Cooperation and Openness

Principles for fair treatment of the staff are described in the Equality and Non-discrimination Plan and the realization of the principles are followed up in the Työyhteisövire survey as well in a separate equality and non-discrimination questionnaire. The staff are encouraged to report any grievances they observe regarding equality and non-discrimination through as they see fit either orally to the supervisor, director, health and safety representative, employee representative, or in writing anonymously through the Feedy feedback. The cooperation development group deals with all problems that have arisen. The equality and non-discrimination plan defines the annual enhancement areas and measures to be taken. The cooperation development group and the Management Team follow up the realization of equality and non-discrimination plan. They have also cooperated in drawing up the principles and instructions for recruiting. VAMK's values and strategy have been considered in the instructions.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Processing and follow up of staff survey (Työyhteisövire) results so that it enhances the well-being	Efficient utilisation of the HR system to be introduced
Staff’s possibility to take a working life period	Development of supervisory duties
Collegial support as a resource in the working community	Development of managing an ageing workforce

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

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Strategy guides the development of staff competence

VAMK's renewed strategy highlights five areas for development, also encompassing the competence development needs of the institution. Development needs are analysed in more detail in VAMK's annual document on HR planning and training aims. This comprehensive and informative document forms a solid basis for staff development as a whole. At the individual level, competence development needs are identified during the annual development discussions between staff members and supervisors, and individual development plans are drawn up accordingly. The interviews confirmed that this procedure is widely applied and highly appreciated.

VAMK's strategic focus areas are also mirrored in opportunities provided for staff development. With RDI activities and participation in continuous learning activities having been included in VAMK's teaching staff portfolios, the enhancement of staff's research competences and working life skills is fostered.

Staff competence development is also enabled through working life periods which constitute a valuable opportunity for learning and upskilling. Furthermore, these periods play an important role in achieving the strategic goal to work closely with regional working life and provide input for up-to-date teaching. In the interviews, the auditors learned that the opportunity to go on a working life periods has so far not been used by many colleagues, thus the auditors encourage staff to grasp this unique opportunity (see also chapter 4).

While VAMK documentation related to staff development is comprehensive and well set, the key document for staff recruitment is quite scarce in content and detail. Therefore, with a view to the coming updates of the principles and instructions for staff recruitment, academic staff recruitment processes, competence requirements and actors involved in the respective procedures should be transparently laid out in this document.

Well-being of staff is a strategic priority

Improving staff well-being at work is one of the five strategic areas for development at VAMK. Well-being of the staff is followed with an annual staff survey called Työyhteisövire. The results of the latest staff survey have been discussed in the management team and development measures have been decided, resulting in a large-scale plan of action. However, a more detailed implementation plan with responsible actors and prioritised schedules would further support the

implementation of the chosen measures.

Following the strategy, engagement in RDI has become part of the task portfolio of VAMK’s teaching staff. Even though new personnel have been recruited for continuous learning and RDI activities, there is a risk that teachers’ work duties may become too fragmented and workload for the individual staff members may become too heavy; therefore, the audit team encourages VAMK to remain vigilant and to evaluate and monitor staff well-being regularly.

During the audit interviews, the management of ageing workforce was discussed. This topic is an important management issue as many of VAMK's staff members are close to retirement age. The audit team values VAMK’s approach to this issue and encourages the Management Team to pay attention to the special needs of ageing and experienced personnel, and initiate flexibility in working hours and the revision of job descriptions. Furthermore, VAMK should care for knowledge management and consider how to ensure the transfer of know-how and tacit knowledge from more experienced persons to less-experienced staff members.

VAMK has published a statutory personnel policy plan of equality and non-discrimination on its website. The realisation of this plan is followed up by an equality and non-discrimination questionnaire and Työyhteisövire staff survey. In addition, there is an anonymous Feedy feedback system in place that enables reporting of unfair treatment. The interviews confirmed that Feedy is well-known within the institutional community.

