KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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1.2 The implementation of education

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Fair and appropriate student selection and flexible study paths

UEF follows national guidelines in student selection processes having clear selection criteria and common guidelines aligned with the Council for Teaching and Guidance. The university is actively involved in a national development project to provide a clear and smooth route to university studies.

The admissions routes and selection criteria are published beforehand on the opintopolku.fi portal, which is open to all. The selection process has been developed, in particular by expanding Open University routes and opening up multi-modal training to meet the needs of working life. The number applicants applying via an Open University route has increased, and the number of people admitted through the route has risen sharply.
The selection criteria for doctoral programmes and the guidelines for research proposals have been refined and are open to applicants, and application deadlines and English language requirements have been harmonised.

Students can apply to the University of Eastern Finland’s Board of Appeals for an appeal against the decision if they are dissatisfied with the student selection.

Students have flexibility to change their major subject inside the university, and an elective minor study right allows for individual combinations of skills. It is also possible to transfer from university to another within the same major/field as a so-called transfer student based on the selection criteria set by each university.

A flexible personal study plan (PSP) process allows students to take an active role in their own learning and the learning process. Instructions on the recognition of competencies have been outlined and, where necessary, specified at the faculty level and the documentation is openly available. The broad elective study right also encourages students to consider different options for their own study path.

The university has extensive educational cooperation with various higher education institutions. There are many types of educational cooperation. For example, one higher education institution may offer another institution courses that are compulsory in their degree structures, or they may jointly offer a wide range of elective courses for all.

Connections with working life in education

Links with working life are created and maintained through working life days, career guidance, expert lectures on working life, traineeships and thesis work in companies. There are compulsory traineeships for studies in professional fields e.g. pharmacy and teacher training. In addition, the faculties strongly support generalist disciplines. The Teacher Training Schools provide most teacher training at the university and they are involved in a network that ensures the needs of teacher training in other training locations. Traineeships as part of undergraduate degrees support the formation of connections with working life. The degree structures of international master's programmes have been strengthened to include a traineeship component.

The student organisations have been offered training and coaching in creating working life events (paid by the university) to strengthen the engagement and expertise in building cooperation with working life from a view of the student organisations.

In doctoral studies, the Academic Working Life Skills course allows students to gain skills through relevant courses connected to working life and for example, by participating in academic events and trainings.

Investing in study support and student well-being

UEF has a well-established tutor process that starts when a student is accepted into the university. The student is assigned their own student and staff tutor who offer guidance in both study-related matters and in getting used to the university and student life. Teachers responsible for personal study plans in process help each student to take their individual studying pathway. The Student Union is heavily involved in the development of peer tutoring and orientation during the initial guidance. The university has invested in student guidance by developing the Everyone Gives Guidance model and the Digistartti orientation package.

Students receive feedback on their learning outcomes through several procedures at the group and individual levels. Feedback can be related to an exam or assignment or portfolio, or it can be verbal feedback in a learning situation. Cumulative learning feedback is applied for example in pharmacy and biomedicine.

Student progress data is available at the faculty/department/subject level for the monitoring of degrees. Digital tools for systematic tracking of students' progress have been developed to identify drop-outs at the subject/departmental level and get them back into education or, if necessary, referred to the necessary support and guidance services. Analysis of study paths has been piloted, and good practices of them are shared through the pedagogical leaders network, for example.

In doctoral studies, the university ensures that each doctoral student has at least two supervisors who provide support for the advancement of studies and learning. The doctoral programme coordinators also provide support and guidance throughout doctoral studies.

Special attention has been paid to student well-being. The university has participated in several key projects of the Ministry of Education and Culture to develop students' guidance and well-being. The most significant of these are the reform of initial guidance and the investments made in student well-being during and after the coronavirus pandemic, such as a resource for student psychologists and sports advisers. The university hired five well-being coordinators in spring 2021. In addition, well-being coordinators contacted all students during the coronavirus pandemic to reach out to those who needed special support in their studies, provided them with peer support, and referred them to other services if necessary. The university hired 44 teaching assistants for the departments/units in autumn 2021 to support teachers and students in changes in the organisation of teaching.

