

# AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

### New solutions for developing the competence

Deepening the cooperation with working life and increasing the volume of RDI and service activities obligate and encourage us to seek new solutions for developing the competence. Learning new is part of the work, as well as part of well-being at work. Self-development, maintaining and updating professional competence take place even more at work and in national or international networks instead of traditional education and training. Therefore, project cooperation and working life assignments during courses are important in maintaining and developing staff's competencies.

### Changes Give Impetus to the Competence Development

The development of the staff's competence is considered from the point of view of VAMK's competence development, as well as from the point of view of the development needs of work duties and individual persons. VAMK has defined its own strengths and a set of new emerging fields. Our working life partners operate in the fields and the cooperation with them helps us to recognise our strengths and enhancement areas. We draw up a document on HR planning and training aims annually, which outlines the principles, needs and measures of staff competence development for VAMK.

In the appraisal discussions between teachers and their immediate supervisors, one area discussed is how the teachers have developed their own professional and pedagogical competence. Other topics covered in the discussion are VAMK's criteria for pedagogical competence, the teacher's own wishes and needs and feedback from the students. Aims are set for the following academic year and a plan for competence development is made. The support services staff also have corresponding appraisal discussions. The HR system to be introduced during 2021 will improve the current discussions process and it will enable an automatic summary of staff competence needs.

## Methods of Development

Teachers have had a possibility to gain support for the development of pedagogical competence from Edulab, a service centre for digital pedagogy. In addition to digital pedagogical services, Edulab arranges intensive courses and extensive studies in digital pedagogy, as well as ordered training for member HEIs. Many teachers at VAMK have a solid competence in substance obtained in working life, and to maintain it, we have wanted to support our teaching staff's short-term working life periods in our partner enterprises. We encourage our staff to participate in projects and service activities. Competence development has been included in the teachers' yearly work plan and an allocation per each unit for it has been reserved in the 2021 budget. The administrative and support service staff can use up to 70 working hours for degree-oriented studies. In addition, our staff can utilise our provision of studies freely. More attention needs to be paid to the sharing of competence, experiences knowledge and skills in the future on our common forums.

## Significance of Well-being is Emphasised in the Strategy and Activities

Enhancing the well-being of the staff has been chosen a strategic enhancement area at VAMK because the economy measures in the recent years have burdened the staff and their well-being. Well-being at work is followed up with an staff survey, called Työyhteisöviire, the results of which are discussed with each team. The progress and effects of measures are followed up in the Management Team and assessed in the survey the following year. Occupational health service surveys the staff's well-being with a questionnaire, the results of which is also followed up by the Management Team. The occupational health steering group anticipates the need support services of the staff and supervisors alike. With the early intervention model, we strive to prevent any severe problems in well-being. Well-being at work is brought up in appraisal discussions and following up the well-being is part of supervisors' everyday work. Occupational health service assesses the working conditions and safety of the workplace with workplace surveys.

Flexible work and working hour arrangements support and help to reconcile the work and other life in various life situations. Extensive occupational health services and disability management together with occupational health services and employment pension insurance

company promote the achievement of the goals of well-being at work. We also subsidise the physical exercise and cultural activities of the staff with the ePassi employee benefit services.

## Equality through Cooperation and Openness

Principles for fair treatment of the staff are described in the Equality and Non-discrimination Plan and the realization of the principles are followed up in the Työyhteisöviire survey as well in a separate equality and non-discrimination questionnaire. The staff are encouraged to report any grievances they observe regarding equality and non-discrimination through as they see fit either orally to the supervisor, director, health and safety representative, employee representative, or in writing anonymously through the Feedy feedback. The cooperation development group deals with all problems that have arisen. [The equality and non-discrimination plan](#) defines the annual enhancement areas and measures to be taken. The cooperation development group and the Management Team follow up the realization of equality and non-discrimination plan. They have also cooperated in drawing up the principles and instructions for recruiting. VAMK's values and strategy have been considered in the instructions.

### Strengths

Processing and follow up of staff survey (Työyhteisöviire) results so that it enhances the well-being  
Staff's possibility to take a working life period  
Collegial support as a resource in the working community

### Enhancement areas

Efficient utilisation of the HR system to be introduced  
Development of supervisory duties  
Development of managing an ageing workforce

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### Strategy guides the development of staff competence

VAMK's renewed strategy highlights five areas for development, also encompassing the competence development needs of the institution. Development needs are analysed in more detail in VAMK's annual document on HR planning and training aims. This comprehensive and informative document forms a solid basis for staff development as a whole. At the individual level, competence development needs are identified during the annual development discussions between staff members and supervisors, and individual development plans are drawn up

accordingly. The interviews confirmed that this procedure is widely applied and highly appreciated.

VAMK's strategic focus areas are also mirrored in opportunities provided for staff development. With RDI activities and participation in continuous learning activities having been included in VAMK's teaching staff portfolios, the enhancement of staff's research competences and working life skills is fostered.

Staff competence development is also enabled through working life periods which constitute a valuable opportunity for learning and upskilling. Furthermore, these periods play an important role in achieving the strategic goal to work closely with regional working life and provide input for up-to-date teaching. In the interviews, the auditors learned that the opportunity to go on a working life periods has so far not been used by many colleagues, thus the auditors encourage staff to grasp this unique opportunity (see also chapter 4).

While VAMK documentation related to staff development is comprehensive and well set, the key document for staff recruitment is quite scarce in content and detail. Therefore, with a view to the coming updates of the principles and instructions for staff recruitment, academic staff recruitment processes, competence requirements and actors involved in the respective procedures should be transparently laid out in this document.

## Well-being of staff is a strategic priority

Improving staff well-being at work is one of the five strategic areas for development at VAMK. Well-being of the staff is followed with an annual staff survey called Työyhteisöviire. The results of the latest staff survey have been discussed in the management team and development measures have been decided, resulting in a large-scale plan of action. However, a more detailed implementation plan with responsible actors and prioritised schedules would further support the implementation of the chosen measures.

Following the strategy, engagement in RDI has become part of the task portfolio of VAMK's teaching staff. Even though new personnel have been recruited for continuous learning and RDI activities, there is a risk that teachers' work duties may become too fragmented and workload for the individual staff members may become too heavy; therefore, the audit team encourages VAMK to remain vigilant and to evaluate and monitor staff well-being regularly.

During the audit interviews, the management of ageing workforce was discussed. This topic is an important management issue as many of VAMK's staff members are close to retirement age. The audit team values VAMK's approach to this issue and encourages the Management Team to pay attention to the special needs of ageing and experienced personnel, and initiate flexibility in working hours and the revision of job descriptions. Furthermore, VAMK should care for knowledge management and consider how to ensure the transfer of know-how and tacit knowledge from more experienced persons to less-experienced staff members.

VAMK has published a statutory personnel policy plan of equality and non-discrimination on its website. The realisation of this plan is followed up by an equality and non-discrimination questionnaire and Työyhteisöviire staff survey. In addition, there is an anonymous Feedy feedback system in place that enables reporting of unfair treatment. The interviews confirmed that Feedy is well-known within the institutional community.