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Högskolans självvärdering

Accurate and Systematic Quality Management

The quality system supports the renewed strategy so that the essential data produced by the quality system is available to be used in various phases of the PDCA cycle. Quality management has become more accurate and systematic by developing the financial planning process, by structuring the procedures and measures and by redefining and refocusing the indicators. The Management Team goes through the processes and makes necessary changes in them in process workshops annually. The aim in the enhancement of activities is an efficient but simple enough model. The new enhancement areas defined according to the new strategy steer the planning of the basic tasks of education and RDI activities. Now activities that have previously been in the background but that are significant to the implementation of the new strategy are also invested in. A map of measures for enhancement areas now under development brings together the enhancement areas and their goals. Yearly goals are further assigned to the units and the degree programmes. The Management Team follows up the indicators of the enhancement areas and strategy four times a year, and the Board, having decided on the most important indicators, follows them up quarterly, as well.

Extensive Information on the Education Process to Various Actors

The provision of education, curricula and tuition are assessed annually. In addition to indicator data, we receive information on the success of the education process from the Graduand Feedback Survey and the Career Monitoring Survey, which belong to the MoEC's indicators. Our aim is to use the results of these surveys even better by selecting some indicators to a closer scrutiny. By reflecting the changes in the results systematically, we can better assess the impact of the measures taken.

The newly adopted course feedback system, Radar surveys (In Finnish Tutkakysely) for the students and group tutoring with its appraisal discussions give versatile information for the assessment of the activities to the Management, immediate supervisors and teaching staff. The Radar surveys are implemented as separate questionnaires in accordance with the progress of the learning process so that for example the emphasis in the questionnaire for the first-year students is on the orientation to the studies and in the questionnaire for the third-year students on practical training and issues related to the thesis. Vamok's questionnaire on social affairs, previously implemented as a survey of its own, has now been integrated into the Radar survey. This has had a positive effect on the response rate when we have reduced the number of questionnaires and possible overlapping.

Strategic Emphasis is Shown as Investment in Enhancement

Our current strategic cooperation with working life and RDI activities are highlighted, whereas earlier the emphasis has been on the functionality of the education process and success. The cooperation with working life gives us signals of what kind of competencies are needed in working life and helps us to anticipate the changes in our operating environment and working life. In 2019, more than 150 companies were involved in our RDI work in implementing projects and working life projects. Feedback from these projects help us to enhance our activities. At the beginning of 2021, we will introduce a project management tool and a new RDI Manager will start work. The Thinking Portfolio project management tool enables a better collecting and follow up of strategic information and the use of competencies gained in the projects. To promote the Open Science and Research, several measures have already been taken, and the President has defined the policy for the organisational culture in Open Science at VAMK.

Towards Inclusive Quality Culture

The community spirit is built on common values, by promotion and nurture of which we will create a basis for mutual trust and common goals. Dialogue, interaction and cooperation are important, and they come true in everyday work, meeting practices and common enhancement projects. In the President's monthly discussion and briefings on Zoom, we deal with topical and important issues. During the corona pandemic, staff meetings have been held weekly to inform the staff how to act safely and responsibly. Close cooperation with Vamok student union has proved to be a valuable asset when the tuition was transferred online, and many students were left alone without a possibility to meet fellow students. In cooperation with Vaasa University Student Union, Vamok took care of quarantined students by contacting them and supplying them with food and medicines; this was reported in National news. VAMK and Vamok sign a cooperation agreement every year regarding for example quality work. Our students have representatives in all VAMK's bodies and work groups. The President meets student union monthly.

Annual cooperation meetings with our most important working life partners have turned out to be a good practice. A large number of teachers from our educational units and degree programmes participate in these meetings. Feedback on the meetings has been good both from our staff and from the working life. Yearly revised agreements create continuity and activity in cooperation. Online meetings have made it possible for even more people to participate. Many changes challenge us to create new forums to share good practices. The first of these is our online magazine Energy in which our staff can share their competence and experiences for the good of our own organisation and the society around us.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
The quality system produces relevant information and is not too heavy	Enhancement of RDI feedback collection in a systematic way

The quality system supports the strategy and achievement of strategic enhancement areas	Systematic analysis of quality feedback related to strategic enhancement areas
Committed, collegial staff	Systematic ways to share good practices

3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The quality system covers the core processes

The quality system covers all core processes of VAMK: education, RDI activities and design services. Regional development work, societal interaction and impact are carried out in all the above-mentioned core processes. A general description of the quality management of the core processes is included in the Quality Handbook. In addition, VAMK has a large collection of process descriptions in place, complementing the Quality Handbook. Process descriptions are annually updated in the Management Team workshops, ensuring that the descriptions are up-to-date and well-known to the top management.

