

Audit of Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT

3.5 Diversity and well-being at work and in studies

Proactive and innovative approaches needed to address gender imbalances

The university has an Equality and Non-discrimination Plan, separate plans for staff and students, covering both gender equality and broader non-discrimination, including recognition of non-binary identities. Plans explicitly prohibit discrimination on multiple grounds, such as age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political or trade union activities, family relationships, health, disability, and sexual orientation. The plans promote equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in employment, career development, professional growth, participation, and decision-making. Equality across campuses is also addressed. However, while these policies and objectives are clearly articulated, evidence of their systematic implementation and ongoing monitoring is less clearly documented. Based on the audit visit, monitoring is largely based on tracking feedback data.

LUT promotes diversity and non-discrimination through the dedicated equality plans. The plans explicitly address the reconciliation of work and family life through flexible working hours, remote work, and parental leave encouragement. They also highlight the value of age diversity, recognising both the tacit knowledge of senior staff and the fresh insights of younger employees. The university also aims to improve physical and digital accessibility, updating platforms like the Tuudo app. Information and support materials are also available to staff on the intranet, including resources on supporting diverse learners. There were also positive examples of promoting equality beyond gender, such as the university's provision of designated "silence rooms" on both the Lahti and Lappeenranta campuses to accommodate the diverse cultural and religious practices of its staff.

However, the university faces ongoing structural challenges in achieving gender balance. Women remain heavily underrepresented in advanced academic and technical roles, comprising only 10% of full professors. The university acknowledges the ongoing challenge of attracting female applicants in certain technical and engineering fields. This is reflected in the tenure track statistics, which show a heavy skew towards male academics. Women make up only 10% of professors (5 women compared to 45 men) and 34.4% of tenured professors (11 women compared to 21 men). In the tenure track system, women account for 20% of Assistant professors and 28.6% of Associate professors. A gender imbalance persists also in some "Other staff" job titles (e.g., Secretaries: 95.3% women; Engineers: 11.5% women). However, the gender distribution is perfectly balanced at the top management level.

The staff salary statistics show men's average salary is consistently higher across the 'Other staff' and there was no clear action plan to change this. Despite women holding most leadership roles, a pay gap persists in senior positions: among administrative staff, women earn 90.2% of men's salaries. The salary data at the highest academic positions is often hidden, which makes it difficult to compare salaries. On the other hand,

where data is available at level 9 in the university salary system for teaching and research staff, women earn more than men.

Based on the interview with the Rectorate, the university has also discussed gender and equality issues with the professors' union. According to the Staff Members' Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan, pay systems are intended to promote equality, with salaries based on job demands, individual competence, and performance. However, interviews and available data provide limited evidence of concrete actions to address existing imbalances, despite open recruitment processes. It was also noted in audit interviews that, given the current gender structure, recruitment committees may consist entirely of men, which can influence outcomes. The audit team recommends that more proactive and innovative internal measures are taken to address gender imbalances.

In the Rectorate interview, it was noted that LUT actively promotes engineering opportunities for women and participates in relevant networks. On the other hand, both the Rectorate and the deans emphasised in their interviews that meaningful change cannot be achieved through university recruitment efforts alone. It requires broader societal shifts in attitudes and interventions earlier in the education system. To combat this, LUT collaborates with other Finnish technical universities and invests in initiatives like *Mimmit koodaa* (Women Code) to attract more female students to the field.

An online equality and non-discrimination training was created in Moodle in April 2023. This training is a mandatory part of the orientation process for new employees, which they must complete within their first three months. The training is also open to all existing staff members. It would be beneficial to make the training compulsory for all staff members ensuring the effective implementation of the policy across university.

The Student Union takes an active role in promoting diversity and equal treatment, for example, it proactively appoints harassment contact persons for events, aiming to provide a safe space for all. Based on the audit, there are opportunities for closer cooperation with the Student Union in promoting diversity and equal treatment, given its systematic approach to preventing all forms of harassment and monitoring the effectiveness of its policies.

Inclusion, language and communication need continued attention as internationalisation grows

As mentioned, LUT has undergone rapid internationalisation and has recognised integration as an important university-level issue. This involves trying to ensure that international students and staff can participate, feel included, and have equal access to services, communication, studies, work-life opportunities, and university life. The SAR notes that the pace of growth challenges orientation, onboarding, and responses to increasing diversity, while also creating emerging needs as operating models, processes, and resources continue to evolve. The audit team found strong evidence that the university is making significant efforts to support international students and promote their integration into Finnish society and work life. However, both staff and students indicated that further development is still needed, particularly in orientation, communication, community integration, and employment pathways.

