

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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

### - Högskolans självvärdering

#### The university supports staff well-being at work

Physical, mental, and social capacity for work and activity is supported in a variety of ways. The university has a multi-site working model, which means that people can work flexibly on campus and remotely. A common policy on multi-site working aims to ensure successful and recovery-friendly multi-site working. A range of online materials and training courses on well-being at work are offered to support job retention. Staff well-being is monitored every two years through well-being surveys and, if necessary, pulse surveys. In spring 2022, an interaction and collaboration survey was carried out among the university services staff to find out their experiences of interaction and collaboration in the university community.

The progress and well-being of doctoral researchers is monitored through a biennial survey. The results of the surveys are used to plan and develop activities.

Staff well-being is supported by comprehensive occupational health care and an early support model. The skills of supervisors in dealing with different work capacity management situations are developed through regular training. Workplace surveys are carried out every five years to take a broad picture of the state of each unit and to support its operations and development work. The University Sport services Sykettä offers a wide range of physical activity services for both students and employees.

## Diversity, inclusion, and equality at the University of Eastern Finland

Making visible and strengthening the diversity of its staff and students is a strategic goal of the University of Eastern Finland. In a diverse, inclusive and equal workplace community, everyone can work, study, and participate as themselves, openly express new ideas, and contribute to the success of the university.

The current state of staff and student diversity has been mapped through various surveys and statistical data. In 2022, diversity will be a central theme in training and events for university staff. The topic is also addressed in training sessions for management and supervisors. By the end of 2022, the university's renewed Equality and Equal Opportunities Plan will include more specific objectives and measures to promote the above objectives. Diversity is linked to the university's sustainability and responsibility agenda and to the accessibility of higher education.

As of June 2021, researchers with grants have had the opportunity to enter into a part-time employment relationship (10%) with the university, improving their status and guaranteeing them access to the benefits normally covered by the employment relationship, as well as allowing them to become more closely involved in the university community. There is also a common title for doctoral researchers.

### Ensuring transparency and justification in recruitments

Strategic human resources planning provides a vision for expertise and recruitment needs over the next three years. Human resources planning is also used to implement strategy and renew operations.

The transparency of the recruitment process and the justification for the candidate selection are verified at different stages of the process. The recruitment process is carried out in cooperation with Human Resources Services and the recruitment decision is always made in accordance with the competence of the university as an employer.

A vacancy notice will be published for open applications (internal or external). Furthermore, in the case of direct recruitment, the job to be filled must be documented with the job title, job description, and other key information about the employment relationship. Vacant positions are published in the electronic recruitment system (SaimaRekry), on the university's website and LinkedIn pages, and on other electronic application channels relevant to the position.

The stages of the recruitment assessment and selection process are documented. A written merit or reference report is prepared for applicants, which includes an assessment of the applicants and the recruitment process described in an appropriate manner. Employment contracts are prepared in writing. The publicity of recruitment documents is determined by legislation and the documents are archived in accordance with the university's information management plan.

The career development of teachers and researchers is based on the guidelines and nomenclature of the national four-tier career model. In addition, the university's tenure track offers the best researchers an accelerated and personalised route to scientific career progression. Tenure track positions are always recruited in line with the strategic human resources planning of the faculties and departments. The university's current career model is being worked on to develop new models for the career development and skills development of teaching, research, and other staff. The aim is to enable staff to focus on tasks that match their expertise at different stages of their career. UEF's career modelling work will be linked to the preparation of reforms related to the EU's research assessment and the development of research careers. The university has been recognised by the European Commission for HR Excellence in Research for its long-term HRS4R development work. During 2022, the university will develop its activities to ensure the continued use of the logo. UEF is also committed to the DORA Declaration.

## Expertise development

Expertise development needs are identified through, for example, development and appraisal interviews, well-being at work surveys, and workplace surveys. A report on the expertise needs identified in the annual development discussions is drawn up and used to plan staff training. The planning process is supported by a working group on skills development, with a wide range of scientific and administrative disciplines represented. Staff expertise is strengthened by offering a wide range of free training in Finnish and English. The findability of staff training provision has been improved by centralising all training provision in the university's common [training calendar](#). The university will also offer more flexible ways of training (self-paced and instructor-led online and distance learning) and increase the number of courses offered in English, including management training.

The university has started to define competencies that describe the development of the expertise profiles of all staff. The focus is on strengthening expertise. The employee must have the basic knowledge and skills to work effectively and efficiently in a university environment with others, using time- and task-appropriate working methods and acquiring information. Cooperation in education and training takes place at the local, national, and European levels. UEF is part of the European consortium of YUFE universities, which develops common guidelines for the development of staff expertise. Staff have had the opportunity to participate in staff training provided by the YUFE universities.

UEF service design training has been piloted as training for managers of University Services and independent and service institutions.

### Strengths

10% employment contract for grant researchers

### Enhancement areas

Career models

Strategic Human Resources Plan	Transparency of work plans and objectives for teaching and research staff
Diverse services for work ability and well-being at work	Career and well-being services for doctoral researchers
Workplace surveys to support the operation and development of the units	Reform of recruitment practices and the recruitment system
Expertise development opportunities and management training	Diversity work
Knowledge management	Developing human resources and management indicators and monitoring progress

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

### - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

#### Staff competence development has copious offerings

Staff competence development at UEF is a clear strength of the university. The UEF does have procedures to identify development needs regarding staff competence. Both regular surveys and other qualitative techniques, like discussions among staff and management, were identified by the audit team. In the interviews and workshops, staff reported that they get the training they need. Students shared the opinion that teaching staff are adopting new techniques. UEF appeared to have the overall view that continual development is important. The academic rector was repeatedly cited by teaching staff as encouraging innovative practices and continuous development.

