KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF AALTO UNIVERSITY

Tekijät **Antoinette Perry, Mia Brzakovic, Mika Konu, Geir Øien & Sirpa Moitus, Self-assessment of Aalto University (ed.) Rediet Abebe**
Auditointivuosi **2023**, Karvin julkaisu **13:2023**
Kieli **Englanti**
ISBN **978-952-206-764-7 pdf**

4.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) was chosen to be the theme of our learning organisation and benchlearning based on our community input and discussion. The Aalto Management Team agreed on the importance of this evaluation area in 2021. Aalto considers a comprehensive assessment of EDI vital for understanding how well it is being managed and implemented and for further developing EDI through insights from the evaluation and lessons from the benchlearning.

EDI is part of our core values, supporting our community's wellbeing, creativity and ability to foster world-class research, teaching and impact. We actively work towards providing an inclusive and accessible environment in which employees and students from diverse backgrounds are treated equally and are free to work and study without fear of discrimination. Our operating model stresses community engagement, accountability, and proactive and systematic development. All community members have a responsibility to build equality, diversity and inclusion locally in their own environment.

The Aalto University EDI Plan defines the ways in which we promote EDI in our community: the current status, recent developments and development plans for a three-year period. The EDI Plan outlines five development areas and feeds into the annual action plans, which outline concrete action steps for each year at the university level and in each of Aalto's six schools (see figure 8). The EDI Plan was built in a community-driven manner through the participation of faculty, staff and students.

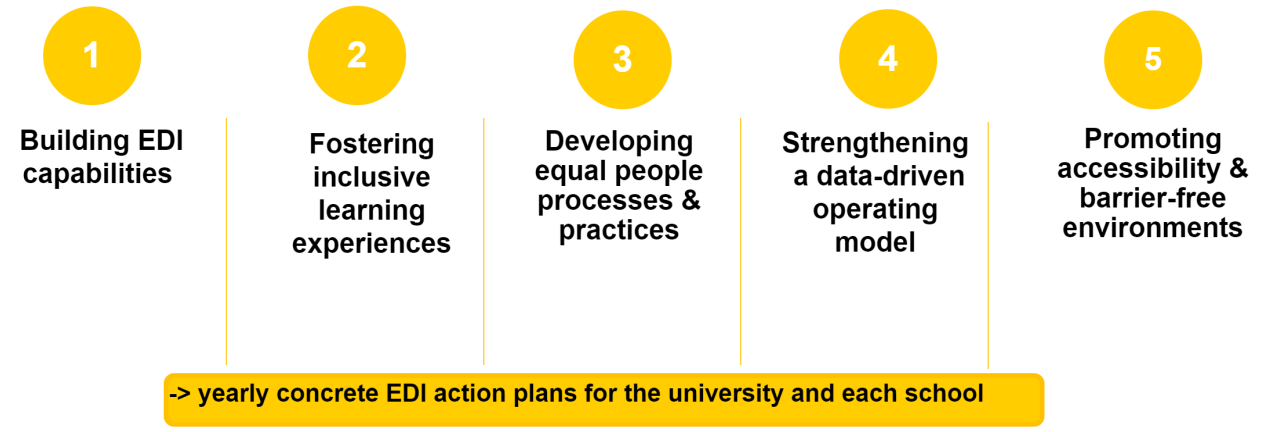

Figure 8. Aalto's EDI plan

Building EDI capabilities

Based on the 2021 Employee Wellbeing Survey, the overall experience of equality, diversity and inclusion at Aalto is at a good level (average 4.17 on a scale of 1 to 5), but there is variation across different demographics. Personnel with a nationality other than Finnish assess their experience positively but indicate that better support is needed for spouses and families, as well as for understanding Finnish culture, language and working life opportunities. The Aalto community continues to grow more diverse. During 2022-2024, we will take further actions to facilitate making all students and personnel feel included in the Aalto community by building EDI awareness, communication and competencies further and by focusing on psychological safety, inclusive communications and inclusion of diverse minorities. After COVID-19, a sense of belonging and togetherness needs to be fostered through grass-roots level activities to promote an inclusive environment. We organise monthly EDI discussions for Aalto personnel as part of our efforts to enhance the EDI awareness of the Aalto community.

