

AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Towards Managing Societal Impact

The President of VAMK has given a [statement](#), which crystallises the involvement of each member of the community in societal engagement and impact. Our aim is to practise regional development and research, development innovation activities, which reforms the regional economic structure. The basis of our societal impact comes from the quality of our activities and active co-operation with working life.

We are engaged in an active, partnership-based dialogue with our long-term and committed partners. Our model of partnership is systematic, fruitful, proactive and dialogic. Continuous analysis of operational environment with the operators in the region is anticipatory, and thus we are able to produce competence required in the region.

We provide education and continuous learning in extensive networks and thus participate in building Competent Finland; international connections are part of everyday activities. We promote the integration of our international students into Finnish society and working life. Societal impact is present in the daily work of each member of our community, as is dialogue with our partners and alumni. The student union is a key partner for us, with whom we build our recognition and engage in dialogue to increase our societal impact. At VAMK, we examine the societal impact and engagement from the point of view of education, working life cooperation and regional impact, as well as RDI (Figure 3.).

In accordance with our [strategy](#), our vision is that we are the main partner in Expertise.

Our values, Openness, Sympathy, Pioneering and Customer-driven, include a will to societal impact and engagement. Our activities on part of societal impact are functioning, which is proven by the high employment rate of our students in regional companies. We are a part of a Consortium of Higher Education in Vaasa, formed by six HEIs. In co-operation with Vaasa University, Novia UAS, Hanken School of Economics, Åbo Akademi University and Helsinki University Vaasa Unit for Legal Studies, we all promote the availability of qualified work force and anticipate the needs for it in the region.

The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia is a significant partner to us. The [attached video](#) shows several of our undertakings and learning environments. Our common challenge is to ensure competitiveness in the digitalised world, together with the manufacturing industry in Ostrobothnia and the entire education system.

