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FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

Författare **Marja Sutela, Lena Gumaelius, Damon Mohebbi, Attila Pausits, Marja-Leena Rinkineva, Mirella Nordblad & Mira Huusko. University of Ljubljana self-assessment (eds.) Marina Šućur, Vanja Perovšek & Maja Hosta**
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3.2 Supporting the competence development and well-being of the staff

- Högskolans självvärdering

Identifying development needs in staff competences (e.g. pedagogical competence)

UL defined the main areas and action points in the area of the development of such competences in the UL Strategy 2022-2027 and UL HRS4R (UL HR Strategy for Researchers and Teachers 2021-2023).

Needs and wishes for further training are identified in tandem with teachers' and researchers' personal annual plans and with the annual interviews. Teachers and researchers have their career paths determined by the UL Criteria for Appointment. These criteria include the flexibility needed for various fields of research. While teaching excellence indicators are available to teaching staff for monitoring and development, their proper insertion into the system is still pending.

The identification of the needed competences is reflected in recruitment calls and the appointment of visiting teachers and researchers.

UL collects and analyses feedback from training programme participants, who report on their wishes and needs for additional skills and competencies. More extensive studies of needs for additional competencies are occasionally carried out (e.g. Digital University, INOVUP).

Development needs in the field of UL competencies are monitored with active staff participation (regular tasks, participation in national and international projects/networks, e.g. EUA, The Guild, EUTOPIA).

Supporting the development of staff competences

UL recently implemented all major HR modules of the SAP information system. A recruiting module with onboarding, competence models and training is planned as the next step. This will enable systemic support of the development of staff competences.

Staff competences are developed through specific and general training needed by employees (including both internal as well as external training), through international mobility programmes (supported by the International Offices), as well as in projects and more regularly through on the job learning.

UL provides various training programmes, some of which are (primarily) designed for specific groups and others for everyone. Training is provided for the development of general competencies: communication skills, cooperation, management, taking better care of one's health, ICT skills and foreign language knowledge (or teaching and general purposes), etc. (examples include the Quality Culture Programme and INOVUP, Digital University, ULTRA), for inclusivity and acceptance of diversity, for research, for R&D (in Slovene), for knowledge transfer (in Slovene), and for entrepreneurship.

All new hires, including foreigners, are given the opportunity to get acquainted with all the relevant regulations, rules and instructions, including the related ethical codes and the Equality Plan of the University of Ljubljana for the period 2022-2027. New hires have a formal probationary period with defined relevant work areas and actions.

Ensuring fairness and transparency in staff recruitment and development procedures

Recruitment at the UL is based on local national labour laws, the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The UL has also adopted its own regulations for the recruitment of researchers and professors. All vacancy announcements are published on the UL internet portal, while teaching and research positions are published on the EURAXESS global online platform. Applicants are selected by a panel of experts chosen by the dean of a UL Member, and unsuccessful applicants have the opportunity to appeal.

The hiring of researchers and faculty is tied to titles earned through a habilitation process. In 2014, the UL introduced the possibility of obtaining a temporary academic and research title, which allows foreign nationals and others without a UL title to obtain the corresponding UL title.

UL ensures that staff development is fair and transparent by making vacancies and opportunities for activities public. Staff are able to see their regular performance assessments. In cases of stress or unfair treatment, staff can turn to their superior or ‘trusted person’; procedures are also in place for dealing with workshop bullying and for appealing against an assessment. Membership of sectoral trade unions provides staff with legal advice and protection.

Ensuring the well-being of staff

UL fosters a good work-life balance and encourages psychophysically healthy lifestyles and good cooperation between staff (for more, see 2.3), with students and more widely.

UL has health promotion programmes (e.g. at the Rectorate), while UL Members have similar programmes/activities. Examples of activities include weekly exercise sessions, the promotion of active breaks during work, a psychosocial counselling service (in Slovene), mental health promotion workshops, and events to promote healthy lifestyles and socialising (recreational exercises).

There are a number of provisions, checks and balances that ensure a good work-life balance in accordance with the opportunities and provisions of the relevant labour laws. One recent improvement was implementation of the UL's Work from Home Policy.

UL has developed a questionnaire and recommendations for monitoring staff satisfaction (2015). UL Members are free to adapt the questionnaire to their circumstances or use other tools.

The training provided at UL level and UL enhancement-led visits promotes collaborative skills; participants notice that they work more collaboratively and that the training has a positive impact on their satisfaction and well-being.

Procedures for ensuring the equal and non-discriminatory treatment of staff

The Equality Plan of the University of Ljubljana for the period 2022-2027 addresses the area of gender equality and aims to create a working and learning environment that is sensitive to gender and other forms of discrimination or bias, as well as other characteristics that may result in employees and students being treated less favourably and therefore having fewer opportunities to succeed and participate in all processes at the UL and UL Member level. The UL actively promotes gender equality, primarily through the participation of its Members in research and other national and international gender equality projects.

The Rules for action against violence, harassment and bullying - University of Ljubljana (2022), apply to conduct that constitutes discrimination on the basis of personal circumstances. To support this, UL introduced the institute of the "trusted person", appointed at each UL Member (26) and the Rectorate (1).

