

# AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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## 1.1 The planning of education

### - Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

#### 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 these 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**

Planning of education meets the needs of working life

Utilising international and multicultural working and learning environment in the planning of education

Cooperation between HEIs in Vaasa and with secondary education institutions

### **Enhancement areas**

Increasing the provision of continuous learning anticipatorily to meet the future needs

Increasing RDI and integration into education

Teachers' cooperation in planning the workload of the simultaneously running courses

## 1.1 The planning of education

### - Auditointiryhmän arvio

### 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.