To improve the overall outline and interlinkage of the individual processes, VAMK could consider designing a process map and increasing visualisations through workflow charts or diagrams. The auditors also recommend using the next Quality Handbook revision to integrate further quality-relevant information in the handbook, such as details on information production, development of measures or the description of the quality management of RDI activities and design services. All this will make the Quality Handbook a comprehensive “instrument” to enhance and monitor the quality management of the institution.

All parties participate in the quality management

Students, staff members and working life partners take part in the quality work at VAMK. The interviews with representatives of the student union VAMOK confirmed that students have various possibilities to participate in the development dialogue. There was also evidence that staff members identify development needs with the help of information produced by the quality system. Working life partners participate via advisory committees and by cooperating in education, RDI activities and continuous learning. Annual cooperation meetings with the most important working life partners, the yearly revised agreements and the Key Partner award are good practices which support the continuity of cooperation with working life and thus contribute to the quality of education.

VAMK was able to present several examples of effective quality work and the involvement of different parties in it. The interviews confirmed that VAMK’s quality culture is based on dialogue and openness. The sharing of good practices has increased alongside with the development of the quality culture. VAMK’s new interaction forums and platforms offer potential to further improve sharing of knowledge and good practices in the work community. The strong commitment of the President to quality work was both evident and confirmed in the interviews.

Systematic development of the quality system should be set as driver for quality enhancement

Prior to this FINEEC audit, VAMK had reformed several of its quality system procedures, including institutional-level indicators, quality management of RDI and the course feedback system. These changes are promising, even though the evidence of their impact has not yet been fully deployed due to the rather recent reforms.

Based on the information given in the audit documents and the information gained in the audit visit interviews, so far changes in the quality system have rather been made as a response to emerging development needs than as a systematic exercise. Therefore, the audit team encourages VAMK to continue the dynamic renewal of the quality system as set out in VAMK's strategy. More proactively initiated internal evaluations of the quality system could enhance the continuous strategy implementation and foster quality development as well. The quality system development plan complemented systematically by a self-evaluation or an internal audit could effectively support this important work and have a substantial impact on the quality of VAMK’s core areas.

3.4 The HEI’s examples of successful enhancement activities

- Högskolans självvärdering

Dialogical and Participatory Strategy Process

The strategy process was started at VAMK UAS in the autumn of 2018 with an idea to create a strategy that secures the economy of the UAS and gives added value to the regional working life. The focus was on developing the education process that is working- life oriented and that supports the students’ graduation. The work started with a joint workshop for the Management and the Board. Participating in the process have been staff, students, and ten of our most important working life partners. The dialogical process was implemented by using a joint dashboard for initial surveys and to follow up the progress of work. Participants could access the input given by others, comment on them and make additional questions. After round 2 in February 2019, we had the initial emphases for the strategy, vision, missions and values. The Board approved the strategy on 23 March 2019 to be further developed.

Led by the President, the strategy work has continued by specifying the enhancement areas, indicators and values. These are a basis for the 2021 budget, and they have been discussed in teams and degree programmes staff when preparing the action plans. The strategy is available in form of a strategy leaflets and on our website. The work continues. After finishing an efficient and updated indicator follow-up, and thus able to assess the impact of our strategy, we can move on to the following plan- do – check- act round.

Processing the Results of the Staff Survey

The well-being of the staff is followed up with an annual staff survey (Työyhteisövire), which highlights the strengths and enhancement areas. The results and answers of each team are dealt with in teams. The discussions have clarified and revealed reasons for certain results and has helped with devising enhancement measures. Last year the most supported statement in the survey was that we do meaningful work at VAMK. According to our staff, the most important enhancement area was the improvement of activities with regard to our competitors. The expert in HR affairs summons discussion meetings. She presents the enhancement proposals to the Management team to be decided. The next follow-up on the implementation of the enhancement activities will be in the Management team meeting April 2021. The trend of the results shows how well the enhancement activities have succeeded.