Fostering inclusive learning experience

The diversity of Aalto's student body is gradually increasing. The results of the 2022 'AllWell?' student questionnaire indicate that the overall wellbeing of Aalto's students decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest single factor contributing to this was a lack of peer support, and this remains a key development area. During 2022-2024, we will continue to work to attract diverse students to Aalto's educational programmes and will also continue joint EDI development work with the Aalto University Student Union (AYY) and student associations. Specific development areas focus on inclusive teaching and learning practices and equality and consistency of supervision.

Developing equal people processes and practices

The share of women in academic positions is improving but continues to be a development area. Aalto is the 40th most international university in the world (THE Most international universities 2022), with a highly diverse international faculty, but the share of international service personnel

is still a clear development area. The share of women among heads of departments is 15%, which also represents a clear development area. During 2022-24, we will take actions to embed equality, diversity and inclusion further into the recruitment and onboarding processes, widen mentoring and support in career paths, and continue to use job pay analyses to achieve equal pay. Specific development areas are holistic well-being and improving diversity in management and service positions.

Strengthening a data-driven operating model

The management and development of EDI work is part of Aalto University's overall quality system of continuous development and is aligned with the university's planning cycle. The Provost, supported by the EDI Officer and EDI Committee, is responsible for equality, diversity and inclusion development work at the university level, and the Deans, supported by the schools' Development Managers (or equivalent), are responsible at the school level. School-level EDI Task Forces (or equivalent bodies) make annual action plans for their school and follow up on these. The EDI actors monitor EDI statistics annually. By linking EDI to the university's annual clock, we systematically monitor Aalto's progress toward the 2022-2024 EDI goals outlined in this document. We are aiming for even tighter alignment between EDI and our annual management processes.

Promoting accessibility and barrier-free environments

Based on the 2021 Employee Wellbeing Survey, the overall experience of the accessibility of university facilities is at a good level (average 4.04 on a scale of 1-5). However, experiences vary between demographics. We will focus on building awareness and ensuring the competence of our employees regarding both physical and digital accessibility. We will also further develop ways to measure accessibility and use data to prioritise development work (for example, accessibility inspections of each of Aalto University's buildings).

At Aalto, we evaluated our current EDI state in five areas as a part of the University Review process. Our strengths and enhancement areas are summarised in the table below. More detailed development actions are included in our EDI plan.

Aalto University expects to receive recommendations that would be relevant for addressing the enhancement areas identified in the table below.

	Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Building EDI capabilities	• Aalto's values, ways of working and Code of Conduct were updated through a participative process, and the Code of Conduct is now also an e-learning modules. Code of Conduct workshops were organised across the university. • Trainings and workshops about unconscious bias are held.	• Build EDI awareness, communication and competencies further and reach a wider audience. • Specific development area: increased awareness and focus on psychological safety, inclusive communications and inclusion of diverse minorities, including peer-support networks. Inclusion of international employees and students in the Aalto community and Finnish society.