Equal treatment and non-discrimination are also ensured through the recruitment process based on the OTMR principles.

Strengths	Enhancement areas
The implementation of the SAP information system in HR will be completed in all 26 UL Members in 2023. This will streamline HR processes across the UL, supported by a single information system that will enable staff to focus their efforts on important areas and spend less time on administrative tasks.	A training and development competency model will first be developed for staff of the Rectorate, then of the UL, and then for researchers, enabling tracking assessment of competences and planning their development. Implementation of the module of personnel development within the SAP information system, which includes training (general and pedagogical) and will enable integration or connection of different existing systems into SAP.
Implementation of the INOVUP project, which provided intensive pedagogical training and study visits by multipliers to learn about didactics at foreign universities and the practice of knowledge transfer. Implementation of other development projects to improve the study process.	Integration and enhancement of existing activities to support the development of didactic competencies within the Centre for Pedagogical Training.
The UL provides a wide range of relevant and well-rated training for all employees. Most of the training is focused on skills development (and most is not lecture-based).	Integration and enhancement of existing activities to develop general skills (communication, leadership, psychophysical health care) for all employees and specific groups (e.g. the Quality Culture Programme and training for the managers of UL Members). Collecting regular employee satisfaction feedback and using the results to address challenges at various organisational levels, then informing employees of the results and improvements.

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

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The UL needs a more strategic approach to competence development

One of the support areas of the UL strategy is to support staff development. The UL has conducted several initiatives during the previous strategy period and from there on lately the Digital University and ULTRA (a project from the Recovery and Resilience Plan 2022–2025) to enhance support for staff development. In addition, international mobility is encouraged.

Based on the audit visit, faculties and academies have introduced annual discussions with staff and are conducting surveys to identify development needs. These discussions are considered when planning future training. However, the interviews indicated that the practices vary between faculties and academies, and it was not clear to the audit team if development discussions are carried out systematically and at a sufficient level in all faculties and academies.

Through staff training, the UL has facilitated employee development of specific knowledge and skills necessary to monitor and assure quality, i.e., courses in ICT, digitalisation, and communication. Based on the audit visit, it could be seen that there are a wide range of courses available for academic staff to support their pedagogical skills and other courses for administrative staff to support competences that they need. There are also opportunities for administrative staff to take part in Erasmus exchange programmes. However, attending courses is optional in most of the faculties, and there appears not to be a systematic follow up on participation and impact of the training. Based on the audit interviews, lack of time and incentives affect participation, and practices appear to vary a lot between faculties and academies.

The UL has recognised the need for a competence model for its staff. The audit team stresses the need for an institutional approach to competence development. In addition, the staff should systematically have time and opportunities to attend some staff development and training. Audit team recommends making staff development and training compulsory for teaching staff including full professors. The audit team encourages the university to use the recently introduced SAP for monitoring staff participation in competence development training and ensuring that the training is set at a sufficient level. In addition to pedagogical skills, the training could more address future skills, such as teaching entrepreneurial skills to students. The training could also be further aligned with the strategic goals of the university.

A systematic approach to measuring and developing staff wellbeing is needed

One of the strategic development areas of the UL strategy is to promote an accessible, inclusive, and equal academic environment. The UL’s strategic goal is to become an academic institution

that serves as a role model in respecting diversity. In addition to national laws and EU regulation, the UL has its own regulations for the recruitment of researchers and professors. HR rules for recruitment are at the university level, and there are committees concerning hiring processes with external members to ensure fair treatment of all applicants. The habilitation process is transparent and open, and it applies across the university. According to the audit visit, some faculties have challenges to attract enough qualified staff to work at the university and in teaching positions.

The university has an equality plan for the strategy period 2022-2023 that addresses gender equality. Based on the audit visit, it could be clearly seen that the UL actively promotes gender equality through the participation of its members in research. However, based on the university's self-assessment and audit visit, diversity, equality, and inclusivity could be better integrated in managing and developing the activities of the UL and its faculties. This is necessary for the UL to become a truly global player, promoting SDGs and helping society to transform itself into a society of the future. For example, it is unclear how the strategic activity of adopting a public commitment from the staff and students to proactive and consistent conduct in embracing diversity takes place.

According to the audit visit, staff wellbeing is maintained through good working conditions and working tools, different discussion sessions, meetings, lectures, information sessions and workshops, renewed teaching methods, various informal meetings, and events, such as celebrations and sport activities. As mentioned, all faculties conduct staff surveys annually and the results of the surveys are used to improve the wellbeing of the staff. On the other hand, based on self-assessment report and audit visit, it was not clear who is responsible for staff wellbeing at the university level. Both HR and quality management seem to have some responsibility, but the audit team found no evidence that the roles are adequately determined and get the attention they deserve.

Collecting and using data at the university level could be further improved. There is lack of data about psychosocial stress at university, which makes it difficult to take necessary measures or ensure staff access to the right activities. In the fierce competition for talent, and to make academic careers more attractive, the audit team recommends that human resources including staff wellbeing remain high on the management's agenda.