VAMK – Vamok Cooperation

For years, we have developed our cooperation with the student union so that it is an essential

part of VAMK's activities and its enhancement. A sign of this is the agreement signed annually with the student union, which covers, for example, the organisation of tutor activities with related training, services for and integration of international students, cooperation in marketing and recruiting, and the training of meeting representatives for work groups and bodies. To promote studies, Vamok participates in administering the encouragement systems, in which every student who completes 55 credits receives an overall badge. Vamok also activates its members to give feedback and participates in self-assessment in the audit and in other audit-related tasks. Vamok arranges Top Teacher –vote every year, in which teachers are rewarded and their best practices are presented. The organisation of sports activities for students is also one of Vamok's task. The cooperation is regarded as important and the President meets the Board of Vamok regularly.

Staff's Working Life Periods

Teachers' working life periods have proved to be a good way to enhance the staff's competence. These have been arranged at VAMK for years but now we invest in it and encourage the staff more strongly and in a more goal-oriented way than previously. The possibilities of working life periods are discussed with working life partners in annual meetings. Working life periods are also discussed in teachers' appraisal discussions; next year the aim is two to three working life periods in a year per unit. The purpose is also to enable long-term working life periods with special arrangements.

Results of Tutka Survey Support Group Tutoring

There are three different Tutka Student surveys on study-related matters: for first -year students, for second- year students and for third -year students. The Quality Manager draws up the questionnaires and sends tutor teachers the links to the surveys to be forwarded to their respective groups. The results are examined on the UAS level, unit level, degree programme level and group level. The Quality Manager presents the summaries to the Management Team and submits the results of each degree programme to the Head of the Degree Programme and group results to teacher tutors. This way we will get a good notion of the students' opinion of the study-related matters. The aim is that each tutor teacher goes through the results with the group and gives feedback- on- feedback to the students.

4 HEI as a learning organisation

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

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

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

Strengths

- Working life cooperation is strongly connected to VAMK's institutional strategy, to regional companies and to the regional institutions.
- Strategic partnerships effectively capture the needs of working life and cater to the provision of qualified workforce through practice- and competence-oriented education.
- Close and varied cooperation of teaching staff with regional companies and institutions underpin VAMK's ambition to be the main partner in expertise.
- Manifold integration of working life input into curriculum design helps to keep educational offers up-to-date and future-oriented.
- Institutional indicators relating to working life cooperation provide good orientation for development and enhancement.

Recommendations

- Working life projects should be integrated systematically into the planning of teaching and the programme development process to ensure that all students are provided with learning experiences connected to working life.
- Graduates’ competences needed for future work should be captured periodically and more systematically mapped to the needs of working life; teaching and learning should be aligned to foster the attainment of these competences.
- Cooperation with working life should be used consistently to increase proactively continuous learning offers.
- The newly installed platforms should be used diligently and consistently to make continuous learning initiatives for partners from working life more visible.
- Predictive analyses as to labour market trends should be used to provide for future-oriented education and up-skilling through continuous learning.

4.1 Cooperation with working life

- Högskolans självvärdering

Reasons for the Choice of Evaluation Area

The evaluation area chosen by VAMK is cooperation with working life in bachelor's degree education. Education is, besides being one of the tasks decreed in the Universities of Applied Sciences Act, the core of our mission and enhancement area in our strategy. Our strategy conveys our aim to create a new partnership with societal impact together with actors of working life, where the emphases of our education and regional profile meet. In the audit, we wish to receive more insight and methods to integrate the working life cooperation even better into the tuition and learning processes of our education.

The significant export energy industry in our operating environment is based on enterprises that represent the fastest growing state-of-the art technology and competence in their respective fields. It is self-evident that to be able to know the needs and expectations of these enterprises, the cooperation needs to be wide-scale, close and deep enough. These enterprises create more business around them, for example in subcontractor businesses and services, and cooperation with them is important, as it is to meet the competence needs of the entire area. Our aim is that our students obtain skills to find employment in their dream occupation. When they graduate, they must have the competences of the future working life.