Fostering an inclusive learning experience	• Active collaboration with the student community together with the AYY equity team. • Student marketing and the 'Shaking up Tech' event aim to attract women to tech fields. • A dedicated 'Starting Point for Wellbeing' was established, offering students advice and guidance on services related to wellbeing. Student psychology services, online support and workshops were increased. The 'AllWell?' wellbeing survey results were systemically analysed and discussed in all study programmes and with the student union, and corrective measures were taken.	• Continue actions to attract diverse students to Aalto's educational programmes; continue joint EDI development work with AYY and student guilds at all levels. • Specific development areas: inclusive teaching and learning practices, equality and consistency of supervision.
Developing equal people processes & practices	• Integrated EDI aspects into Aalto's training programme for new supervisors. • Systematic development of recruitment practices in job marketing materials and the in-house headhunting service, 'Talent Search', particularly to recruit professors in fields lacking women applicants. • A handbook and e-learning tool on EDI aspects in recruitments is available. • Ensuring equal pay across gender and nationality groups, and following up with employee unions.	• Embed EDI further into recruitment and onboarding processes, and broaden personnel mentoring and support in career paths. • Specific development areas: holistic employee well-being, and diversity in management and service positions.
Strengthening a data-driven operating model	• Overall EDI governance was strengthened. The initiative is led by the Provost, and there is a dedicated EDI Officer and an operative EDI Task Force. The EDI committee composition was strengthened by adding members representing international faculty. • EDI work organisation was established at the schools (e.g., the Dean's Taskforce at the School of Business, Inclusive ARTS at the School of Art, Design and Architecture) • Increased support is provided for people in challenging situations, and ombudspersons for doctoral students were established.	• Tighter alignment of EDI with annual management processes. • Development of an EDI dashboard to provide transparent real-time access to data and analytics. • Further improve processes, guidelines, communication and monitoring of reports of inappropriate behaviour.
Promoting accessibility and barrier-free environments	• Harmonised and systematic practices for individual study arrangements were launched, and a toolbox for individual study arrangements in diverse situations was established. • The Aalto University Open Science and Research Policy was updated to promote open access to scientific publications, research data, methods, software code and infrastructure.	• Continue implementation of the accessibility requirements of the Finnish Act on the Provision of Digital Services 306/2019. Build the relevant awareness and competences. • Improve the accessibility of the national SISU information system. • Further improve students' and teachers' awareness of individual study arrangements. • Develop better metrics for the accessibility and use of data for development.

4.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

By choosing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) as its optional evaluation area in the FINEEC audit, Aalto University expects to receive recommendations that would be relevant for addressing five key areas. Below are the audit team's assessments and detailed recommendations concerning the EDI plan and these five areas.

The EDI plan is ambitious, comprehensive and strongly linked to Aalto's strategy and core values

Aalto's three-year EDI plan for 2022–2024 has been crafted creatively and collaboratively by the university EDI Committee, chaired by the provost and comprising faculty, staff and students from across the campus. The plan defines how Aalto promotes EDI values and principles in its community and includes recent developments, the status and key priorities over the next three-year period. The EDI plan is ambitious and bold, strongly linked to Aalto's strategy, prioritising gender equality and inclusion, particularly for international staff and students. Aalto sees EDI as a tool to advance the university's core values and a competitive edge towards better research, education and impact.

At a governance level, in addition to the university EDI Committee, each school has its own local EDI committee, comprising staff and student members at different career stages (from assistant professor to full professor). However, whilst EDI reps from schools were positive about buy-in from senior staff, some departments have not yet participated in the process. Furthermore, discussions with students revealed an absence of awareness of such EDI committees or plans. Thus, to build EDI awareness and reach a wider audience, the EDI plan needs to be branded, so it is instantly recognisable and evident to those not formally engaged in the process. Notably, the audit interview with staff involved in EDI consisted of only 25% of males. A conscious and systematic approach must be adopted to ensure equitable EDI workload, representation and chairing of EDI committees across schools.

The Aalto EDI Plan outlines five development areas. Each area has several priorities and actions. These are being implemented via university-wide initiatives, organic bottom-up events and trainings. The EDI plan feeds into action plans at the school level. Progress on these actions is monitored via the university's annual clock (Preview-Review-Dialogue). Regarding implementation and progress, Aalto has already achieved significant gains across its five development areas.

Area 1: Building EDI capabilities

Aalto identifies building EDI capabilities as its key priority area and has implemented numerous initiatives. These include creating and revising policies, forming local committees in each school, and establishing a dedicated EDI web resource with information, policies and EDI tools accessible to the whole Aalto community. Other approaches to building EDI capabilities include staff training, such as unconscious bias, which has been taken by academic and support staff across the university.

To support the university's goal of promoting psychological safety, Aalto has developed a code of conduct with mandatory training for all staff provided through video content and e-training. Aalto also has dedicated support personnel to whom incidents of harassment, bullying or misconduct can be reported. The audit team interviews with post-graduate students revealed them to be very well informed on the support available to them and how to report difficulties. Similarly, the

student union has trained harassment contact persons and provides a range of trainings to students, which they were overwhelmingly positive about.

