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AUDIT OF METROPOLIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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5 Benchlearning

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Student and personnel well-being through benchlearning

Benchlearning at Metropolia was implemented in cooperation with the Dutch Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA) university of applied sciences between the autumn of 2021 and the spring of 2022. The benchlearning topic (personnel and student well-being) is linked to the social sustainability goals of sustainable development and therefore to Metropolia's strategy.

The initially planned visit to Amsterdam was cancelled due to the pandemic and the benchlearning was implemented remotely. The HvA student advisor and an HR representative answered a few questions in writing and, based on the answers, Metropolia's student advisors and an HR representative wrote content to the benchlearning section. A Teams meeting was held in which Metropolia's and HvA's personnel who participated in benchlearning exchanged their views and discussed well-being during the pandemic more extensively. The following chapters describe the learning outcomes and the ideas to be applied. The core items have been listed in tables 4 and 5.

Personnel well-being: Identification of risks for well-being during the pandemic

Metropolia anticipated that the personnel having to switch to remote and hybrid work due to the exceptional circumstances would result in increased challenges in their psychosocial well-being. Based on the results of the 2020–2021 personnel surveys, the exceptional circumstances did not compromise personnel well-being to a considerable extent. Approximately half of the

respondents felt that their well-being at work during remote work remained unchanged, while 25 per cent of personnel said their well-being had decreased, and slightly less than 25 per cent said their well-being had actually improved. More than a third of the respondents found that communality had suffered in the virtual environment.

Psychosocial risks were mapped in the exceptional circumstances by means of risk assessments, workplace surveys conducted by the occupational safety and health services, superior interviews, personnel health questionnaires and preventive medical examinations. The early support operating practice (monitoring of absences due to illness, early support discussions, support measures by the HR services and the occupational safety and health services) continued in the exceptional circumstances as well.

The assessment of psychosocial risks has been carried out since the beginning of 2022 in HvA as well. In addition, personnel are invited to preventive medical/health examinations during the year. Both examinations pay special attention to the impacts of the changes caused by the exceptional circumstances on work and well-being at work. HvA did not mention personnel questionnaires or surveys as sources of information.

Good practices of your organisation

Early detection of risks in well-being at work

• Personnel questionnaire, personnel survey
• Assessments of psycho-social risks
• Workplace surveys by the occupational safety and health services, including superior interviews, personnel health questionnaires and medical examinations
• The early support operating model and system (Sirius) and providing superiors with coaching in using them
• Occupational safety and health key figures and indicators
• Occupational health cooperation (regular meetings, monitoring, case meetings, occupational health meetings)

Support for well-being at work in the exceptional circumstances

• A coronavirus task force established at the beginning of the pandemic: policies, guidelines, communication, and dialogue during the exceptional circumstances
• Digital support for remote teaching (the teaching staff, in particular)
• Webinars and network learning modules supporting well-being
• Sharing experiences and practices in the sparring forum for superiors
• Open work supervision groups (superiors, experts)
• Short-term psychotherapy when needed (based on the occupational health team’s assessment)
• The Break Pro application to support exercise and recovery during workday for the entire HEI community

Near-term plans to develop personnel’s well-being

• The *Onnistu hybridityössä* (Successful hybrid work) learning path for superiors and their teams

Good practices of the partner organisation

Early detection of risks in well-being at work

• Assessments of psychosocial risks
• Preventive medical/health examinations
• Special attention to the impacts of the changes caused by the exceptional circumstances on work and well-being at work

Support for well-being at work in the exceptional circumstances

• Newsletters introducing personnel’s methods to handle remote work amid the pandemic
• A platform designed for personnel with a multitude of up-to-date information on well-being at work and the pandemic.

Near-term plans to develop personnel’s well-being

• A game on the team’s operating practices in hybrid work and for agreeing on the ground rules.
• Work spaces are designed with multi-location work in mind and equipped for such work.
• More meetings requiring participants to be physically present to strengthen the positive impact of social contacts.
• Personnel training is increasingly provided online.

Future application of the peer partner's good practices, or practices already applied

• Personnel communication during the exceptional circumstances and when returning to hybrid work could highlight personnel's/students' own stories: the methods they have come up with to handle the situation, and the positive things that remote/hybrid work has introduced to one's life.
• A gamefied approach to agreeing on the team's shared working methods in the hybrid work model.
• Meetings requiring the attendees' physical presence are organised in such a way that the physical presence is seen as useful and rewarding.

Table 4: Comparison of personnel's well-being practices

Student well-being: Methods of early detection of deteriorating student well-being

The goal of benchlearning was to examine how student well-being can be supported even before the student uses well-being services in HEI. Deteriorating well-being can be recognised at an early stage as part of the study guidance and counselling process, teaching situations and personal guidance and counselling meetings.

At the beginning of the studies, both Metropolia and HvA students completed a questionnaire to evaluate their need for closer guidance and support. Well-being issues can be recognised in groups in which teachers and study counsellors encounter students. The monitoring of the study progress, (mandatory) presence and the accumulation of credits has been found to be an effective method for early detection. Based on observations on benchlearning, guidance and counselling paths from such early detection occasions to numerous services as well as the awareness of these services must be strengthened.

In HvA's student info, students help each other in face-to-face and online meetings, on chat and via e-mail. At Metropolia, similar activities are provided by student tutors during the first semester. Students who developed student-oriented peer services in the autumn of 2021 proposed a Tutor Room where students would be available to assist other students. Benchlearning confirmed *that the Tutor Room is worth developing: the room could be a way to identify, at a very early stage, those students whose well-being with regard to their studies is deteriorating.*

The discussion events organised by HvA are comprehensively attended by members of the HEI community: the attendees may include members of the Board or a study psychologist. The practice has also raised interest in Metropolia. Hearing the students' views as part of the process to affect well-being should be made more systematic and increased.