Interviewed staff and workshop participants indicated that the problem is not the lack of training opportunities, but the lack of time to participate in trainings. Thus, the audit team recommends that management ensures staff have sufficient time and mental space available to participate in competence development activities. Additionally, staff should be encouraged to recognize the value of continuous development.

Many mechanisms for staff development were identified as being in place and actively functioning. Courses targeted to international staff, training on digital tools, pedagogical training, development days, and many other mechanisms are available. However, many of the discussed mechanisms for the development of staff competence were focused on formal trainings. Competence development encompasses far more than simply formally offered trainings. Formal recognition of the value of such informal mechanisms and encouragement to develop such

mechanisms could lead to further enhancement of staff competence development at UEF.

As mentioned in the audit visit, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of staff training courses. UEF uses internal surveys, but it remains unclear how the results of the various surveys are translated into development. Continual evaluation of UEF's competence development systems is critical to ensuring that staff can develop to become professional experts in their disciplines in addition to research achievements. The audit team encourages the university to implement processes to ensure that this happens, including analyses of quantitative and qualitative datasets on staff development opportunities and outcomes.

Doctoral researchers with grants recently gained the opportunity to enter a part-time (10%) employment relationship with the university. This enhanced their status and guaranteed them access to the benefits normally covered by an employment relationship. The 10% relationship allows them to become more involved in the university community. This is a good initiative for UEF to promote the integration of doctoral researchers with grants.

The university needs to make sure that all groups affiliated with the university get the opportunity to participate in competence development to further their career opportunities. UEF recently noted that grant funded doctoral researchers lacked access to competence development. The audit team considers the attention to this problem as a strength. The university should continue this work and ensure that there are no other groups similarly lacking access to competence development. While there were multiple competence development offerings targeted to international researchers, there is still a need to enhance the offerings for international staff. This topic is further discussed in chapter 4.

## UEF has fluently functioning basic procedures of staff recruitment

The university carries out strategic human resources planning with a three-year horizon that includes annual updates. The university has protocols in place to encourage transparent, fair hiring. Based on interviews and the SAR, it was reported that all job ads are posted publicly, job duties are listed in the job ad, hiring committees are formed before applicants are known, criteria for the candidates are set early in the hiring process, and applicants are evaluated on their qualifications.

Good basic protocols are in place. It does not appear that sufficient effort is being put into mediating or negating the potential bias of reviewers, and only few mechanisms for addressing equity issues related to hiring were discussed. While eliminating bias and addressing equity in hiring is extremely challenging, the audit team recommends working towards creating the most equitable, fair hiring process possible. For example, based on interviews, it was determined that personally identifying information such as applicant names are visible to internal reviewers. It is highly likely that reviewers can identify gender, country of origin, age, and other characteristics

that have documented histories of eliciting both conscious and unconscious bias in hiring.

One potential way UEF could address this recommendation would be to create a multidisciplinary team with the purpose of evaluating existing hiring practices and recommending revisions to hiring practices through a lens of diversity, inclusion, and equity. This team could review published research on the topic, study the hiring processes of other organizations, collect and analyse internal data regarding hiring practices, engage in both intra- and extra-organizational discussions, and eventually form recommendations for future practices at the university. When undertaking analyses and actions such as these, it is important to ensure that a complex, nuanced understanding of diversity is used that includes multiple intersecting axes, such as gender, country-of-origin, ethnic heritage, age, internal vs. external candidate status, and more.

## Staff well-being is actively promoted

There are many procedures in place to evaluate and support staff well-being at UEF. Staff reported that there was strong well-being support, as well as a low threshold to communicate with others in the organization. Managers, while a group that expressed concerns about their own well-being, clearly appeared to care for the wellbeing of those they supervised and worked to ensure their staff were supported through different formal and informal mechanisms. UEF efforts at fostering well-being during the COVID pandemic were cited as positive examples of the university proactively working in this area. Many efforts were discussed, such as encouraging active transportation (e.g., bicycling) to work, allowing multi-location work, UEF festivals, sport services, occupational health care, exercise and culture benefits, and well-being groups in each unit.

However, when asked about data collection on well-being, evaluation was left up to quantitative surveys every two years. The copious informal well-being data being collected by leaders across the university appeared to be under-appreciated and under-utilized as a source of information on workplace well-being. The audit team recommends reconsidering well-being evaluation processes, both increasing the frequency as well as exploring mechanisms that could harness the existing informal well-being evaluation mechanisms already used by leaders.

## Progress has been made in diversity and equity, but much more could be done

Non-discrimination and inclusion are present and widely discussed at UEF as a goal. Work related to diversity has already started, staff know that diversity and inclusion is an area that needs work, and existing work and trainings were cited as useful by many staff in interviews. However,

the audit team recommends that improvements regarding diversity should be a continual focus of the university for the foreseeable future.

The standard of equality (treating all groups identically regardless of background) appears to be the commonly held view regarding diversity among many staff and was nearly universally espoused as a value. However, substantive equality, the idea that treating everybody the same does not always guarantee equality, did not appear to be widely endorsed (though there were multiple notable exceptions in the interviews). Certain situations may warrant an equity-based approach, such as those involving international staff and minority groups. The audit team recommends that UEF explore evaluating whether an equity-based mindset would lead to better outcomes. Discussions on this topic will continue in chapter 4.

UEF's theme of diversity in 2020-2022 is laudable. It was discussed in multiple interviews that the university was working towards revised processes and procedures regarding diversity. However, few concrete results of the process were shared with the audit team. It is unclear what the results of this annual theme will be. The recent KOTAMO-publication may be of great value as a resource and call to action for UEF as they continue to work on the issue.