However, beyond those immediately engaged in EDI, it was evident that, more broadly across the university community, there is a lack of awareness of the EDI plan and participation in EDI trainings. Specifically, students were largely unaware that there is even an EDI plan; the minority who were aware only knew of initiatives to improve gender equality for women.

Ideas on achieving widespread participation in EDI trainings are being discussed by the EDI committees; currently, this is encouraged through internal communication channels, including development managers and human resources. Based on the primary evidence gained during the audit visit, whilst progress has been made, there is a lot more to do in Area 1.

Aalto should invest in branding their EDI plan, making initiatives across the campus immediately attributable to this important pillar. This, together with regular communication and education of EDI philosophies and priorities to staff, particularly students, will help build awareness and competencies. One approach to mainstream/integrate EDI into daily operations is to include it as a standing agenda item at school/department meetings and have it at the start of the agenda so that it is not seen as tokenistic. EDI awareness needs to be extended to aspects beyond gender. For example, students expressed a wish to improve staff awareness and competence in tailoring their teaching and assessment for students with disabilities or additional needs.

Area 2: Fostering an inclusive learning experience

Student diversity is increasing. Learning Support Services and the pedagogical team within this unit provide training to lecturers on inclusive and accessible teaching and assessment. During interviews with staff from support services, the audit team learned that Aalto has a policy that each student has a right to reasonable individual study arrangements due to any impairment restricting their ability to study or any other health condition. Should teaching not allow a student, due to a disability or other health condition, to complete their studies as outlined in the curriculum or the course, the school is obligated to make reasonable accommodations to organise a mode of completing their studies. Such alternative completion modes must allow the student to achieve the intended learning outcomes set for the course or degree.

Student feedback systems enable an analysis of student inclusion. Overall, students at Aalto (including international) were very positive about their sense of inclusion and felt that the staff and lecturers made a great effort. They have neither witnessed nor experienced discrimination or exclusion incidents among their peers. However, some interviewees pointed to a need for Aalto to differentiate more within the large and heterogeneous group international students, in order to better meet individual students' needs.

The inclusion of international students (undergraduate and doctoral) is supported by language tutoring, guidelines and social activities. Several new initiatives are planned for 2022–2024, emphasising doctoral students, including training for supervisors and establishing a set of

standards for supervision. The audit team's discussions with postgraduate students revealed that this is especially needed for international students.

The audit team recommends that Aalto could further strengthen its inclusive teaching and learning practices by providing resources – such as teaching materials, assessment guides and staff training – to embrace neurodiversity in lectures, learning materials and assessments, with a goal of increasing inclusion. Staff could be incentivised to develop these competencies in inclusive teaching through professional accreditation such as digital badges.

Area 3: Developing equal people processes and practices

Internationalisation and gender have been identified as priority EDI areas to achieve equality. Aalto is Finland's most international tertiary-level institution; 48% of its staff are international.

Regarding Aalto community members from abroad, several measures are in place to help onboard and welcome international staff. At the university level, these include the annual Finland Independence Day dinner for all staff and their families and a spousal job-seeking assistance programme for new tenure track hires. Many local initiatives have also been developed. For example, the School of Arts, Design and Architecture organises regular dinners and get-to-know-you social events that have proved very popular. Other schools organise an onboarding buddy, excursions and language training and have set up an informal spousal network.

In terms of gender equality, in the ten years since Aalto's beginning, the percentage of female professors has doubled from 11% to 22%. One initiative to support this goal is the introduction of mentoring for all new assistant professors and all female academic staff. Aalto's participation in the national project Equal career paths for women is further evidence of their work in this space. In order to ensure success in this area, it will be essential to monitor figures at the local department/school level because significant differences exist between disciplines, which risk being overlooked or missed when data are aggregated at a higher level.

Another initiative by Aalto is embedding EDI philosophies into their recruitment process to broaden diversity in the applicant pool, for example, by using gender-neutral language in job descriptions and utilising dedicated search committees to try to attract more female candidates to predominantly male-dominated disciplines, for instance, chemical engineering. Marketing materials that embrace EDI philosophies to encourage females and males to apply for typically gendered roles are also being developed.

