

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

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## 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

### - HEI's self-assessment

#### Diversity and inclusiveness supporting renewal

Building on its core values of community, courage, and responsibility, the university actively promotes equality and well-being on campus and across the community. Faculty, staff and students are represented in all decision-making bodies, ensuring the consistency of the Mission and objectives with the voice and expertise of the whole community. Gender equality and the integration of international personnel and students into the UVA community are essential for UVA's objectives in social sustainability. The university's performance and progress in diversity, equality and inclusiveness as well as its operating culture are reviewed via biennial workplace well-being surveys. A new internal networking and communication channel [Viva Engage](#) will enable more low-threshold idea sharing and connecting with others

As part of an extensive [campus development project](#), UVA has modernized its workspaces to accommodate new ways of working (e.g., collaboration and cross-boundary team working, use of technology). Most university functions are located on the same campus within walking distance, which contributes to easy daily interactions.

#### Innovative culture via international mobility and multidisciplinary

## collaboration

As a part of the university's internationalization strategy, members of staff are encouraged to participate in international conferences, staff exchanges and assignments abroad during distinct phases of their careers. UVA also participates in international programmes such as [Erasmus+](#) and [Fulbright](#). There is a considerable amount of outgoing and incoming staff mobility, both in terms of academic research and teaching faculty and professional service staff. Equally, UVA welcomes visitors to strengthen teaching and research, international cooperation and societal impact. UVA has a long history of inviting part-time, international professors. The new professors of practice also bring in high-level practical expertise and societal knowledge.

UVA's multidisciplinary research environment enables researchers from various fields to work together to find solutions to complex problems. UVA actively encourages collaboration among researchers and faculties across different disciplines and research groups. The multidisciplinary research platforms ([VEBIC](#), [Innolab](#), [Digital Economy](#)) serve as an integral tool in the transformation and renewal of the University's operations with the goal to combine strong disciplinary knowledge with prevailing global trends.

## Alumni engagement

The university recognizes the importance of [alumni engagement](#) and involves alumni in activities such as mentoring programs, fundraising and marketing through e.g. alumni career stories. Alumni also actively contribute to UVA operations by sharing their expertise as guest lecturers and experts, and act as reputation ambassadors. They are reached through newsletters and events providing opportunities for networking and engagement. Alumni are also one of the key target groups for the university's social media including the LinkedIn group "Alumni of Univaasa." After completing a master's degree, a UVA student can apply for an alumni study right for open university studies or normal degree courses to supplement the degree. Additional activities such as regular 'Home coming' days and inviting UVA staff to meet up with alumni living abroad are under preparation.

## Cooperation with national and international networks

The University is engaged in several international partnerships and networks to support the renewal of its culture. In managing networks, potential partners are reviewed to ensure the institutions' common interests, long-term commitment, and alignment with UVA's strategy. Criteria based on national and [international rankings](#) (e.g., Times Higher Education) and accreditations (e.g., AACSB) are also applied. Of the key networks, the [EUNICE](#) alliance membership seeks to strengthen educational and research collaboration on a European level. Engagement with networks such as [HERMES](#) and [GBSN](#) via the national Global Pilot initiative supports UVA's members to connect globally. The membership in multiple Nordic networks, such as [Norek](#), [Nordtek](#) and [Nordlys](#), offer another framework for student and staff exchange.

The University has signed student and staff exchange agreements with about 160 partners in nearly 50 countries. The students' exchange destination interests are followed up on a yearly basis and agreements are scrutinized based on the students' behavior. UVA's commitment to the [Erasmus Charter for Higher Education ECHE](#) represents a benchmark in European collaboration. Partnership agreements are reviewed before a possible renewal.

Engagement in [international accreditations](#) allow UVA to review its practices and share good practices with external peers for development. For example, the [HRS4R](#) development process (the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment) is used as a tool for advancing a working environment that is conducive to research, embraces diversity and supports the career development of all personnel.

