KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF AALTO UNIVERSITY

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1.1 The planning of education

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

A future-led learning strategy guides the planning of education

Clear roles and responsibilities provide a good basis for the management of education and the implementation of our future-led learning strategy. The Vice President for Education leads and coordinates the development of the University's educational activities across the Schools leads the Learning Steering Group (LESG), which prepares and coordinates the implementation of the university's strategy and joint development projects in education. The LESG also coordinates the planning and development of new degree programme initiatives and the Aalto degree programme portfolio by ensuring that these have a clear purpose which aligns with the strategy and research focus areas and meets the national and international framework and working life needs. LESG coordinates and prepares items for the university's decision-making bodies, such as the Academic Affairs Committee. The Doctoral Education Working Group (DEWG) supports the LESG in its duties by coordinating the planning, execution and evaluation of doctoral programmes. The annual University Dialogue steers the planning of education by setting specific targets for schools and fields. The Learning Services management team (LESjory) supports the LESG and other education-related bodies by coordinating the preparation of administrative items.

The President decides on the introduction and termination of degree programmes and annual student intake numbers. The University Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) decides on student admission criteria, the university's curricula and degree requirements, as well as other general rules related to teaching, research, art and creative practices.

Collaboration with external stakeholders (alumni, research or network partners and advisory board members) supports the planning and development of a future-led learning portfolio and curriculum at all levels (university, school and department/degree programme).

The university curricula are designed and implemented in accordance with the university's strategy and various academic guidelines, rules and regulations. The school-specific degree regulations have been replaced with common degree regulations for bachelor's and master's degrees (in 2021) and doctoral education (in 2018), and these provide a joint framework for the planning of education at Aalto. The degree programme director oversees the planning, execution, assessment and development of the programme, and each study module has a teacher in charge of developing and implementing its teaching. The programme director's handbook includes guidelines and instructions for the curriculum design process.

Future-led teaching and learning is one of the cornerstones of the university's strategy. The understanding of future competence needs is therefore an important part of the planning of education. Schools and degree programmes have different avenues to ensure close collaboration with external stakeholders and alumni. There are both school-level formal advisory boards (e.g., the Corporate Advisory Board at the School of Business) and programme-level informal annual events for stakeholders. This supports two-way communication to build an understanding of current and future needs in work life.

Teachers are encouraged to integrate internationalisation and global competence skills into their teaching. An internationalised curriculum also helps build future working life skills for Aalto graduates.

Concrete tools to support teachers in this mission are the curriculum design guidelines and pedagogical training courses, such as curriculum development and multicultural teaching. The new Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness guidelines also include concrete examples on how to enhance internationalisation in teaching and education.

Our objective is competency-based planning of education

The degree programme supports both the development of the field and the student's securement of a meaningful future profession. The aim is the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that are vital for the student's professional future and working life, including transferrable skills and special competencies in their own field.

The learning outcomes and contents of the programme, as well as its methods for evaluating teaching and learning, should form a cohesive, foreseeable whole from the student's point of view, thereby helping them graduate within the target timeframe. The goal is for students to graduate on time and in a state of wellbeing, ready for the demands of working life and to continually develop their competencies.

As part of the course feedback surveys, students are asked to evaluate the workload they experienced in the course. Student wellbeing surveys ('AllWell?' and Doctoral wellbeing study) also provide valuable information on the workload that students experience. The results from these surveys, together with other programme evaluations, are discussed at different meetings and forums in the schools to identify suitable development actions.

Each degree programme has nominated student representatives, and many also have external stakeholders from industry, non-profit organisations and/or other relevant parties who participate in the development of the programme. Programme development is a continuous process that is done following the continuous improvement cycle. Students take an active part in all phases of the process, while external stakeholders are mainly involved in the evaluation and planning phases.

The curricula of the programmes, majors and minors (BSc, MSc), as well as course descriptions, are approved by the school's Academic Affairs Committees (excluding offerings from the Language Centre and the Open University, which are approved by the University Academic Affairs Committee), where there are representatives of professors, students and other faculty and staff.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
The university has a strong focus on managing and developing its educational portfolio, with well-established processes and joint criteria for new degree programme initiatives.	Further development of a critical and evidence-based review of the attractiveness of the current portfolio would be helpful. Stakeholder feedback should be systematically considered in portfolio management.
The university works to create awareness of the importance of multidisciplinary skills while striving to balance between disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches.	Educational planning could be improved further through enhancing the pedagogical competence of the teaching community.
The annual clock designed for programme management helps programme management teams plan and execute their tasks alongside their other academic duties.	The programme director's role should be further clarified, especially in relation to the role of the heads of departments.
Concrete development in integrating the university's strategic cross-cutting approaches (i.e., sustainable solutions, entrepreneurial mindset and radical creativity) is accomplished by providing support for teachers' competence.	There is a need for active and systematic interaction with upper secondary schools for curriculum development and alignment across different levels of education.