The audit material shows a wide range of practical support for international students. These measures include general and programme-specific orientation, dedicated international orientation sessions, pre-orientation, peer tutoring, Finnish language opportunities, career counselling, job search support, networking opportunities, and cooperation with municipalities, government agencies, and student associations. The SAR also notes the appointment of student community coordinators on both campuses in 2025 as a recent initiative to support student integration into the LUT community. Official student communication is provided in both Finnish and English, and LUT uses multiple channels, including eLUT, Tuudo, campus screens, Moodle, and email.

For international employees, the evidence also shows a range of support measures. LUT provides bilingual communication, Finnish language courses, weekly information desk support, arrival counselling, Welcome to Finland webinars, LUT PALs activities, events for international staff and their families, and cooperation with local city services through International Houses. Recruitment is described as open, transparent, and merit-based, with an international focus, particularly for teaching and research positions. The tenure-track process likewise follows an open international search based on merit, with clearly defined criteria and documented decisions.

These are significant strengths, demonstrating that LUT is not only attracting international students and staff but also actively supporting their participation in the university community and Finnish society.

The SAR notes that the expansion of English-language teaching has prompted discussion and the need to clarify language policies, while also highlighting that internationalisation challenges both international and Finnish teachers, as differences in academic cultures and language practices can affect guidance, group work, course instructions, inclusion, and learning outcomes. Audit workshops revealed that integrating international students with domestic students remains a practical challenge, as nationalities often form separate groups in classes and social settings. This suggests that, while LUT has been successful in attracting a significant number of international students, there is still potential to further develop a more integrated international campus environment and a need for strategies and activities that bring different student groups together. For international staff, while English is actively used as a working language, integration requires continuous effort to overcome cultural barriers, implicit expectations, and the navigation of Finnish administrative systems.

The audit team also found that, although LUT has sound bilingual communication and flexible language practices, its language principles could be made more explicit and easier to apply across contexts. LUT could define more clearly the expectations related to teaching, assessment and submission, meeting practices, and communication, supporting a more consistent and transparent approach.

Similarly, while the principle of equal access to student services is clear, the distinction between universal services for all students and targeted support for international students is less visible. Clarifying when services are the same, when tailored support is needed, and the rationale behind this would strengthen inclusion and make the service model easier for students and staff to understand.

The Integration Plan provides a useful structure for LUT's work with international students, covering areas such as student recruitment, social integration, integration in teaching, Finnish language and culture, professional development, career services and employer cooperation. The plan also identifies responsible actors, existing activities and development ideas for several stages of the integration process. To further strengthen this work, LUT could make the monitoring, evaluation and follow-up of the overall integration plan more visible, including how progress is reviewed, how outcomes are assessed, and how development actions are followed up over time.

Active support for international students' integration into society and labour market still needed

The extraordinary growth in the number of international students also necessitates robust integration efforts to transition these talents into Finnish society and the local labour market. To address the integration of a growing international student body into the Finnish labour market, a challenge recognised by both the university and regional stakeholders, LUT has developed several targeted initiatives. External partners also emphasised that successful integration is increasingly a national priority due to demographic trends.

To support international talent retention, LUT has introduced the Career Spark salary support programme, which lowers the threshold for companies to hire international students for internships and thesis projects. In

addition, the Future Talent project in Lahti was launched in response to local employers' concerns about future workforce availability. The project connects 33 local companies with students through regular networking, dedicated coordinators, and social media engagement, directly addressing regional labour market needs. Audit materials and workshops highlight a range of other support measures, including career services, job search support, Finnish language studies, networking, guest lectures, job shadowing, Duuniday, company visits, project work with companies, and work-life elements in courses. The SAR also describes systematic monitoring of company collaboration in courses through course description updates, PowerBI reporting, and teacher surveys. These are all a clear strength.

International students face immense barriers entering the Finnish labour market due to strict language requirements from local companies. LUT should continue to actively support international students in acquiring Finnish language skills and local networks to further enhance their employability and retention within Finland, leveraging its strong relationships with cities and other stakeholders to lower recruitment barriers.

