

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Authors **Tatjana Volkova, Hans Gruber, Siamäk Naghian, Kateryna Suprun, Mira Huusko & Sirpa Moitus. Self-assessment of the University of Vaasa (eds.) Marja-Liisa Hassi & Tanja Risikko.**

Year of publication **2024**, FINEEC publications **28:2024**

Language **English**

ISBN **978-952-206-890-3 pdf**

5 Benchlearning

- HEI's self-assessment

International student recruitment

UVA selected international student recruitment for the target of its benchlearning project to support its goals for internationalisation and a diverse and inclusive community. [Jönköping University](#) with its long-term and well-established activities in the area provided an excellent partner for the project.

Background for choosing the target and partner

In its [Strategy 2030](#), the University of Vaasa (UVA) visions to be an internationally recognised research university, with 35% of its students and faculty being international. The target is to establish international student recruitment as a new, financially self-sustaining function by designing a comprehensive and integrated international student recruitment process. It also involves development of an internationally competitive programme portfolio with enhanced support for international students as future specialists to integrate into the regional labour market and society.

Jönköping University (JU), with internationalisation as a strategically important priority, has a multicultural environment with 2,400 international students from about 120 countries. It has a well-established and successful process for international student recruitment. Approximately 50% of the students and faculty at [JU Business School](#) are international. Likewise, JU has well-established international programmes, with education in English at all levels from Pathway Education to postgraduate level. JU's profile is also close to the UVA profile. Their International Business School and School of Engineering represent institutions and scientific areas that are equally strong at the University of Vaasa.

Aims of the project

The aims of the benchlearning consisted of:

- comparing the aspects of strategies for internationalisation and international student recruitment
- learning about the key aspects of JU's successful international programmes
- learning about the key aims, targets, benchmarks, and procedures of JU's international student recruitment activities
- learning about organisational engagement behind JU's activities
- sharing best practices, and
- discussing the universities' challenges in the area.

Process and timeline

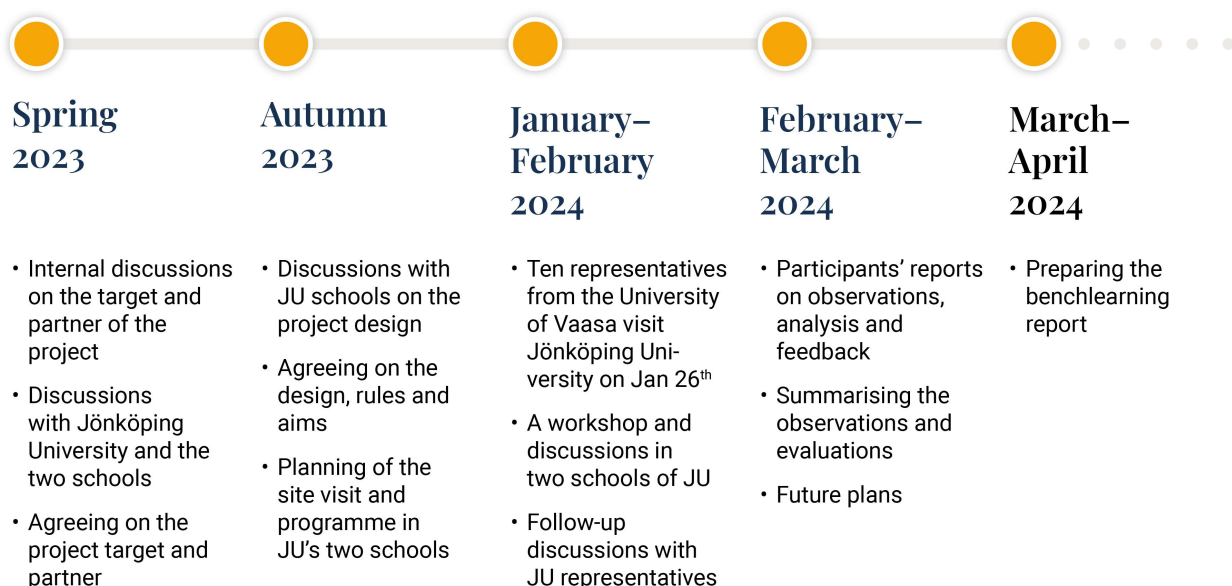


Figure 8. Agreeing on the aims and process with JU.

The coordinators and key persons agreed on the programme and schedule of the site visit in the two JU schools on January 26th. The workshop with the International Business School (JIBS) was organized in the morning and the afternoon workshop took place in the School of Engineering (JTH). More specific questions on the topics were sent to the representatives before the site visit. JU International Services' team provided answers to supplementary questions after the site visit.