### **Strengths**

As a relatively small university with a low hierarchy and everyone based on one compact campus, wellbeing results and external evaluations highlight collegiality as a strength of UVA's operating culture

Inclusive communication via regular briefings and information events in both Finnish and English. Regular meetings among university management and student representatives

Opportunities for stakeholder engagement via a strong regional ecosystem and membership in high-quality international networks

### **Enhancement areas**

Develop a more structured approach towards diversity, equality and inclusiveness (DEI) activities to support the greater inclusion of international faculty in decision-making bodies

Work more closely with alumni, including a review of how technology and social media can be utilized to improve engagement

Develop a more integrated approach towards developing strategic partnerships, including a CRM system and institutionally harmonized forms of collaboration

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### - Assessment of the audit team

UVA carries out actions aimed at establishing innovation and ecosystems that support cultures and practices at the university and in the wider society. These are excellent ways of promoting a culture of creativity and innovation that contribute to the societal impact of research and education. UVA's culture reflects a strong sense of community and belonging.

According to the audit interviews, UVA has a strong focus on sustainability and the courage to do things differently. Examples include the installation of a new energy system as part of the renovation of the UVA campus, which also led to more efficiency in the use of space. During the audit visit, many interviewees emphasised activities related to the discovery and encouragement

of new ideas and research results, commercialisation and interaction with entrepreneurs, and the promotion of multidisciplinary cooperation.

Vaasa has a total of six higher education institutions. According to the audit visit, cooperation between UVA and Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) will be stepped up in the future. For example, the cooperation with VAMK and other higher education institutions in Vaasa includes establishment of the West Coast Startup to offer coaching for student entrepreneurs. These are great ways to create a problem-solving culture that supports the societal impact of UVA's research and education, while helping and encouraging students to find and create jobs. The audit visit also found that the region has a competence committee and other regional programmes. The culture of the UVA community is reflected in the different activities carried out which aim to share best practices and to reward, support and motivate people in their studies and research.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA is engaged in several international partnerships and networks to support the renewal of its operating culture. The audit visit confirmed that the university is an important partner in the region's ecosystem and EU projects. It is a member of the EUNICE Alliance, and participates in HERMES, GBSN (Global Business School Network) and several Nordic networks. UVA has signed student and staff exchange agreements, e.g., Erasmus agreements, with about 180 partners in nearly 50 countries. Engagement in international accreditations allows UVA to review its practices and share good practices with external peers for development. The KiVANET network, LITO (Basic Business Studies) courses and national research schools were also frequently mentioned during the audit visit.

The strong heritage of the Ostrobothnia region's industry and community serve as an inspiration and practical foundation for sustainable development at UVA. The university is strengthening its position as a business-oriented, multidisciplinary research university in a region with a leading cluster of energy companies and food industry. This provides a practical strategic framework for UVA's societal engagement and impact that is well-connected to society.

Projects implemented together with industry take place mostly in collaboration with large enterprises. According to the audit visit, companies in the region have donated professorships to UVA. That cooperation is mainly with large enterprises is understandable given the region's industrial ecosystem. The audit team recommends that UVA also engage with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to support future growth in the region and at national level. According to the audit visit, the growth of the SME sector has already been successful in the Vaasa region.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA has recognised the importance of alumni engagement and involved alumni in activities. According to the audit interviewees, UVA still has unused potential to increase the participation of alumni as guest lecturers in education and research activities. However, university alumni were satisfied with the cooperation and the number of alumni messages they received. The self-assessment report also found that after completing the master's degree, a UVA graduate can apply for an alumni study right for open

university studies or degree courses free of charge for one academic year. The university could make more use of technological solutions and social media, in particular LinkedIn and apps used by the younger generation, to further improve its alumni engagement.

UVA is still in the process of developing procedures for managing and updating stakeholder relations and cooperation networks. According to the self-assessment report, the university is developing a holistic approach to the development of strategic partnerships, including a CRM system and institutionally harmonised forms of cooperation.