

AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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

Year of publication **2021**, FINEEC publications **15:2021**

Language **English**

ISBN **978-952-206-702-9 pdf**

1.2 The implementation of education

- HEI's self-assessment

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

- Assessment of the audit team

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.