Through its Bridges I and II projects, the university has implemented several measures in cooperation with the Student Union to support student well-being. The most extensive of these have been the creation of the Student2Student operating model and the recruitment of a third student psychologist.

The university has also renewed several of its guidelines on student well-being, including the early intervention model. The university has shared guidelines and recommendations in Kamu to ensure equal treatment of students in terms of student admissions, enrollment, tuition fees and scholarships, recognition and accreditation of competencies, and applying for extra time.

The university has an Equal Opportunities Committee, which includes representatives of staff organisations, the Student Union, and the employer. It has prepared an Equality and Equal Opportunities Plan, which describes the current situation regarding gender equality and equal opportunities at the university and measures intended to implement and promote gender equality and equal opportunities among staff and students.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Extensive connections between degrees and working life	Systematic monitoring of study progress and development of pathway analysis to identify drop-outs

Significant investment in student well-being	The need to improve the use of personnel and facilities resources to cope with the growing number of students
Initial guidance (including Digistartti)	Development and harmonisation of guidance counselling and training
Good e-learning support services	Monitoring the supervision of doctoral dissertation work
Consolidating the utilisation of open learning materials	

1.2 The implementation of education

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

Clear and consistent student selection processes are in place

UEF has clear and consistent selection procedures for students. UEF follows national guidelines for student selection procedures with clear selection criteria and common guidelines agreed with the Teaching and Guidance Council. The admission routes and selection criteria are published on the Studyinfo.fi -portal. Studyinfo is an official website maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The selection process has been further developed, especially by expanding the Open University routes. A bot system supports students in their search for information. All relevant information is easily accessible and available also in English.

Flexible learning with personal study plans supports students' learning processes

A flexible system of personal study plans (PSP) supports students' learning processes. Students can choose between a variety of minor subjects and earn additional ECTS in areas that interest them. A further strengthening of the individualisation of studies can be seen in the fact that there is a comprehensive system for the recognition of prior learning at the UEF. The importance of the active role of students was emphasised both in the SAR and in the audit visit. The opportunities for students can be described as good, but there is also room for improvement. For example, students reported that in some cases students have little opportunity to work in an interdisciplinary way. The audit team recommends UEF to explore how to give students more opportunities to work in interdisciplinary ways and enhance access to learning spaces.

The high degree of flexibility requires a high level of guidance and counselling. In the discussion with students during the audit visit, it was shown that there is still room for improvement in some areas and that students would like to see contact persons clearly named who can then deal with

the students' concerns. As mentioned in the SAR and in the audit visit, students receive feedback on their learning outcomes through various procedures at the group and individual level, like cumulative knowledge tests in medicine. The variety of methods for recording learning progress was also positively highlighted by students during the audit visit. The audit team recommends UEF to clearly name contact persons for students.

UEF plans to improve the feedback process by introducing systematic monitoring of study progress and by developing a study progression analysis system to identify students at risk to prevent drop-out. The SAR identifies the development of a learning analytics system as an area for improvement. In the audit visit, it became clear that the development of a learning analytics system is on its way but is not yet at the final stage. The audit team recommends moving forward with the development.

Students rate the quality of teaching and supervision as good, but experiences vary

The quality of teaching is rated high at UEF. This became evident during the audit visit. In the student workshops, it was emphasised that the flipped classroom approach is much appreciated. UEF supports lecturers in providing trainings for lecturers on activating and diverse teaching methods, especially flipped classroom teaching. This obviously bears fruit: students spoke of positive learning experiences, approaches to learning new things and reflecting from different perspectives, like case studies, role plays, group work, panel discussions, and competent and friendly lecturers who care. Students positively mentioned aspects such as flexibility, lack of hierarchies, approachable professors, and the possibility to choose a wide range of courses. Students reported that courses are designed to promote competence. In this context, students stated they felt that lecturers wanted them to learn rather than just pass the course. It is evident that the quality of teaching is of importance.

