

Strengthening the 15-year partnership between SEAMK and VIKO under the HEROES Alliance

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HEROES partners SEAMK and VIKO share much in common: similar size, comparable study fields, overlapping research interests, and a strong culture of applied, student-centred learning. These parallels form a solid basis for collaboration that has already delivered results, such as the double degree in International Business. The collaboration now opens new opportunities in areas like hospitality, nursing, sustainable transportation, and social work. The partnership also extends to mobility, joint teaching innovations, and ambitious RDI initiatives, making the relationship both deep and forward-looking.





Awareness raising about the current and future collaboration opportunities between SEAMK and Viko (photo: Sigita Leistrumienė, 2025).

Studies and mobility

The double degree in International Business remains a successful example of cooperation between SEAMK and VIKO. Building on this, both institutions see potential for new joint educational offerings and double degree opportunities in hospitality management, nursing, and automobile engineering with a focus on sustainable transportation. While semester-long exchanges can be challenging, there is strong interest in shorter formats such as blended intensive programmes and collaborative online projects, which attract both students and staff. Increasing teacher and staff mobility is highlighted as a shared priority. Social work studies expressed interest in expanding international training placements where English can be used, and nursing aims to strengthen internationalisation by developing English-thought opportunities. Creativity and business innovation, supported by VIKO's Creative Platform methodology, was identified as another promising area for collaboration.



Meeting with Viko faculties and experts (photo: Sigita Leistrumienė, 2025).

Research and innovation

Research collaboration emerged as an important area for the future. VIKO's active role in the Lithuanian EIT Food hub connects it to European networks working on food innovation, sustainability and education. This creates natural opportunities for SEAMK to join forces in projects and publications not only in food but also in areas such as SME growth, non-communicable diseases, and sustainable transportation. The idea of a HEROES researchers' conference is supported by both VIKO and SEAMK, with the aim of bringing partners together to share results, publish proceedings, and co-author articles. By combining strengths, both institutions can expand their international visibility and contribute more strongly to the themes of the HEROES alliance.



Visiting Viko laboratories and meeting with experts (photo: Sigita Leistrumienė, 2025).

Funding opportunities

The visit also opened new conversations about funding opportunities. EUREKA was highlighted as a particularly relevant avenue, with both Finland and Lithuania eligible for continuous network project calls, Eurostars, and thematic opportunities such as lightweighting technologies. These instruments offer excellent possibilities for SME-driven research and innovation with higher education involvement. Beyond EUREKA, Erasmus+ projects and Horizon Europe were on the agenda.

Looking ahead

There is a broad potential for SEAMK and VIKO to deepen their collaboration across education, mobility, research and innovation. Opportunities range from expanding joint educational pathways to creating more flexible mobility formats, and from co-developing projects in food, health, entrepreneurship, technology and sustainable transport to strengthening links with regional industries. By pooling expertise and networks, the two institutions can amplify their impact and reach new levels of cooperation.

At the same time, both sides recognise the value of embedding these initiatives within the wider HEROES alliance. Joint activities such as blended intensive programmes, researcher training, and conferences can be designed to invite participation from other partners, ensuring shared learning and multiplying results. In this way, the bilateral partnership between SEAMK and VIKO can serve as a catalyst for broader collaboration across HEROES, building momentum that benefits the entire alliance. By linking their efforts more closely to the HEROES PODs, the two institutions can also make their joint work more integrated and efficient. Aligning activities with POD themes will help ensure that results are relevant for the whole alliance and provide a structured framework for joint publications, mobility, and project development.

Acknowledgements

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Anne-Maria Mäkelä
Senior Advisor, International RDI and Networks
SEAMK – Seinäjoen ammattikorkeakoulu
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

Anne-Maria Mäkelä is a leading expert in international research collaboration within Universities of Applied Sciences, combining strong experience in external funding, project coordination, and strategic internationalisation. Her work emphasises building institutional support structures, fostering participation in European alliances and networks, and promoting collaboration based on shared values, regional impact, and industry engagement. Mäkelä's approach highlights how structured support, strategic alignment with funding instruments, active networking, and peer learning can enable UAS researchers to succeed in international collaboration.

Marjo Arola
Manager of International Education Services
SEAMK– Seinäjoen ammattikorkeakoulu
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

Marjo Arola is an expert in international mobility, joint programme and double degree collaboration within Universities of Applied Sciences. Her work focuses on promoting in-depth and forward-looking collaboration in the development and implementation of joint educational offerings within the framework of international partner network. This includes aspects of curriculum development, virtual, blended and physical student and staff mobility as well as internationalization at home activities.