KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF AALTO UNIVERSITY

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

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Fairness and transparency in recruitment

Attracting the broadest possible candidate pool and evaluating candidates fairly enhances our chance of attracting top talent and making excellent recruitments. Aalto University has established official recruitment and advancement policies and procedures for professors' tenure track, lecturers' career, and other academic positions.

We are committed to ethical recruitment, treating all applicants equally and fairly, and all our policies and procedures in researcher recruitments are aligned with the European Commission's Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and HRS4R Charter and Code, including Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers (OTM-R). The Commission's policies are also reflected in the Aalto Handbook for Quality and Diversity in Recruitments and eLearning. These policies ensure that the best person for the job is recruited, guarantee equal opportunity and access for all, facilitate developing an international portfolio (cooperation, competition, mobility) and make research careers more attractive.

Supporting staff competence and career development

Aalto University's tenure track career system offers a well-supported and clear career path for professor-level academics towards a permanent professorship. It is based on the principle of commitment from the university and individuals to an academic career; it has clearly defined

expectations, incentives, and assistance in personal development. Tenure track promotion proceeds according to intermediate reviews based on merit. This means that our professors are competing only with themselves and not with their colleagues. Aalto supports the professional growth and development of the expertise of tenure track professors in many ways. One important form of support within the tenure track career system is research leave.

The Aalto lecturer career system is a standard career advancement path, providing a transparent and consistent process with common rules throughout the schools and departments of the university. The lecturer career system supports individual development and career advancement through clear principles and systematic evaluation criteria, and it allows Aalto teachers and lecturers to advance in their careers with teaching-focused merits.

Aalto actively supports the career and competence development of the staff by creating opportunities for career advancement, flexible job rotation or moving on to a parallel career.

Competence development at Aalto is based on the 70/20/10 model. The university's competence development index page covers the competence development solutions available to personnel. Aalto supports various forms of development, such as job enrichment, mentoring, coaching and staff training. Trainings for personnel are available in the Workday system.

Aalto University encourages its academic personnel to create new information and share competence and expertise both at Aalto and in society more generally. Trainings to support research work and pedagogical skills are offered.

Building competencies for the future

Highly competent and motivated people form the foundation of Aalto's success. Aalto University has identified five core competency areas aligned with our strategy that are crucial to Aalto's success and the success of our people:

Figure 5. Aalto University's future competencies

The future competencies project has been developed with the aim of building Aalto as a learning organisation for employees.

Aalto supports the competence development of its personnel with solutions that combine future competence needs with an individual's own career and expertise development needs. Development needs and individual development plans are discussed in the biannual My Dialogues.

Talking regularly about wellbeing, development and goals

My Dialogue is a conversation about wellbeing, development and goals that takes place twice a year between an employee and their supervisor or their direct and matrix supervisors. The work plan is an essential part of teaching and research personnel's My Dialogue discussion, where the supervisor and employee agree together on the goals and tasks the employee will have in the coming academic year, which is important for planning their workload and thus ensuring wellbeing.

Supporting wellbeing

Wellbeing, workload, new hybrid ways of working and a sense of belonging to our community remain key development areas after COVID-19. To get a comprehensive overview of the wellbeing of our personnel, we collect information from several channels. For example, every two years, we carry out a joint university wellbeing survey, individual pulse surveys and a workplace survey. In addition, the wellbeing of doctoral students is monitored through a separate wellbeing

survey. Occupational health care reporting is used and reviewed at regular meetings at both the university and the school level. Close cooperation with occupational health services and pension insurance companies is important. For example, in 2021 we launched a steering group involving Aalto, Terveystalo, Varma and Keva to support the development of timely and effective support processes and services.

Aalto has extensive wellbeing and work ability support services and processes, and they are being constantly developed. For example, a new easy access 'Wellbeing Desk for personnel' service was launched in 2022, bringing together Aalto's wellbeing support service providers. A wide range of other services are available to support work ability and wellbeing, including comprehensive occupational health services, work coaching, mentoring, self-leadership support, workplace mediation, support for teams and supervisors, and physical exercise services (Unisport). Aalto has an early support model to encourage supervisors to intervene as early as possible if they face challenges.