Another strength of the university's educational provision is that teaching at UEF is in many cases clearly related to working life. UEF offers working life days, career guidance, expert lectures on working life, internships, and final theses in companies. It is also positive that the degree structures of the international master's programmes have been expanded to include an internship component. In degree programmes with a vocational focus, like health and teacher training, there is a very good fit with professional practice. The Faculty of Science, Forestry, and Technology was also mentioned as a good example in terms of industry cooperation. As faculty members noted, it is not so easy to make a clear connection to the labour market in general degree programmes. Here it depends more on the motivation of the individual teachers and the picture is more inconsistent. The audit team recommends also expanding the vocational orientation of the general education degree programmes.

The quality of teaching and support during the COVID pandemic is rated as adequate. The students stated that flipped learning and distance learning were a great experience. Contact with

the teachers during the COVID pandemic was good and easy. Other students would like to see a hybrid model with a mix of online and onsite teaching. Some students stated that distance learning detracted from the positive learning experience and that they would like to come back to campus to have more onsite teaching, especially the international students. The teaching staff also find face-to-face teaching rewarding. The audit team recommends that the UEF needs to develop a coherent teaching strategy for the ”new normal”.

There are also negative voices and indications of potential for improvement. Students would like to see more flexibility in responding to students in difficult situations, clear and easy-to-find information, better organisation of courses and a better distribution of the workload over the semester. Students stated that there are too many different channels of information and that sometimes they do not know where to find the relevant information. In addition, students would like more comprehensive advice on the composition of their courses for their studies. For example, choosing minor subjects does not seem to be so easy for some students. For international students, the situation is more challenging because many minor courses are offered only in Finnish. The audit team recommends UEF to review the channels of information from a students’ perspective.

Student well-being needs permanent funding and support

UEF focuses its attention on student well-being and equality of students. This is seen as a strength by the audit team. However, it is also recommended that this focus be maintained for the future and that the necessary financial and human resources be found for this. UEF has renewed several of its guidelines on student well-being, including the early intervention model. During the COVID pandemic, student well-being was of particular concern. The UEF responded by recruiting five well-being coordinators in spring 2021. The university has also implemented several student well-being interventions in collaboration with the Student Union, like the Bridges I and II projects and the Student2Student operating model. Currently, three student psychologists work at UEF.

However, despite the investment during the COVID pandemic, the system is under-resourced and over-stretched. Psychologist visits are booked quickly and there are long waiting lists. Project-based funding jeopardises long-term support, like the Bridges project. The audit team finds that both additional funding for service expansion and the continuation of project-based funding are needed for the well-being of students. In addition, continuous monitoring of effectiveness and needs in a changing environment is required. Therefore, the audit team recommends that UEF should look at continuity in the provision of welfare services.

Support and guidance for doctoral researchers needs attention

There are different measures to support doctoral researchers in their development, like training and courses from the open university. The doctoral programme coordinators also provide support and guidance. Interviews with doctoral researchers revealed near universal-praise for the dual-advisor system that was implemented. Many doctoral researchers were praised for their high-quality mentoring.

However, during the audit visit some doctoral researchers spoke of feeling insufficiently supported. Doctoral researchers without scholarship or contract worker status reported that they are disadvantaged in terms of access to research resources and infrastructure. This lack of support for some doctoral researchers leads to a two-tier system in their view and is perceived as an injustice. It seems justified to investigate how widespread these problems are and implement appropriate solutions. Doctoral researchers who had funding reported that the recent change from 4-year funding to 2+2-year funding caused problems. This increased the pressure to publish and make significant progress in the first two years of their programme. This is especially relevant for disciplines where significant research advances require longer periods of time. The funding situation for doctoral researchers and their status at the university needs to be addressed at the university level. The creation of employment relationships with 10% of grant-funded doctoral researchers is an improvement (see Chapter 3). However, the analysis of possible measures to support all doctoral researchers with sufficient resources should be addressed in the coming years.

When the audit team asked about supporting access to Finnish or global labour markets, an incoherent picture emerged. Some doctoral researchers stated career support varies between the departments and the faculties. For international doctoral researchers career options are limited. There are some projects that focus on promoting employment. The interviewees stated that UEF is on the way, but more action is needed. The audit team shares this impression. It is strongly recommended that measures should be taken to further improve the situation of doctoral researchers. UEF could also pay more attention to international students. This issue is discussed in Chapter 4.