Partnership Agreements in Addition to Advisory Committees

To act as a coach for the students in an interface where the changing and reforming working life and the student still building up his or her competencies meet, we have to take care of improving the curricula and competencies of our staff and their acquiring new information. The field-specific advisory committees that convene a couple of times a year have served as cooperation bodies with working life for years. Members in the committees are representatives of significant working life actors and members of the VAMK staff.

Fast changes in working life can be seen in advisory committees, as well. If the working life representatives do not regard this activity as significant or topical, it is difficult to make them commit to and participate in the committee work. Therefore, we are starting a new model in addition to the advisory committees, which is based on an agreement between VAMK and the working life partner. Together with the partner, we will consider various forms of cooperation, agree on the targets and appoint the responsible persons. The cooperation can be, for example, guest lectures, teachers' working life periods, promoting student recruitment for both parties, cooperation in projects and assignments for courses.

Implementing Cooperation with Working Life

In practice, cooperation with working life often is implemented through teachers and their contacts. The problem is that information of this cooperation does not reach others, wider opportunities to cooperate with VAMK are not raised and good cooperation practices are not disseminated in the entire organisation. To increase multi-field cooperation and flow of information, we arrange cooperation meetings with our cooperation partners, and the teaching staff are invited to participate. In these meetings, cooperation results are reviewed, and future cooperation is planned. The phases of working life cooperation are compiled in the annual planning cycle.



Figure 7. Annual planning cycle for working life cooperation

Assessment of the Implementation of the Cooperation with Working Life

The implementation and results of the cooperation is followed up in annual meetings, in which the partners and the staff participate. In appraisal discussions, the supervisor of each person will be informed about the implemented projects with working life, and through that, gets an overview of the working life cooperation in the field of the respective educational programme.

The aim is to inspire and encourage everyone to follow up one's own field and to consider how to keep up with the progress. Gathering information and receiving the overall view of all cooperation with working life by VAMK actors is, however, laborious due to its scope and multifaceted nature. We are planning a questionnaire to measure the partners' satisfaction.

Aims

The aim of the agreement partnership is to gain mutual advantage of the cooperation. The current partners have been chosen considering our emphases, and when negotiating of the forms of cooperation, the needs of both parties have been considered. The set aim of the cooperation with working life is to have thirty agreement partners by the year 2024. We seek to increase the volume of RDI activities and networking with working life, vocational secondary education and partner HEIs. The research platforms under construction support the implementation of these aims. A challenge is to get the entire staff to participate even more in this cooperation. This requires expanding the cooperation opportunities, informing of them and making them a visible part of our activities.

Examples of Cooperation with Working Life

- Wapice Ltd has been chosen as a Cooperation Partner of the Year. The long-standing cooperation has included joint projects, cooperation in tuition, developing curricula and staff exchange.
- Heidi Skjäl, Senior Lecturer at VAMK, have a lot of experience how to implement working life cooperation. This is her article of working-life cooperation projects executed during the study modules.
- The Mirka Innovation Challenge was an open innovation event dedicated to creating new solutions and curve-jumping, paradigm shifting ideas for sustainable future and growth. The aim was to build cross-disciplinary and multi-talented teams for diverse and innovative outcomes.
- Quality improvement effort in Vaasa Central Hospital, in collaboration between a nursing teacher and two nursing students from VAMK and two nursing leaders from the hospital.
- Robot Academy and the master's degree in industrial robotics (In Finnish) The new degree is a sign of close cooperation with working life.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
Partnership model for cooperation with working life	A more wide-scale inclusion of students in working life cooperation
Regular dialogue with strategic partners	Inclusion of opportunities for working life cooperation as part of all teachers' work
Versatile cooperation with working life	Increasing awareness of our cooperation opportunities among working life actors

4.1 Cooperation with working life

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

Cooperation with working life serves as source for future-oriented education

Cooperation with working life is strongly anchored in VAMK's institutional strategy and mirrors the institution's mission to be a competent partner for both regionally and internationally operating companies; furthermore, it caters to the needs of the labour market through competence- and skills-oriented education. Thus, VAMK constantly seeks to strengthen the cooperation with working life and integrate the working life cooperation more deeply into the institution's teaching and learning.