1.1 The planning of education

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Aalto's degree programmes and other provisions are planned with clearly defined learning outcomes

Aalto has robust procedures, instructions and guides for competency-based education planning. Emphasis is put on identifying future competence needs and planning education according to these needs. There are detailed instructions for formulating and designing programme-level learning outcomes. A Guide to Successful Teaching advises teachers on devising and implementing learning outcomes at the course level. These materials constitute an excellent framework for planning education with clearly defined learning outcomes. During the interview

with Aalto education specialists, it was pointed out that the specification of learning outcomes may also be influenced by discussions with students, alumni and external stakeholders.

There is a 2-year curriculum planning cycle – i.e., curriculum contents are confirmed for two years. A sampling of the Academic Catalogue indicates that programmes and courses, as a rule, have learning outcomes adhering well to principles laid out in the instructions. The interviews with student union representatives and doctoral students showed that learning outcomes, as a rule, are systematically communicated to students. However, during the student workshops, it was mentioned that intended programme-level outcomes could be communicated better.

In addition, although the programme-level learning outcome descriptions are de facto in reasonable compliance with the National Framework for Qualifications (FINQF), procedures applied in ensuring formal compliance with the FiNQF could be stated more explicitly in Aalto documents.

The planning ensures that Aalto's education is strategically aligned and relevant for working life

Through the systematic annual processes, the University Preview, the University Review, and the University Dialogue, which cover all schools and degree programmes, Aalto updates strategies, priorities and goals and makes plans for their education portfolio. The resulting education planning documents are openly available. Aalto's Strategic plan for education is an annually revised target agreement with ambitions to be realised through five prioritised actions. These are described in terms of a desired target state in 2030 and concrete, measurable milestones to be passed.

Furthermore, all schools have defined their own strategic visions, plans and goals based on the common framework of the institutional strategies and plans and the long-term direction and prioritised actions defined therein. In education, the schools have the same five prioritised actions as the university, but individual target states and milestones are based on their own strengths, needs and characteristics. The stated goals are always transparent, ambitious and measurable.

The organisation of the education area and the various roles and responsibilities involved in education planning creates an interplay between all organisational levels. The SER and several interviews confirmed systematic interplay between the various committees, working groups and decision-makers involved in education planning. It also links strategic management to operational issues.

In conclusion, Aalto's educational strategy is strongly and systematically linked to action plans at the institutional and school levels. It was repeatedly pointed out in interviews that the three interlocking annual strategic management processes ensure strong alignment between strategies, priorities and actions. Also, it was emphasised in several interviews, including that of the Board, that the revision of plans is based on systematic and inclusive analysis and feedback loops. Roles and responsibilities are clearly described, and the overall organisation of the

education area is fit for purpose.

Regarding procedures for ensuring relevance for working life, top management described a multilevel process, from contact with individual professors up to the programme, school and university level. At the institutional level, external stakeholders contribute to the University Preview process.

Aspects concerning internationalisation are ensured in Aalto's planning process

Aalto's aim of internationalisation is educating globally competent graduates. Internationalisation aspects are well integrated into Aalto's education offerings at all levels, and there is evidence of systematic planning for and prioritisation of those aspects from bachelor to doctoral education.

A rich menu of supporting tools for internationalisation is available: curriculum internationalisation, student and staff mobility, international partnerships and projects, international joint programmes and double degree agreements, international student recruitment and promotion of multicultural learning environments. Pedagogical training courses, Aalto's Language Centre and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) guidelines support planning for integrating internationalisation possibilities into courses and programmes. Some schools have established international advisory boards to strengthen global visibility. Aalto's high proportion of international staff members and students and an extensive network of partner universities in all parts of the world also enhance opportunities for internationalisation.

The interview with educational specialists emphasised the importance of international mobility and double degree programmes with international universities while pointing out a challenge in motivating Aalto students to study abroad. Another future challenge relating to sustainability demands and reduced CO2 emissions may impact travel regulations and, thus, possibilities for international physical mobility.

Teaching, assessment and learning environments are planned to support learning outcomes

The principle that teaching methods, student assessment and learning environments must support the achievement of learning outcomes is well integrated into Aalto's guidelines for education planning. There are clear instructions, useful tools for programme directors and much good practical guidance for teachers. One example is the guide Get Inspired! – A Guide to Successful Teaching. The Programme Director's Handbook contains curriculum design instructions placing learning outcomes at the centre of education planning while teaching and assessment methods are seen as tools to support the outcomes.

Input from staff workshops emphasised Aalto's wide range of physical learning environments supporting different learning activities, such as seminar rooms, workshop spaces, auditoriums, group-work rooms, self-study spaces and video studios. Students have access to these spaces outside organised teaching. There are interesting examples of virtual learning environments, e.g.

for learning about lab work. An explicit aim in Aalto is to enhance the social learning environment to support open discussions and inclusion.

Students and external stakeholders participate systematically and purposefully in education planning

Students participate in the planning of education in several fora, for instance, the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), The Learning Steering Group (LeSG), the Doctoral Education Working Group, individual degree programme committees and the Aalto Management Team (AMT). The student representatives are selected in elections organised by the Student Union upon request from the university. Individual Schools also have school-level Academic Affairs Committees. Doctoral students also participate systematically in doctoral programme committees at the school level. However, no student representative is on the Board (see Chapter 3.3).

