

# AUDIT OF VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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

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## 3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

### Accurate and Systematic Quality Management

[The quality system](#) supports the renewed strategy so that the essential data produced by the quality system is available to be used in various phases of the PDCA cycle. Quality management has become more accurate and systematic by developing the financial planning process, by structuring the procedures and measures and by redefining and refocusing the indicators. The Management Team goes through the processes and makes necessary changes in them in process workshops annually. The aim in the enhancement of activities is an efficient but simple enough model. The new enhancement areas defined according to the new strategy steer the planning of the basic tasks of education and RDI activities. Now activities that have previously been in the background but that are significant to the implementation of the new strategy are also invested in. A map of measures for enhancement areas now under development brings together the enhancement areas and their goals. Yearly goals are further assigned to the units and the degree programmes. The Management Team follows up the indicators of the enhancement areas and strategy four times a year, and the Board, having decided on the most important indicators, follows them up quarterly, as well.

### Extensive Information on the Education Process to Various Actors

The provision of education, curricula and tuition are assessed annually. In addition to indicator

data, we receive information on the success of the education process from the Graduand Feedback Survey and the Career Monitoring Survey, which belong to the MoEC's indicators. Our aim is to use the results of these surveys even better by selecting some indicators to a closer scrutiny. By reflecting the changes in the results systematically, we can better assess the impact of the measures taken.

The newly adopted [course feedback system](#), Radar surveys (In Finnish Tutkakysely) for the students and group tutoring with its appraisal discussions give versatile information for the assessment of the activities to the Management, immediate supervisors and teaching staff. The Radar surveys are implemented as separate questionnaires in accordance with the progress of the learning process so that for example the emphasis in the questionnaire for the first-year students is on the orientation to the studies and in the questionnaire for the third-year students on practical training and issues related to the thesis. Vamok's questionnaire on social affairs, previously implemented as a survey of its own, has now been integrated into the Radar survey. This has had a positive effect on the response rate when we have reduced the number of questionnaires and possible overlapping.

## Strategic Emphasis is Shown as Investment in Enhancement

Our current strategic cooperation with working life and RDI activities are highlighted, whereas earlier the emphasis has been on the functionality of the education process and success. The cooperation with working life gives us signals of what kind of competencies are needed in working life and helps us to anticipate the changes in our operating environment and working life. In 2019, more than 150 companies were involved in our RDI work in implementing projects and working life projects. Feedback from these projects help us to enhance our activities. At the beginning of 2021, we will introduce a project management tool and a new RDI Manager will start work. The Thinking Portfolio project management tool enables a better collecting and follow up of strategic information and the use of competencies gained in the projects. To promote the Open Science and Research, several measures have already been taken, and the President has defined the [policy](#) for the organisational culture in Open Science at VAMK.

## Towards Inclusive Quality Culture

The community spirit is built on common values, by promotion and nurture of which we will create a basis for mutual trust and common goals. Dialogue, interaction and cooperation are important, and they come true in everyday work, meeting practices and common enhancement projects. In the President's monthly discussion and briefings on Zoom, we deal with topical and important issues. During the corona pandemic, staff meetings have been held weekly to inform the staff how to act safely and responsibly. Close cooperation with Vamok student union has proved to be a valuable asset when the tuition was transferred online, and many students were left alone without a possibility to meet fellow students. In cooperation with Vaasa University Student Union, Vamok took care of quarantined students by contacting them and supplying them with food and medicines; this was reported in [National news](#). VAMK and Vamok sign a

cooperation agreement every year regarding for example quality work. Our students have representatives in all VAMK's bodies and work groups. The President meets student union monthly.

Annual cooperation meetings with our most important working life partners have turned out to be a good practice. A large number of teachers from our educational units and degree programmes participate in these meetings. Feedback on the meetings has been good both from our staff and from the working life. Yearly revised agreements create continuity and activity in cooperation. Online meetings have made it possible for even more people to participate. Many changes challenge us to create new forums to share good practices. The first of these is our online magazine [Energy](#) in which our staff can share their competence and experiences for the good of our own organisation and the society around us.

### **Strengths**

The quality system produces relevant information and is not too heavy

The quality system supports the strategy and achievement of strategic enhancement areas

Committed, collegial staff

### **Enhancement areas**

Enhancement of RDI feedback collection in a systematic way

Systematic analysis of quality feedback related to strategic enhancement areas

Systematic ways to share good practices

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#### The quality system covers the core processes

The quality system covers all core processes of VAMK: education, RDI activities and design services. Regional development work, societal interaction and impact are carried out in all the above-mentioned core processes. A general description of the quality management of the core processes is included in the Quality Handbook. In addition, VAMK has a large collection of process descriptions in place, complementing the Quality Handbook. Process descriptions are annually updated in the Management Team workshops, ensuring that the descriptions are up-to-date and well-known to the top management.

To improve the overall outline and interlinkage of the individual processes, VAMK could consider designing a process map and increasing visualisations through workflow charts or diagrams. The auditors also recommend using the next Quality Handbook revision to integrate further quality-relevant information in the handbook, such as details on information production, development of

measures or the description of the quality management of RDI activities and design services. All this will make the Quality Handbook a comprehensive “instrument” to enhance and monitor the quality management of the institution.

## All parties participate in the quality management

Students, staff members and working life partners take part in the quality work at VAMK. The interviews with representatives of the student union VAMOK confirmed that students have various possibilities to participate in the development dialogue. There was also evidence that staff members identify development needs with the help of information produced by the quality system. Working life partners participate via advisory committees and by cooperating in education, RDI activities and continuous learning. Annual cooperation meetings with the most important working life partners, the yearly revised agreements and the Key Partner award are good practices which support the continuity of cooperation with working life and thus contribute to the quality of education.

VAMK was able to present several examples of effective quality work and the involvement of different parties in it. The interviews confirmed that VAMK’s quality culture is based on dialogue and openness. The sharing of good practices has increased alongside with the development of the quality culture. VAMK’s new interaction forums and platforms offer potential to further improve sharing of knowledge and good practices in the work community. The strong commitment of the President to quality work was both evident and confirmed in the interviews.

## Systematic development of the quality system should be set as driver for quality enhancement

Prior to this FINEEC audit, VAMK had reformed several of its quality system procedures, including institutional-level indicators, quality management of RDI and the course feedback system. These changes are promising, even though the evidence of their impact has not yet been fully deployed due to the rather recent reforms.

Based on the information given in the audit documents and the information gained in the audit visit interviews, so far changes in the quality system have rather been made as a response to emerging development needs than as a systematic exercise. Therefore, the audit team encourages VAMK to continue the dynamic renewal of the quality system as set out in VAMK’s strategy. More proactively initiated internal evaluations of the quality system could enhance the continuous strategy implementation and foster quality development as well. The quality system development plan complemented systematically by a self-evaluation or an internal audit could effectively support this important work and have a substantial impact on the quality of VAMK’s core areas.