Input from working life to curriculum development and competence enhancement comes through various channels, such as field-specific advisory boards, strategic partners and regional companies and authorities. In meetings, both formal and informal and spread over a year, current trends and needs are discussed and thus input is fed into curriculum development and teaching. All cooperation forms are based on dialogue and commitment to mutual learning. Institutional indicators relating to working life cooperation provide good orientation for the development of this area.

Learning from and with working life is key to developing the competences of qualified workforce. Thus, student projects and student learning phases with working life should already be systemically integrated into curriculum development to assure an equal learning experience with working life for all students and foster a broader participation of teaching staff members working life cooperation. VAMK could also consider implementing regular student competitions or start-up pitches as integral parts of their teaching with representatives from working life acting as jury members.

In the interviews, stakeholders appreciatively referred to the added value that cooperation with VAMK teachers and VAMK graduates brings to the entire region. Regional institutions as well as regional companies and industries can draw considerable benefit from the various forms of cooperation, be it through knowledge transfer, competence development or common projects.

Partnerships provide impetus for cooperation and add value to VAMK

VAMK's new partnership model will foster new forms to tighten working life – teaching nexus and increase societal impact through guest lectures, cooperation in course assignments, thesis supervision, promotion of student recruitment, and working-life periods for staff members, just to

name some examples. To boost the interaction with working life, VAMK aims to set up 30 partnership agreements of this new model until 2024 and make them visible through research platforms and networking activities. Furthermore, these agreements will provide impetus to enhance working life cooperation in degree programmes and RDI.

VAMK's annual planning cycle for working life cooperation as well as the annual follow-up will support the institution's strategic aim to be the main partner in expertise. Annual meetings and events with partners foster this aim and provide a good basis and valuable opportunity for staff-to-company as well as company-to-company connections. As was mentioned in the interviews, these annual events as well as informal meetings make the cooperation between teachers and working life "tangible". The implementation of key account managers for strategic partnerships facilitate communication for both sides.

Competence development takes place through mutual learning

The opportunity for staff members to go on a working-life period is an example of good practice as these periods contribute to a more stringent competence-orientation of teaching and updating staff's field knowledge; thus, staff members should be encouraged to opt for this possibility while foreseeing necessary back-up through the institution.

Working-life cooperation means mutual learning, thus VAMK should strengthen its partnerships through continuous learning offers for its partners and their employees. The new interdisciplinary platforms provide an excellent opportunity to disseminate both results and plans. VAMK should use these platforms to proactively disseminate continuous learning offers and new initiatives. Furthermore, predictive analyses regarding labour market trends could provide valuable input for future-oriented education and up-skilling through continuous learning.

The newly founded alumni network is a valuable source of competence enhancement and should be used to mentor and foster the link of students' experience with working life in the sense of peer-learning.

Further potential can be drawn from cooperation with working life

The new partnership model foresees various forms of possible cooperation: these forms could be streamlined and channelled according to the strategic goals of VAMK to steer output and impact stemming from the partnership. Furthermore, the partnership model would also benefit from support material that describes how partnerships are managed, how VAMK's strategic goals can be included in partnership agreements and open possibilities to expand partnerships beyond the obvious methods of collaboration. Information based on written material or even a toolbox could clarify the range of cooperation of the new model of strategic partnerships. This could serve to widen collaboration from education to RDI or vice versa.

So far, VAMK's working-life cooperation is mainly oriented towards big regional and internationally active companies of the region. With a view to the importance of SMEs within the

global economic context, and the job opportunities SMEs provide for students and graduates, VAMK should also explore ways to foster SME cooperation in the region for strategic partnerships.

Examples of VAMK’s good practices in working life cooperation

- The well-monitored meeting and interaction events with partners, such as annual meet-up events are commendable as they make partnerships more systematic and add value to working life through staff interaction.
- The opportunity for staff to go for a period of working life experience to learn in the field and from the field experience is a true example of good practice.
- The cooperation with the energy sector of the region to provide students with future-oriented competences and know-how is a model for how to foster state-of-the-art knowledge and competences.
- After-placement review of students’ experiences particularly in education for the health sector capture expectations and experiences to be used by peers.
- The implementation of key account managers for strategic partners help to streamline communication between VAMK and its working-life partners.