External stakeholders also participate in education planning at all levels, from the University Board to school-level formal advisory boards. In addition, there are various informal programme-level annual events for stakeholders. The SER states that collaboration with external stakeholders supports the planning and development of a future-led learning portfolio and curriculum at all levels. This was confirmed in interviews with top management, deans, and education specialists.

Research, development, innovation and artistic activities link education with research-based information

During several interviews, it was apparent that Aalto's research and innovation culture is strong and impacts education activities. One example given by top management is how Aalto's seven key research areas guide the recruitment of professors across schools and programmes. New people are hired to contribute to the key areas while also contributing to education. Aalto also has degree programmes focused explicitly towards vital research areas.

Another example is Aalto's three cross-cutting areas, sustainability, entrepreneurial mindset, and radical creativity, which were designed to impact all activities at Aalto. A special group of Aalto Co-educators plans the areas' integration into education. It entails integrating cross-cutting area aspects into courses and influencing pedagogical training. Integrating entrepreneurial skills into programmes is one example. Based on the output from staff workshops, the practical implementation of cross-cutting area approaches in education is still a work in progress and a development area. Aalto should put effort into overcoming practical challenges, defining suitable indicators and designing incentive mechanisms to advance the integration of cross-cutting approaches into education.

Doctoral students and their thesis projects are systematically integrated into ongoing research in Aalto, thus ensuring a strong link between the doctoral programmes and Aalto's research groups and research projects. Aalto's tenure track system, where academics may advance to a tenured associate and, subsequently, full professor position, also supports the integration of research and education.

The interview with deans emphasised the strong internal forces in place for keeping research and education together and the departments' strong ambitions for science-based education. It was also clearly demonstrated in academic staff workshops: teachers mentioned student project topics from research groups, use of research equipment in student projects, updating course materials based on recent research findings, including their research interests in courses and students in research discussions. Challenges were also mentioned, such as how to strike an optimal balance between standard textbook material and more current topics for courses on different levels and various audiences.

Monitoring students' workload adheres to the ECTS principles

The systems and procedures for monitoring student workload at Aalto are clearly related to the ECTS credits system. For example, in the student feedback survey common to all Aalto courses, students are asked to compare the course workload to the official number of work hours per ECTS credit. The workload is also a topic in the annual AllWell? well-being questionnaire. Based on the interviews with education specialists and through summaries from the workshops for academic staff, the audit team became convinced that results from these surveys are systematically monitored and followed up on.

Still, the SER notes that the risk of burnout due to high workload is high among students. This was further emphasised in responses from student workshops held during the audit visit. It is, therefore, timely that to assess and balance workload related to studies is set as one of the three main goals of curriculum development at Aalto.

Aalto has systematic procedures for approving the plans for degree programmes or other study entities

Aalto's guidelines for preparing new degree programmes are in the Programme Director's Handbook. The Learning Steering Group is formally responsible for supporting schools in developing their programme portfolio and coordinating the university-level portfolio. Portfolio development includes the establishment of new degree programmes. The guidelines describe the entire process for preparing new education initiatives as dialogue-oriented and systematic, starting with discussing ideas and new needs at the school level. If a new programme is approved by all internal bodies and stakeholders involved, a formal decision process follows: the dean formally proposes a new programme, and the president makes the final decision. Individual Schools' Academic Affairs Committees formally approve proposals for majors, minors and course descriptions. The Programme Management Services team administratively supports the work processes. The system appears inclusive and fit for purpose, with transparent and systematic procedures and proper administrative support.

Aspects related to continuous learning needs are still developing but ensured in Aalto's planning

Regarding providing lifewide learning in Aalto and integrating it into the overall educational

portfolio, top management emphasised that this is still an ongoing process and a development area at Aalto. However, Aalto is still involved in a diverse and interesting menu of lifewide learning offerings, including open university studies, customised trainings and development projects, executive education and professional development for early-stage and advanced/senior professionals. In addition, Aalto's Career Design Lab supports both Aalto students, alumni and lifewide learners in career planning. Aalto's several schools are also involved in the FiTech initiative, a national portal for tech-oriented courses which provides both large-audience and specialised courses and offers an additional channel for the input of working life needs.

While Aalto's lifewide provision is clearly developed based on the need for continuous learning, interviews with external stakeholders indicated there are unmet demands and potential in this area. At the national level, challenges relate to new frameworks and funding mechanisms that are still being developed, resulting in a current gap between demands and resources. Based on lifewide experts' views in the workshop at the Aalto level, there is a need for data-driven decision-making in building a scalable lifewide learning portfolio and more transparent governance and infrastructural development in lifewide learning, as several relevant topics are divided between many departments/schools. The audit team recommends that Aalto strengthen synergies between the various departments and schools to build a holistic and cross-organisational portfolio of lifewide learning to serve the needs of many different learner groups.