Quality processes and feedback sources support the development of internationalisation

A clear strength is that LUT draws on several feedback sources relevant to internationalisation, including general student feedback, graduate feedback, quality workshops, well-being surveys, staff surveys, and the International Student Barometer. Evidence from the audit visit also indicated that feedback is discussed at management level and that student representatives are involved in feedback processes. Together, these practices provide a solid basis for identifying internationalisation-related issues and informing development actions.

LUT has begun analysing feedback and indicators for international degree students as a distinct group, helping to identify specific needs and patterns. Interviewees noted that LUT monitors internationalisation using indicators such as the number of international students, degree-related data, and co-publications, including measures that identify the share of non-Finnish participants. Surveys also include a question on whether respondents are Finnish or non-Finnish, enabling comparisons between these groups. This reflects a move toward a more differentiated use of data rather than treating students as a single uniform group. The audit visit highlighted feedback-informed development, including improved communication on career and employment services following lower International Student Barometer scores, and the introduction of cultural ambassadors based on survey feedback.

While the audit visit provided useful examples, the material did not clearly show how feedback is systematically translated into decisions, actions, and follow-up across different feedback sources. The overall approach could also be strengthened by systematically reviewing outcomes by nationality or assessing the impact of key measures, such as Career Spark, Finnish language pathways, career counselling, and employer cooperation.

Overall, LUT would benefit from more clearly documenting ownership, review structures, indicators, follow-up cycles, and feedback-to-action across key areas of internationalisation. This would strengthen the university's ability to demonstrate how internationalisation is planned, implemented, monitored, improved, and experienced in practice.

The well-being of staff and students is a key strategic priority at LUT

LUT promotes well-being at work and in studies and recognises in its 2030 strategic action plan that well-being is central to a thriving higher education community. The strategic actions focus on strengthening self-awareness of staff and students about their well-being, improving internal communication and organising

shared LUT events, and identifying structural factors that affect well-being. The LUT University's HR Strategy from 2024 also specifies the development objectives in well-being of faculty and staff. The three main strategic areas—Getting talented people, Environment for growth, and Best place to belong—are operationalised through seven HR goals. The university is also committed to the European Commission's HR Strategy for Researchers, which promotes, for example, the development of researchers' working conditions and their international mobility.

As mentioned, LUT is also investing in leadership development and, in its 2030 action plan, recognises good leadership as essential for strengthening the community and its well-being. Academic and non-academic career paths are clarified through the sharing of best practices, knowledge, and mentoring across education, research, and services, while valuing good leadership and ensuring that academic leadership is recognised and allocated sufficient time as an integral part of the work. Staff satisfaction at LUT is exceptionally high, with an Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) of 42, significantly above the Finnish university average of 24. However, audit interviews also highlighted that recent occupational health data indicates an overall increase in stress and mental health cases due to demanding university targets and modern work life pressures. LUT is addressing these challenges through early support models and Mental Health First Aid training. Based on the interviews, employee well-being is considered one of the university's key risks and is monitored by the University Board as part of change management-related risks. The university has a change management programme in place, and the strategic action plan addresses the work atmosphere and staff well-being by strengthening interactive leadership and developing tools to support staff well-being.

Well-being in studies is supported by comprehensive services including MOVEO sports, study psychologists, university chaplains, and student community coordinators. During the audit visit, the *Mental Health Mondays* initiative was highlighted as an example of support for student well-being, particularly mental health. These efforts are largely successful, as LUT students consistently rate their overall comfort at the university exceptionally high. During the workshops, students highlighted that their well-being is generally well supported by flexible study options and approachable staff. They also provided positive feedback on, for example, the accessible community spaces, which were seen as contributing positively to student well-being. In addition, the presence of study advisors in these spaces was particularly appreciated, as they were considered highly supportive and helpful to students.

However, workshops with students brought also specific well-being challenges to light. Students report that well-being is sometimes hindered by highly uneven workloads across different courses that award the same ECTS credits, causing unnecessary stress and confusion. Furthermore, students suggested that replacing purely theoretical, repetitive tasks (like essays) with more practical, industry-linked projects would significantly improve motivation, reduce academic fatigue, and better prepare them for work life. In addition, financial concerns, sleep problems, and stress related to future job prospects remained recurring challenges, particularly for international students adjusting to life in Finland. At the same time, feedback from the OLS teaching quality surveys conducted by the Student Union LTKY presented in the feedback review shows a positive trend, with fewer students reporting concerns about their mental health. Although the proportion has nearly halved since 2023, it still accounts for around one quarter of students in 2025, underscoring the ongoing need for targeted support.