To ensure the wellbeing of the whole community, students' wellbeing is also followed through surveys ('Allwell?') and through study environment inspections in cooperation with FSHS. According to several studies, the wellbeing of teachers and students are inextricably interlinked.

Developing equality, diversity and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusiveness (EDI) are among our core values. They support our community's wellbeing and creativity, along with our ability to foster world-class research, teaching and impact. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of EDI at Aalto.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Clear and transparent career systems for professors and lecturers, as well as processes to enhance and support quality and diversity in the recruitment processes.	Enhance supervisors' ability to discuss development, workload and wellbeing as part of My Dialogues and daily leadership discussions whenever there is a need for it. Further develop processes and tools to manage academic work time and workloads.
Systematic competence building both individually (e.g., My Dialogue) and together (e.g., at the unit and management team level), such as future competencies workshops held in units. Availability of a wide range of competence development activities and self-learning materials through Workday Learning.	Enhance staff learning practices by developing learning pathways for future competencies and core role-specific skills for each staff group, as well as developing innovative ways of learning and of measuring the impact of learning.

Diverse practices to promote staff wellbeing.	Develop our culture of inclusion, curiosity, collaboration and wellbeing as our competitive edge.

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

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

Aalto has well-functioning procedures for identifying and supporting staff competence development needs

Aalto has systematic, diverse and well-documented procedures for identifying and supporting staff competence development at the institutional and individual levels. The University Preview process was mentioned in the interview on staff competence and well-being as a central process for identifying new needs at the institutional level. The bi-annual My Dialogue process is the primary tool when identifying individual staff development needs.

The usefulness and central place of the My Dialogue process was emphasised in the SER and several interviews during the audit visit. For instance, during the deans' interview, interviewees pointed out that the My Dialogue process is where staff members are explicitly encouraged to discuss competence development needs and that they are systematically supported. In the staff workshops, this was mostly confirmed. However, some staff had a few critical remarks about the user-friendliness of the supporting software. Some emphasised that informal dialogues with supervisors are equally important for developing competence in the My Dialogue process.

With regard to individual staff competence development, Aalto aims for the so-called 70/20/10 model, in which 70% of learning takes place on the job, 20% happens through learning from others, and 10% is learning in formal settings. On the intranet, one can find an overview of the various formal staff training options, which cover a broad range of relevant topics. These options are open to all Aalto employees and cover development needs for all staff categories. It was also underlined strongly during the staff competence and well-being interview that Aalto treats all employee categories on an equal footing when it comes to acknowledging and supporting competence development needs.

The following processes, procedures, and fora are also supportive of staff competence development: the Tenure Track career system for academic staff, research leaves (sabbaticals)

for tenured academics to develop their competences further, and the Educational Leadership Forum. The latter is an event for the development of educational leaders, such as programme directors and heads of majors, offering possibilities for interaction and networking to strengthen the management and development of degree programmes.

Pedagogical competence development has been identified in Aalto's SER as an essential need. There is a Pedagogical training web page designed to support pedagogical competence development. It lists basic compulsory and elective ECTS-giving courses, e.g. for course design, teaching practice, sustainability in teaching and doctoral supervision. During the staff competence and well-being interview, the interviewees also emphasised that pedagogical training is one of Aalto's main tools for formal competence development. Three hundred teachers per year go through pedagogical training. There is institutional support for pedagogical questions, discussions and events. Many teachers have taken more than the required minimum pedagogical ECTS credits. Responses from staff workshops confirm that the teachers appreciate the availability of pedagogical development courses and programmes. Time available for individual competence development was raised as a problem.