Unconscious bias training is provided for all managers and hiring committees. Detailed tracking of metrics (applicants, shortlisted candidates and those offered positions) needs to be maintained to measure the impact of these measures. However, early indicators are positive; of the last ten assistant professor hires in the School of Science, 50% were female. Gender parity has been achieved in salary and should be monitored going forward across other equality grounds, such as race, particularly as the international community grows.

A staff well-being survey assessed staff attitudes towards working from home and hybrid working

models. Different hybrid models are available in Aalto, enabling flexibility for those with caring responsibilities.

Aalto should strive for diversity in all senses at leadership levels and adopt a range of approaches to achieve this. Noteworthy is the audit team's observation that the percentage of female heads of departments is only 15%. Measures might include targeted, tailored, small-group leadership training for minority groups or the 'see it to be it' approach, which promotes the importance of visible role models at senior and leadership levels.

Area 4: Strengthening a data-driven operating model

Aalto uses its annual clock of Preview, Review and Dialogue to understand and monitor the impact of its EDI plan. This includes monitoring staff and student well-being/satisfaction/recruitment/pay through seven complimentary and discrete tools. Staff members described how through this system, data is readily available within 48 hours, with minimal effort. There is a plan to incorporate EDI into the university's PowerBI dashboard, making them available instantaneously.

The existing biennial employee well-being survey serves as a useful metric to measure the impact of different EDI initiatives. For example, the feeling of inclusion or belonging, particularly felt by non-nationals and their spouses and families, as identified in the last survey, is a vital area for improvement. Aalto has a high completion rate for its staff well-being survey at nearly 60%, and the overall staff well-being results are the highest in Finland.

Whilst student intake is nationally regulated, Aalto should strongly consider innovating a means to measure and monitor the diversity in its student population, encompassing grounds such as gender, race, socio-economic status and disability. This level of awareness of the diversity (or lack of) within its community could illuminate areas where creative solutions could be taken to enhance diversity in its population through creative ways to attract underrepresented groups.

Admission services webpages should make the support available for people with physical or learning difficulties more visible. Such knowledge would strengthen the data-driven operating model, which to some degree, is relatively limited at present. Further evidence of this comes from the two gender only system operated at a national level. There is a lack of awareness of what percentage of the Aalto community does not identify with either of these two genders and, thus, what percentage of the community may feel excluded. Some interviewed students expressed frustration with the inability of Aalto to record other measures of diversity adequately and found the gender-binary recording system antiquated. Although Finnish national legislation does not yet consider gender beyond being binary, careful consideration should be given to how Aalto can overcome this hurdle and be more inclusive to the university community by delivering a creative solution to capture and monitor a broader spectrum of genders.

The audit team recommends that Aalto reconsider its decision to exclude targets from its EDI plan. The EDI leads/champions should carefully consider how they can objectively capture

progress and impact in the EDI areas without targets. Some staff voiced their enthusiasm for setting quantitative targets within schools, especially where stark differences in gender balance, for example, exist. Milestones should be included at the very least and would incentivise and provide a sense of achievement to be celebrated by the university community.

Area 5: Promoting accessibility and barrier-free environments

Aalto is monitoring staff satisfaction in this regard through its well-being at work surveys and has identified areas to prioritise and improve. For current students, the Learning Services' collaborative accessibility group shares best practices for arranging suitable actions and developmental issues. Campus development is controlled by Finnish legislation. However, staff felt that much effort has gone into increasing campus accessibility.

Through discussions with international students, language emerged as a barrier to their sense of belonging to the Aalto community. This is primarily felt outside the classroom, which students feel is also part of their learning experience. They expressed a desire for the university to be more proactive in this regard.

As regards to promoting accessibility of studies, the audit team recommends that Aalto consider what alternative measures or flexible entry and learning pathways they could introduce to strive for equity amongst a diverse entrance student population. For example, students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes, minority groups, migrant families, and students with learning difficulties or physical or mental disabilities have a much higher barrier to entering tertiary level education. While some alternative admission routes exist, such as open university and vocational degree pathways, no formal processes are in place to train, educate and equip faculty with how to assess these cases. Initiatives may include improving web-based admissions information, physical and online support for these students and targeting outreach events and programmes to them in the community.