

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

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## 3.2 Supporting the competence development and well-being of the staff

- HEI's self-assessment

### Supporting staff competence development

UVA's staff training and competence development are based on the strategy, annual operating and financial planning process, changes in the working environment and the results of the well-being survey. The collaborative planning of competence and well-being actions involves a work community development plan prepared together with employee representatives.

UVA has a [career model](#) with position-specific eligibility and promotion criteria for teaching and research staff that guides faculty development across three different career paths: a tenure track path towards professorship, a path in project and research work, and a teaching-oriented path. Faculty development needs are identified (a) as part of the annual strategy review process between the schools and the rector, and (b) in the evaluation of personal performance and development discussions. All faculty and professional staff receive systematic reviews of their performance as part of their (a) development discussions, and (b) salary reviews. As part of the [Finnish University Salary System \(USS\)](#), grounded in the General collective agreement for universities, both faculty and professional staff are evaluated based on their demand level and personal performance.

UVA encourages staff to participate in courses, seminars and national and international conferences to support their professional development. Internal training covers well-being,

management and leadership, working methods, and communication and language skills (eg., Personnel Training). Besides university-level training, schools reserve an annual budget per faculty member and doctoral researcher for conference travel and competence development. Research Services and the [Graduate School](#) support competence development in research funding, good scientific practice, open science, and project management. Regular Research Cafés offer information and opportunities for discussion on topical issues.

UVA's Support Network for Teaching and Learning ([EDUWASA](#)) enhances the development of teaching skills through consulting, training and co-development. Besides pedagogues, it covers experts in digital teaching and learning, IT experts and mentors within each school. Self-paced online courses on e-teaching and learning are offered in the Howspace virtual environment.

## Recruitment

The recruitment principles and eligibility criteria are based on [the University Regulations](#). Open positions are advertised via many channels, including social media as well as academic and field-specific portals. In addition to interviews of applicants, assessment by external experts as well as teaching demonstrations provide further input into the selection process. School-appointed nomination committees handle the selection process for Professor, Research Director and tenure track positions.

Since 2014, UVA has participated in the European Commission's quality program [HR Excellence for researchers \(HRS4R\)](#). It received recognition for its efforts in improving researchers' working conditions and career development in spring 2023. The [Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment \(OTM-R\)](#) section of the programme pays particular attention to practices related to the recruitment of researchers.

## Occupational Health and Safety

UVA employs an Occupational Health and Safety Committee tasked with assessing the work environment. It identifies disturbances and make proposals for their remediation. Relevant health and safety trainings (e.g. first aid training) are organised based on the work of the committee.

[Occupational healthcare](#) is provided by [Pihlajalinna](#) and comprises extensive medical care as well as preventive occupational health. Preventive care includes, for instance, workplace surveys and visits assessing working conditions, ergonomical aspects and staff training. Occupational health nurse and physiotherapist services are offered on campus. The occupational health offering also includes work counselling and short-term therapy.

## Equality and wellbeing

An [equality plan](#) guides UVA's development activities on promoting gender equality as well as the statutory obligations stated in the non-discrimination act. The aim is to reinforce an equality-

positive atmosphere and effective equality communication among students and personnel of the university.

Actions for the development of [accessibility](#) are summarized in the Accessibility plan.

Regular well-being and pulse surveys (in cooperation with the occupational pension company Varma) are key tools for measuring and promoting wellbeing. The results from the surveys are used in planning and carrying out required unit-specific and university-level wellbeing actions.

UVA adopts a workload allocation model that uses a common formula for how to allocate teaching and supervision based on position, course size and anticipated extent of curriculum renewal.

These are discussed with teachers before being included in their personal work plans.

Contributing to work-life balance, UVA staff benefit from flexible working time arrangements and opportunities for multi-location work. Guidelines for remote work abroad were completed in 2023.

UVA's annual benefit offers vouchers redeemable at sports and culture venues throughout the country. UVA's sports services provide activities, including (but not limited to) a gym, group exercises, tennis, and swimming to staff either free of charge or at a discounted price.