5 Benchlearning

- Högskolans självvärdering

Efficient Thesis Writing Process for Timely Graduation

Selection of the Target and the Partner

VAMK's Benchlearning Theme 'Efficient Thesis Writing Process for Timely Graduation' is part of evaluation area 1.1. The planning of education. The success of the student is one of our strategic enhancement areas. With efficient thesis process we promote the student's graduation in time and thus their success in working life. In the free choice benchlearning project we examined the thesis guidance processes at VAMK and Novia UAS, methods used and ways of working in various phases of the thesis. We asked Novia to be our benchlearning collaborator because we knew, based on our previous cooperation, that our thesis processes differed from each other. We had observed that the students of Novia seemed to do better in the final phases of the studies than VAMK's students.

Aims of Benchlearning Project

The aim at VAMK is to reduce the number of dropouts and to increase the number of students that graduate in the normative time. The reason for study delay with many students is the prolongation of the thesis process. With some students, the thesis may be the only part that is missing from the degree. With this benchlearning project we wanted to find means and ideas to make the thesis process more effective at VAMK. The organisational cultures are different in Technology, Business Administration and Health Care and Social Services and this influences the thesis process, as well. Therefore, we chose corresponding degree programmes from VAMK and Novia for comparison.

Table 1. Degree programmes selected to the benchmarking project

	VAMK	**NOVIA**
BUSINESS Bachelor of Business Administration	Tradenomi, Taloushallinto (Business Administration)	Tradenom, företagsekonomi (Business Administration)
	Tradenomi, Kansainvälinen kauppa (International Trade)	Tradenom, internationell handel (International Trade)
TECHNOLOGY Bachelor of Engineering	Insinööri, Sähkötekniikka (Electrical Engineering) Insinööri, Tietotekniikka (Information Technology)	El- och automationsteknik (Electrical Engineering and Automation Technology)

Phases and Schedule of the Project:

The decision on the benchlearning theme was taken by the Management Team in February 2019. After discussions, we contacted the Quality Manager at Novia UAS and invited the Presidents, Quality Managers and Director of Units from both UASs to a meeting.

The project proceeded as follows:

1. The meeting of the partners

We met on 4 October 2019 and draw up the preliminary project plan. The plan included the target, aims, restrictions and participants of the benchlearning project. VAMK's Quality Manager was appointed the project manager.

2. Acquiring background information

The project manager compiled background information on the thesis processes at both UASs and visited a thesis seminar at Novia on 22 November 2019.

3. Sending the questionnaires

We sent a student questionnaire to students in various phases of the thesis process and a supervisor questionnaire to the teachers participating in the project. We received 113 responses from VAMK's students.

4. Workshops

Before the workshops, the teachers were sent a summary of both questionnaires. Workshops were held on 28 January for both Technology and Business Administration programmes and another for Business Administration programme on 10 February 2020.

5. Summary of the observations made in workshops

The project manager presented a summary of the observations to the Directors of Units

6. Policy to develop the thesis process

The Directors of Units drew up common policies concerning all degree programmes to develop the thesis process at VAMK.

7. Information and application

The results of the benchlearning project were presented in the Quality Zoom on 21 October 2020. We have already piloted new methods and experiences have been positive. The process has been refined and more students have already graduated on schedule. We will continue to develop the process in accordance with the policy.

8. Assessment of Benchlearning and Measures Taken

The implementation of the benchlearning process succeeded very well and we found means to develop our thesis process. It was evident already in the background material that the thesis processes at VAMK and Novia were different; the most significant difference was in the approach: at Novia it was collective, at VAMK individual. The other differences observed were due to this basic difference, and they can be found in the table below.

