

# AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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

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## 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

### Reforming Organisational Culture

A new organisational culture is being developed at VAMK that is confidential, responsible and encourages taking on challenges and excelling oneself. Interworking platforms have been developed for multi-field collaboration in which themes for research and development projects are brainstormed with a national or international network. Various design -thinking methods are utilised in the brainstorming and the brainstorming often takes place in an interdisciplinary team. Articles are also co-written with project partners on virtual platforms.

Discussions held by the President are interactive and encourage dialogue. Many ongoing development projects enable participatory interworking in the organisation (research platform working, OSR, project management tool). Due to our evolving organizational culture, the intranet is in a phase of change and we will introduce a new one by the end of 2021. To follow up and utilise new experiments, the management team monitors the advancement of the projects. A person in charge has been appointed for all development themes. The aim is agile development according to the guidelines set for strategic development projects. Experimental organisational culture is supported by the management and for example, one criteria of salary bonuses is work done to promote strategic development projects.

Muova houses the Co Proto Lab, which was created for interworking purposes for researchers, businesses and students. In autumn of 2020, student teams took part in the Nasa Space

Challenge in a global virtual hackathon to co-create their entries on a virtual platform. New methods are also tested and developed with a network of business partners.

## Vaasa HEI Cluster

VAMK is part of Vaasa Consortium for Higher Education the members of which, in addition to VAMK, are Novia UAS, Vaasa University, Hanken School of Economics, Åbo Academi University and Helsinki University Vaasa Unit for Legal Studies. We collaborate in RDI, promote flexible study paths and meet the competence needs of regional economic life. A good example of this is flexible study right agreements between the HEIs, making the entire provision of studies within the consortium available for students.

Furthermore, we have collaborative agreements with Centria UAS and Seinäjoki UAS. We participate in large-scale development projects with representatives from the entire HEI network in Finland. We also co-operate in several international networks.

## Co-development networks

We are part of the employment ecosystem in Ostrobothnia. The work is based on the anticipation of the need of qualified work force in the region, analyses and working with various services. A central area is allocating funds for continuous learning in fast experiments.

An example of international co-development worth mentioning is a module of online studies developed due to the corona pandemic in collaboration with Avans University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands) and Wärtsilä, the global leader in sustainable solutions for the marine and energy markets. These [IOL studies](#) are a concrete example of a need arisen in a prevailing situation and of a fast reaction to it.

Our staff have good relations with businesses in the region. Many of them are active in working life through for instance steering groups or through similar influence groups. Enhancing the competence together is a natural way of working to us, and our staff can take a work practice period in companies and we have for example guest lecturers from companies. Sharing the competence is part of our community spirit. Collegial help and support is natural for everyone. However, it is evident that systematic procedures are needed to manage the competence and collaboration. We have explored acquiring a CRM system and the advantages it would bring.

Cooperation takes place in several national and international networks. Cooperation with HEIs in Ostrobothnia, Vaasa Consortium of Higher Education and businesses especially is active and reciprocal. Our new online magazine [Energy](#) enables expanding our impact and enhancing our visibility among the operators in the region and nationally but also internationally, since the magazine is trilingual.

## Developing Alumni Activities

Alumni activities at VAMK are developing; we have begun to create systematic activities and platforms. However, we have always had cooperation with our graduates, since they find employment in businesses in the region. This interaction is mainly based on personal relations; the alumni network that we have started enables more organised activities. We have also activated interaction with alumni in social media. More than 5000 persons have registered as VAMK alumni on VAMK's page on LinkedIn. The five biggest [employers of these alumni](#) are Wärtsilä, ABB, Danfoss, VEO and Hitachi ABB Power Grids, all our strategic partners. Hundreds of our graduates are working in these companies, with which our staff co-operates on a daily basis.

In future, we will expand out alumni network abroad and will utilise it more in RDI and continuous learning supply. On the other hand, we are already doing this activity through our key partners, which are employers of the majority of our graduates.

### Strengths

Strategic key partnerships  
Co-development networks  
Start-up -activities encourage to entrepreneurship and innovation

### Enhancement areas

Better utilisation on alumni network  
Expanding the experimental culture to the entire community  
Strengthening the interworking competence

## 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

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### Successful renewal of the organisational culture is a priority

VAMK sees the renewal of its organisational culture as a strong basis for quality and a key precondition for the successful implementation of its strategy. The interviews provided evidence of an overall commitment to this renewal and a common aim to build a community of working together. This is a clear strength of the institution. As a good practice, the President's discussion events with staff are said to happen in an open atmosphere and thus diligently support institutional change management.

Many of VAMK's partner companies are large, innovative, global organisations who share the same goals for developing open, empowering, and inclusive workplaces. VAMK could aim to benefit from its partners as co-development partners when it comes to organisational

development. Joint projects on the topic of organisational culture development could bring about new ideas.

## Partnerships are the primary tool for stakeholder management

VAMK's partnership agreements essentially form its new partnership model. Based on the interviews, the agreements have made partnerships more systematic and have led to an annual cycle for planning and updating partnerships. They form a basis for capturing expectations from both sides and enable leveraging cooperation from the already existing good person-to-person contacts. According to the partners interviewed, the partnership model is not too rigid and VAMK is still able to flexibly meet the partners' needs.

In addition to partnerships, VAMK uses its regional networks beneficially for co-development, which is demonstrated in the examples of successful enhancement activities in VAMK's self-evaluation. The Vaasa Higher Education Consortium especially is an example of good practice where the six higher education institutions that operate in the city actively search for synergies in teaching and RDI.

## International networks could increase VAMK's contribution to the region

The interviews confirmed that VAMK's international contribution now comes mostly through international students that it brings to the region. VAMK should seek ways to also use its international networks to internationalise its RDI work and identify global trends that will affect the region in the future. There is also further work to be done to succeed in keeping the international students in the region after graduation.

A new alumni network has just been set up. VAMK is starting to use the network for collecting information such as needs for continuous learning. The plans to include international alumni in the network are promising and the auditors encourage VAMK to follow these plans. The alumni network could be utilised more extensively in the activities of VAMK once these initiatives begin to bear fruit.