### **Strengths**

Career model that provides transparent expectations for eligibility and promotion along each path

Induction processes and activities supporting the integration of employees and their families arriving from abroad (including Spouse Programme)

Staff benefits and brand new, accessible campus facilities on an attractive seaside campus

### **Enhancement areas**

Follow-up on individual target setting and quality of development discussion dialogue

Updating common rules for multilocation and flexible work

Digitalization of select parts of the induction process to support information flow and socialization

## 3.2 Supporting the competence development and well-being of the staff

### - Assessment of the audit team

## Staff competences are developed in versatile ways

The responsibilities for developing staff competence and well-being are clearly stated in the quality management manual. The university has transparent procedures for staff recruitment. The manual also states that a plan for competence development is drawn up for each employee in connection with the target and development discussion. According to the staff workshops, supervisors enable and support employee participation in training in accordance with the plan. Annual staff performance assessments, pedagogical training and support staff training are offered through various training courses, such as IT, HR, working methods, communication and language training, and leadership and management training for different levels. According to the audit visit and self-assessment report, there is the opportunity for a particular unit to request tailored courses. Funding is also available to schools for competence development and participation in international conferences and networking.

UVA has functioning procedures in place to identify development needs concerning staff competence and to support the development of this competence. According to the staff workshop, staff can learn from the experiences of others and share their own by participating in conferences, both in Finland and abroad, and collaborating with colleagues. According to the staff, UVA supports and enables pedagogical development, including pedagogical mentors.

UVA offers various pedagogy-related courses in cooperation with various partners. According to the staff workshops, the range of pedagogical courses available varies too much from year to year, making it difficult for good time management planning. Pedagogical courses are extensive and demanding and difficult to complete alongside other work. The staff wanted more permanent and flexible training package that better considers the busy schedules of faculties. They also wanted shorter and more intensive pedagogical courses, which they considered would increase participation rates in pedagogical training. In addition, they wanted pedagogical training to go deeper into specific topics, such as artificial intelligence.

According to the staff workshop, the pedagogy courses offered by UVA take little account of the realities of so-called mass courses, where it is more difficult to implement time-consuming teaching methods. The audit team recommends that staff development is better aligned with UVA's strategic development priorities and the impacts of UVA's strategic growth goals also consider in terms of changing needs for staff development.

## Staff well-being is regularly monitored

The staff well-being survey is conducted bi-annually. There is a high staff response rate (85.5%) to the survey. The survey has had the same format for a long time, allowing trends to be traced and forming a sound basis for decision-making. Results of the survey are analysed and feedback on the developmental discussions is gathered. However, according to staff, these results do not always have an impact on the university's well-being activities. The audit team therefore

recommends that feedback to staff on the surveys be improved. The occupational health company Pihlajalinna and the occupational pension company Varma have their own survey on health trends.

UVA has systematic procedures to support staff well-being, equality, and non-discrimination. According to the self-assessment report, an equality plan guides the university's development activities. The aim is to reinforce a non-discriminatory and equality-positive atmosphere as well as effective equality communication among students and personnel. The audit visit found that staff well-being and motivation are important at UVA. Staff are also rewarded for training, projects, and publications. According to the visit, staff feel that their ideas and voices are heard. This shows that UVA is a staff-centred organisation. The development of staff competences and well-being also contributes to staff engagement, involvement, and participation in the quality improvement of the university's activities.

Well-being is explicitly considered at the university and well governed based on strategic processes and management. The audit visit shows that there is a good communal spirit at UVA. Staff pointed out that their work and well-being at work is supported by the various social events organised by the university both formally and informally, at different levels in schools, research groups and teams, such as breakfasts, lunches, school quarterly meetings, Christmas parties, well-being weeks, lunch discounts, guest lectures on stress and conflict management, and harassment. There are also many initiatives to support well-being, such as Smartum vouchers. An Occupational Safety and Health Committee, as mentioned in the self-assessment report, also organises activities to safeguard and increase staff well-being. The self-assessment report also states that UVA has developed and implemented three career pathway models: a tenure track pathway towards professorship, a path in project and research work, and a teaching-oriented pathway. These are well appreciated by staff.