Forms and tools of guidance and counselling

Metropolia provides guidance and counselling to students with a focus on group guidance and counselling: the students are supported by their designated PSP (personal study plan) / career counsellor in groups specific to degree programmes and in support workshops related to their studies. HvA's study guidance emphasises more individual guidance and counselling, where the student is referred to various services based on discussions.

Various forms of student tutoring are a central part of peer guidance and counselling and are

implemented through the METKA student union and peer activities at Metropolia. Participating in hobby clubs, university chaplain's Friday respites for studying parents, and events organised by the student association are examples of peer get-togethers. HvA provides extensive peer guidance for various groups and financially supports student associations and unions.

Although peer-based meetings, groups and events have otherwise increased at Metropolia, students' independent peer activities have decreased as the campuses were closed during the coronavirus pandemic. Students must be encouraged to engage in various forms of peer activity on the level of degree programmes, schools and Metropolia as a whole.

The availability and accessibility of digital services has improved during the pandemic in both Metropolia and HvA. The provision of study guidance for individuals and groups through Zoom and Teams that flexibly align with students' different life situations has become routine. To improve accessibility, briefings and guidance sessions are recorded and shared with students. Metropolia has increased the provision of webinars for students, and, in addition, the student's electronic desktop, a Wiki site and the thesis instruction facilities support communication and guidance. HvA offers its students a free-of-charge and anonymous access to an online platform with modules covering a variety of topics. At Metropolia, equivalent support is available in the form of webinars and courses. For example, credits can be earned from the course called '100 aktiivista hyvinvoinnin päivää' ('100 days of active well-being'), which will speed up the study progress. Benchlearning provided ideas about developing modules based on themes (e.g. stress, game addiction) online and for groups.

Good practices of Metropolia

Early guidance and identification
- Survey for new students
- Orientation programme for new students
- Small-group teaching
- Support workshops related to the studies
- Monitoring of attendance and study progress

Digital services
- The OMA intranet
- A Wiki web platform
- Digital web platforms (e.g. Teams) in individual and group guidance
- eHOPS (Peppi)
- Theme-specific recorded seminars in the open UAS

Peer guidance and counselling
- Student tutoring
- Thematic peer guidance and counselling groups
- Student assistant activities (e.g. a mathematics and physics workshop)

Good practices of HvA

Early guidance and identification
- Survey for new students
- A guidance path model for accessing various support services
- Monthly guidance discussions
- Student briefings
- Discussions between the management and students on the degree level

Digital services
- Digital web platforms (e.g. Teams) in individual guidance, in particular
- Theme-specific modules, including
  - stress management
  - alcohol abuse
- The SIS registration system

Peer guidance and counselling
- Thematic peer guidance and counselling groups:
  - refugee students
  - students from the Netherlands Antilles
  - disabled students.

Example(s) of future application of the peer partner's good practices or practices already applied

• More extensive mapping of the guidance path of support services, e.g. services provided by third-party actors.
• Investigating the opportunity to implement student information activities in peer guidance and counselling.
• Increasing interaction between the management and persons responsible for services with students.
• Investigating the implementation of theme-specific electronic modules or a more systematic use of existing modules provided by external parties (e.g. depression).
• Increasing thematic peer guidance and counselling groups.

Table 5: Comparison of students' well-being practices

Audit team's feedback

The chosen theme proved to be incredibly topical during the pandemic

Metropolia's benchlearning project focused on the well-being of students and staff. The choice of this benchlearning topic resulted from Metropolia's strategic social sustainability goals. The selected partner was the Dutch Hogeschool van Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Considering that the project's implementation coincided with the pandemic period, it was incredibly convenient and beneficial to exchange best practices for the well-being of students and staff.

As staff had to switch quickly to remote and hybrid work due to the exceptional circumstances, there were increased challenges for their psychosocial well-being. The audit team considers the chosen theme topical and essential for education development and appraises the following future application of the results. For instance, according to Metropolia's self-evaluation report, staff communication during exceptional circumstances and when returning to hybrid work could highlight their personnel's/students' own stories: the methods they used to handle the situation and the positive things that remote or hybrid work introduced to their lives.

The audit team appreciates Metropolia's aim to apply the lessons learned from the project, such as the game-field approach to agreeing on the team's shared working methods, particularly in a hybrid working environment. The plan to organise meetings requiring the attendees' physical presence in a beneficial way is also considered an asset and an important tool to re-establish face-to-face relations after two years of the pandemic.

Metropolia is encouraged to share good practices from benchlearning visits

During the process, Metropolia has learned many good practices. In the interviews, it became evident that the topic is perceived as important within the organisation. Using personnel surveys, workplace surveys, and digital support for remote teaching, mainly teaching staff, Metropolia can anticipate risks concerning well-being at work. Concerning the students' early guidance, the higher education institution has extensive experience using new student surveys, orientation programmes and student tutoring.

However, there is room for development by implementing (thematic) peer guidance and counselling, increasing interaction between the management and staff responsible for services

with students and so forth. Unfortunately, results and potential deriving from the benchlearning project are still relatively unknown among staff. For this reason, the audit team encourages Metropolia to share good practices and further develop the ideas from the benchlearning visit to ensure this project’s systematic implementation of shared processes and operating policies.