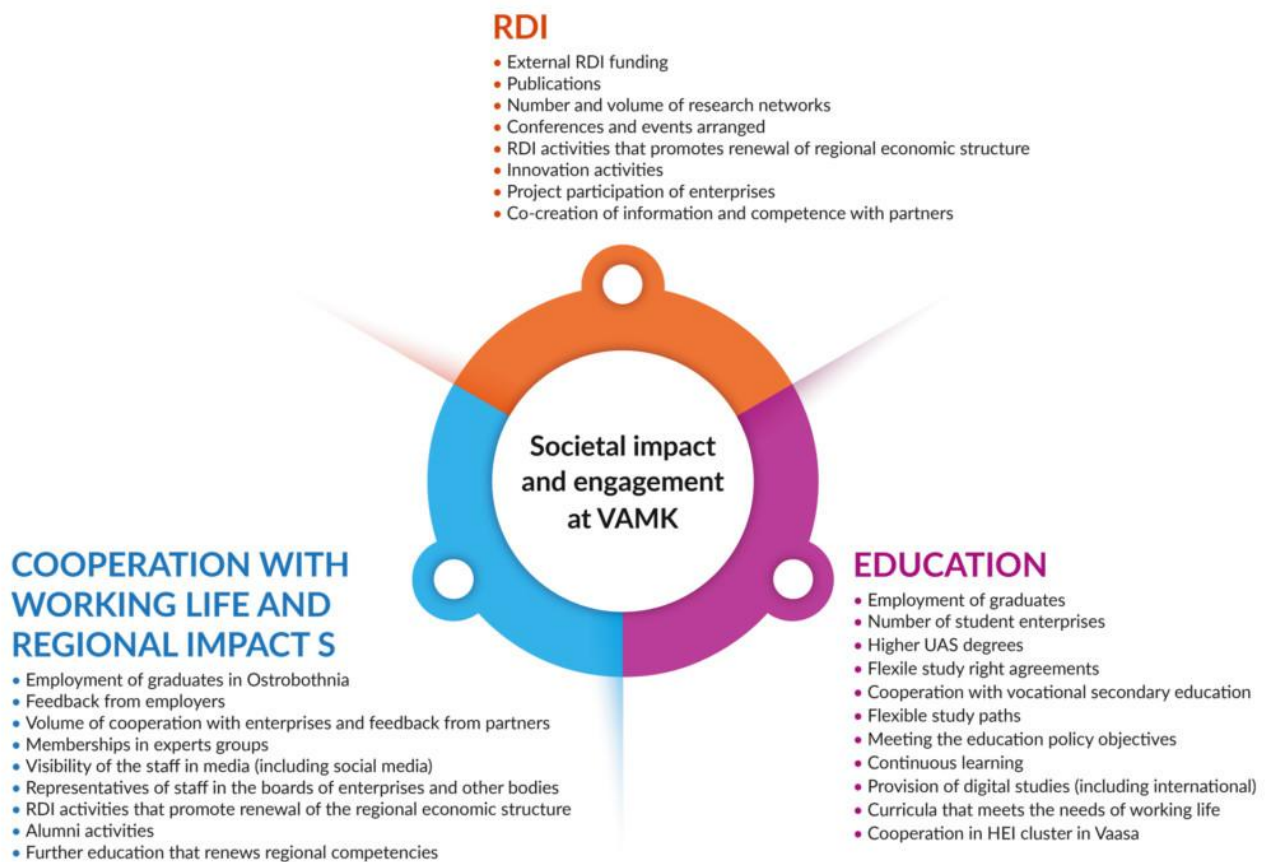


Figure 3. Societal impact at VAMK, University of Applied Sciences

Dialogue with the Operational Environment

VAMK is part of the employment ecosystem in Ostrobothnia. The Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment organises the activities in this ecosystem. TE office (the local employment and business services) is also strongly involved. In this cooperation, we anticipate, react and develop education and our RDI activities to meet future

needs.

Similar dialogue is also implemented with our key partners. Our partnership model is based on a systematic model in which we develop the current and future education and increasingly our RDI activities together in co-operation with working life operators. In the planning phase we take into account both Finnish state and regional guidelines in order to implement education that meets the labour policy situation at the time. An example of this is the high unemployment rate of secretaries in the region, to which we are reacting by arranging retraining, if funding is arranged.

Impact with Knowledge

Our strategy has been built as a participatory and dialogic process with the staff. We have advanced to a phase where a working map is created. The realization of the strategy is followed up in the Board of UAS, management team and in the units from different angles to receive an overall picture of the advancement. In the next phase, we will build a digital dashboard to provide the quantitative information in real time. Then we will move on to create an indicator system to measure societal impact. In future, systematic models need to be built for gathering and utilising qualitative feedback.

The procedures for managing societal impact and engagement are functioning but many of them are still at an early stage of development. Only with time and after creating the indicator system and model for societal impact and engagement can we draw any definite conclusions (President and Ceo Kati Komulainen´s interview in [the Finnish News Agency STT](#)). It is clear, however, that we educate exactly right type of experts for needs of working life and thus, our models are functioning.

Strengths

Societal impact is an important part of strategy and activities
Dialogic partnership with operational environment
Co-operation in Vaasa Consortium for Higher Education

Enhancement areas

Creating an indicator system for societal impact
Better use of analysis methods for qualitative measuring
Strengthening RDI networks

2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

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Societal engagement is rooted in the strategy and based on dialogue

VAMK is highly aware of the responsibility it has as an HEI for its societal impact and its impact on the region. For VAMK, societal engagement does not only support the implementation of its overall strategy – it is a central element of the strategy. VAMK's President's firm statement on societal engagement and impact shows the direction of the development. The aims of societal impact are strongly rooted in the institutional strategy and connected to regional business life, networks, and strategies. VAMK staff have a common understanding of the importance of societal interaction and impact, and managers are aware of the goals and challenges that VAMK has to this regard. Societal engagement is interpreted throughout the institution as a horizontal activity that should be considered in all core duties.

The student union VAMOK has a strong position within the institution. Expanding RDI work would provide students with a broader platform to participate in the social interaction of the university. Overall, VAMK has defined clear ways to reach the goals it has set. These include partnerships, new interworking platforms and active networking in the region. The challenge is to make networks and partnerships more visible and to develop them systematically.

The interviews confirmed that VAMK has a good understanding of the developments in its operational environment. The understanding stems particularly from open dialogues that VAMK systematically undertakes with its partner organisations. Because of these close ties to stakeholders, VAMK gathers information through many channels: individual one-on-one discussions, advisory committees, joint RDI projects, student placements, student projects, surveys, networks, partnerships, etc.

A more systematic approach to information would support societal impact

The big question for VAMK seems to be: how can the waves of technological and societal change be grasped both sooner and better? Based on the interviews, VAMK would benefit from more systematic ways to analyse and synthesise the information that it gets from various networks and partners. The new interdisciplinary platforms are promising and could serve as a needed place to aggregate information for different institutional users and to identify longer term trends and global developments. In addition, if the new key account managers for partnerships are able to successfully network, it could ensure that the information from partnerships flows efficiently and effectively across the organisation and add further insights to the partnership process.