More generally, Aalto's Human Resources (HR) services support all kinds of staff needs, including competence development. There are also several examples of tools for internationalisation which serve to develop the staff's global competencies. Finally, the Competence development index is a useful web page which collects information on all the processes, procedures and tools available for identifying and following up on staff competence development needs. Various forms of professional training, personal coaching services and mentoring opportunities are provided. It also enables individual staff to request feedback from colleagues on one's strengths and enhancement areas.

The SER also refers to a future competencies project which has led to the identification of five future competency areas found to be crucial for Aalto as a learning organisation: working together, insightful expertise, learning agility and creativity, achieving excellence, and empowering leadership. However, it is unclear how explicitly these are linked to the current portfolio of training options and support services for competence development. Aalto should develop its portfolio of staff training options and their support services for competence development to ensure that these essential future competence areas are explicitly covered and supported.

Aalto has clear, transparent, and fair procedures for staff recruitment

Aalto has clear, transparent, and fair procedures for recruitment, and career paths for development after recruitment. The SER states that Aalto is committed to ethical recruitment, treating all applicants equally and fairly, and all the policies and procedures in researcher recruitment are aligned with the European Commission's Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and the HRS4R Charter and Code. These claims are convincingly documented on the

web page Recruitment at Aalto, where one finds a detailed description of the recruitment process, including a section on Ensuring equality. It also contains a comprehensive handbook on quality and diversity in recruitment with sections on equality, diversity, unconscious biases, prearrangements to support equality, institutional policies for various career paths and various support materials. This excellent source of information contributes significantly to promoting fairness and transparency in staff recruitment. There is also a webpage describing how academic leadership is recruited with an open search in a transparent and communal manner. Fairness and transparency in career development are supported through institutional policies such as the Tenure Track and Lecturer career paths.

Aalto has systematic and diverse procedures to support the well-being, equality and non-discrimination of all staff categories

Aalto provides an impressive and diverse set of procedures, services and fora for supporting staff well-being. Staff well-being is referred to as a key development area in the SER, and the importance of well-being was also emphasised strongly in several interviews during the audit visit, from top management on down. For example, recruitment to ensure sufficient capacity in well-being support services was explicitly mentioned as important in the interview with deans.

Several tools are used for monitoring staff well-being at Aalto. Examples are the biennial staff well-being survey, individual pulse surveys such as a monthly survey on hybrid working, workplace surveys every five years and a well-being survey for doctoral students. The aforementioned My Dialogue process also includes well-being aspects. This process was emphasised in several interviews as perhaps the key procedure for discussing well-being aspects with individual staff members and making individual follow-up plans.

The webpage Wellbeing at work index provides information on healthcare services, perks, and employee benefits including sports/training opportunities and other practical aspects of well-being. Other relevant support services include the Wellbeing desk – a newly launched low-threshold service point for employees. It provides advice and guidance on work well-being and ability via online information, physical meetings and events. The Wellbeing Desk is one of the services offered under the more comprehensive project Oasis of Radical Wellbeing, designed to be an accelerator of well-being for students and employees in Aalto.

Aalto’s staff well-being services have an impressive level of ambition and broadness of scope. However, a challenge may be that not all services are well-known to all staff members. In some cases, services may not be well-matched to the essential needs of staff members. During the audit visit, staff workshop summaries highlighted the need for more practical services and actions for well-being. Examples given were the need for better support for conflict management and handling of difficult situations, more explicit guidelines for workload management and leadership development considering human aspects more.

There also seemed to be a perception among some staff members that staff well-being is not prioritised on the level of student well-being. These concerns should be investigated to ensure well-functioning communication of the available services and the best possible alignment between services offered and the needs identified.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is generally an area where Aalto has strong strategic aims and ambitions. EDI is also Aalto's self-chosen evaluation area in this audit, and this topic is therefore treated in more detail under Chapter 4. Overall, Aalto takes their EDI responsibilities very seriously and has many well-functioning procedures and tools in place to enhance equal and non-discriminatory treatment of staff and students.