Organisation and participants

UVA's core team consisted of two managers from the International Services led by the Vice-Rector of International Relations. Director of Quality and Accreditation of the JIBS acted as the

JU's core and contact person, with contributions from the Head of Department of JU's International Office. In addition to UVA's core team, four representatives from Study and Education Services and three faculty members from the schools participated in the site visit. A member from the International Services attended the workshops remotely. The administrative personnel attending the site visit are involved in the international student recruitment process. All participating faculty members are engaged in UVA's international education programmes and/or in supervise international students.

Before the first workshop, the visitors had a short tour in the JU's premises. Both workshops started with introductions of the participants and were followed by short presentations of the two universities' strategy, aims and procedures in their international student recruitment. Questions and enthusiastic discussions took place flexibly and intensively during and after the presentations. JU units' comprehensive approach to internationalisation and its strategic, long-term work and data driven procedures in international student recruitment were very appealing to the visitors. UVA representatives took home plenty of new perspectives and ideas to accommodate to the existing practices.

Assessment of the project

The site visit and learning about the two schools' practices in internationalisation and international student recruitment were considered highly fruitful among all visitors. After introductions, the participants exchanged experiences and identified shared challenges. Learning about the work of JU International Office, JIBS's successful international programmes and the industry collaboration of JTH shed light on JU's strategy, systems, and partnerships in international student recruitment, including active monitoring and organizational engagement. The visitors also got valuable insights in the JU's path to the current approach and practices. After the site visit the visitors listed their take-aways from the site visit. They also compared the best practices between the two universities, which are summarized in the table below.

| Good practices of UVA | Good practices of JU |
|---|---|
| Financially and environmentally efficient recruitment results | Well-resourced and organized international recruitment teams |
| Updated website for enhancing the university's brand; a welcome webpage for new students | Website set up with customer in mind; clear information about the programmes |
| International agenda and strategy with data and evidence applied | Strongly data-driven and evidence-based recruitment approach |
| Timely admission processing period for prospective applicants; selection criteria allowing for students at a later age to have a chance | Efficient local admission process also at use, including interviews to determine fit and skills level |
| Strong recent input and progress in the international student recruitment activities | Collaborative approach to international recruitment covering all levels of the university; regular meetings with administration and schools |
| Strong local strategic partners to collaborate with | Strong ties with industry and projects helpful in attracting quality students; International Campus |
| Increasing English programmes at both undergraduate and graduate levels | Diverse programs in English, a more flexible approach to English language evidence |

Application

- Further increasing admission and after admission information on the website
- Clarifying admission criteria and prerequisites for programmes for efficiency and transparency.
- Allowing for some discretions and flexibility in terms of English credit requirement for admission, connected to new national guidelines in 2025
- Ensuring advanced data-based forecasting, careful design of the actions, and communication among academic units and university services.

Audit team's comments

UVA's strategic goal is to recruit more international students as part of its growth strategy. The goal of becoming internationally recognised lies at the core of the UVA Strategy 2030. This was also continuously mentioned during the audit visit by multiple stakeholder groups. The university selected international student recruitment as the target of its benchlearning project to support its goals of internationalisation and a diverse and inclusive community. The audit team considers that choosing this topic as the benchlearning target was justified and well aligned with UVA's strategic development.

UVA chose Jönköping University (JU) as its benchlearning partner. The universities are well matched in that they have similar institutional profiles, particularly in the fields of business and technology. They also share the same internationalisation objective. The selection of the benchlearning partner and the benchlearning visit engaged all key UVA stakeholders involved in the international student recruitment process. The audit team recommends that, in further work, UVA considers closer involvement of international students, both on the part of UVA and the benchlearning institution.

Current international recruitment practices at UVA are evidence-based, making good use of market analysis and local agents. UVA also understands the potential of internationalisation at home and the efficient use of resources needed to attract more international students. The quality of support services for international students has been found to be good. The audit team also received evidence that sufficient attention is paid to the academic progression of international students.

UVA is tasked with integrating international students into the UVA community. However, their integration in the decision-making process remains challenging, as is evident from the Equality Plan and the audit visit findings, largely due to Finnish language deficiencies. According to the audit visit and the self-assessment report, international students can study Finnish online even before they arrive in Finland. As the number of international students is increasing, the audit interviews also highlighted the availability of student accommodation and sufficiently detailed information about Finland. UVA also has support services for spouses and families.

The audit team recommends that UVA continues to support the employability of international students. During the audit visit, career guidance services were considered beneficial. However, the audit team recommends that international students receive more assistance in order to obtain first experiences in the Finnish labour market and to develop employability competences.

The team also recommends that UVA consider providing targeted merit-based financial assistance for talented students from non-EU and non-EEA countries to leverage full-cost tuition fees. In this way, students would benefit from regional needs in terms of better human capital for further economic growth.