Table 2. Observed differences in the thesis process at VAMK and Novia

Practices of VAMK	**Practices of Novia**
Individual process, in which the teacher and the student have a possibility to accommodate the process into their schedules. Consequently:	**Scheduled group process,** which follows up both the teacher's and the student's activity. Consequently:
• The general instructions are available on the Study site on the portal	• The schedule and the instructions are available on the Moodle platform, a joint platform for the supervisors and the students
• Every thesis supervisor decides independently on the scheduling and other matters related to supervision	• The thesis process of all groups in the degree programme follows the same *annual planning cycle for the thesis*
• The student receives individual guidance, but it takes a lot of the supervisor's time	• One process starts in the autumn semester, one in the spring semester
• The thesis process is flexible for the teacher and the student, but this flexibility can delay the completion of the thesis	• The process compels everyone to follow the same schedule, which puts pressure on some teachers and students but gives the support of the group

The project produced outlines for principles towards which we aim to develop our thesis process:

- Advancing the thesis process in the study plan
- Scheduling the process beforehand so that students are aware of their scheduled progress and deadlines of each phase. At VAMK, a supervising teacher of each degree programme and group prepares the schedules.
- Increasing group tutoring
- Better utilisation of digital tools in the thesis guidance
- Better inclusion of the enterprise that has provided the thesis topic in various phases of the process.

Comments of the audit team

VAMK's benchlearning project led to increase in timely

graduations

VAMK'S benchlearning project focused on efficient thesis writing and thus goes hand in hand with VAMK's ambition to care for students' timely and smooth progression in studies to facilitate graduating on time. The choice of the benchlearning topic was the result of data provided within the institutional student-life cycle and thus provides evidence of the effectiveness of VAMK's quality management.

VAMK chose Novia UAS as a partner for this project since the thesis writing processes at each of the institutions were highly diverse and thus provided an ideal basis for mutual learning. Furthermore, as was known from previous cooperation between the two institutions, Novia UAS students were seemingly able to cope better with the task of thesis writing than VAMK students, who faced the risks of drop-out or at least study delay, both resulting from hurdles in the thesis writing process. As programmes in Technology, Business Administration and Health Care Services are impregnated by specific "discipline-cultures", similar programmes at Novia were chosen as benchlearning partner programmes. Thus, three programmes from Business and Technology were selected at each institution.

The process steps were jointly set up and fixed. To set the stage for the project, a questionnaire was sent to students in various phases of their thesis process and another questionnaire was sent to supervising teachers. The information gained from these questionnaires served as a starting point for two subsequent workshops organised for teachers, the summary of which was brought to the attention of the directors of units as these are responsible for the planning, implementation, and enhancement of education.

As a result of this benchlearning project, common policies for all degree programmes and their thesis processes were developed, with new methods and a refinement of the processes being implemented. This process approach demonstrates that VAMK consistently involves students and other stakeholders in policy decisions.

In the interviews, the audit team learned that the new process entailing an earlier start of the thesis project as well as the group monitoring was welcomed by students and staff; the first results collected showed that the number of timely graduations had increased, thus confirming the success of this project. VAMK is to be commended for this stringent follow-up evaluation of the impact and results.

VAMK is recommended to implement the new thesis process in all programmes

As was equally learned in the interviews, the new process has not yet been implemented in all programmes, and thus should be rolled out consistently throughout all programmes. The lengthier period for thesis preparation could also be used to link smaller parts of RDI projects with the theses and thus foster students' involvement in RDI. It was also mentioned in the interviews

that external stakeholders and partners wished to see interdisciplinary topics being tackled in students’ theses as well; with the new timeline for the thesis project in place, VAMK is encouraged to consider this request as interdisciplinarity mirrors students’ future work environment.

Furthermore, the audit team encourages VAMK to define rules for thesis guidance as the quality of thesis guidance is rather varied and dependent on the teacher a student is assigned. When further developing and implementing the renewed thesis process throughout the institution, VAMK should also focus on equal quality of thesis guidance.

VAMK is encouraged to undertake more benchlearning projects on topics of concern in the future, eventually also with some of its international partners, as these projects not only contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning but also constitute an important element of quality enhancement for the entire institution.

VAMK is already actively engaged in benchlearning with the Health and Well-being Unit of Novia; as the development of students' bilingual skills is a topical need for the development of the health and social sector of the region, VAMK is encouraged to intensify its cooperation with NOVIA in this respect, also through benchlearning projects.

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.