

# Professional in Modern Diaconia



Diaconia University of Applied Sciences

## Mrs. Karamzin in Helsinki And the Gentlemen in the Harbour Bar

Aurora Karamzin was a cosmopolitan person whose colourful life story relates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century history of our country and to that of Diak. Mrs. Karamzin is remembered particularly as the founder and sponsor of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, established in 1867. She initiated deaconess training the same year. In this way, the origins of the capital which started Finnish diaconia lie in Russia while the ideology came from Europe. During the years to come, educational institutions maintained by diaconal organisations were established in various parts of the country. These institutions form the origins of Diak.



In the autumn of 1893, Helsinki Deaconess Institute learned that deaconesses were wanted in Oulu. As the request could not be complied with, it was seen appropriate to establish an institution in Oulu. Oulu Deaconesses' Home was inaugurated in the autumn of 1896.

In 1905, the Bishops' Conference moved to establish the Suomen Kirkon Sisälähetysseura (literally in English: the Association for Domestic Missionary Work) under the leadership of Reverend Otto Aarnisalo. The Sortavalan Diakonissalaitoksen Kasvattajaopisto (literally in English: the College for Educators in the Deaconesses' Institution in Sortavala) started training child protection workers and managers of orphans' homes. After the war, Sisälähetysseura transferred its headquarters to Pieksämäki.

In Pori, deaconess training commenced in 1950. The first students graduated in 1953. Reverend Eino Savisaari, called the "Priest

of the Deaf" in Turku, did valuable work in pleading the cause of sign language interpreter training. College-level sign language interpreter training was first started in Turku Christian Institute in 1983.

And this is not all. There had been a great deal of energy gathering in our country for the past century and more, exhibited by individuals such as Aarne Siirala and Urho Muromaa. This enterprise only needed pulling together.

In 1990, a group of persons in charge of various operations and education in the sectors of diaconia, health and social welfare were on a field trip to the Netherlands. At that time, the present system of universities of applied sciences and polytechnics was in planning in Finland. These experts discussed the educational scenarios during their trip. They conducted some of their discussions in a tiny taproom in the city of Rotterdam, patroned by a large audience of Rastaspriested people from Suriname. In a back room behind the bar, these experts sketched three alternative structures for Finnish universities of applied sciences and polytechnics. One of the structures was implemented, and Diaconia University of Applied Sciences was granted temporary authorisation in 1996. This type of education was established on a permanent basis in 2000.

All organisations have their own stories. Diak can trace its story far back in history, but Diak's true strength lies in how it forms solutions in relation to the challenges in the future. The one thing never to forget is the regular people and their distress.



Ulf Huett Nilsson / Johnér / Fennopress

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## Researcher-developers in Working Life, in the Streets and out in the World

Some of our researcher-developers working in research, development and innovation (RDI) focus on producing knowledge and some focus on the applications of knowledge, while most of these people develop everyday practices in various work communities.

Diak's researchers refine data and experiences in three research programmes, crystallising Diak's expertise concerning the work and everyday-life contexts of the church, the social welfare and health services sectors and various organisations as these combat social exclusion. These developers and educators work in the working-life interface enhancing our expertise and taking it into practice.

We focus on enhancing the quality, effectiveness and impact power of modern diaconia. A quality system audit by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council gave the quality assurance procedures of Diak's RDI the best possible rating.

Our working-life development -related activities aim at providing experts in helping, who work in different jobs in different fields, with good skills for encountering people's distress, suffering and dissimilarity. The importance of encountering dissimilarity should be emphasised now that globalisation is gathering momentum and people who help and people who are being helped come from a wide range of cultures.

Diak's specialty is customer orientation combined to phenomenon-based thinking. The premises of Diak's educational and developmental philosophy arise directly from customer needs. We aim at responsible solutions by emphasising the multi-disciplinary approach to helping.

Learning, development and research all take place in cooperation with working life. Through this cooperation, we learn to recognise the diversity manifest in working life as well as the working-life requirement of multiple skills and flexibility. We educate people to be multiple-skilled and develop flexibility in work communities as they face ever-changing requirements.

Diak encourages the strengthening of developing countries' own capacities for higher education and research. For more than ten years, we have systematically cooperated with the universities in two developing countries in particular. We have modelled our own expertise so that we are now able to produce important information for our partners in support of their work.



## Study for Meaningful Work

Education in Diaconia University of Applied Sciences produces multiple-skilled people. We train people for meaningful jobs. In earning one Diak degree, the student may gain multiple skills which qualify him or her for posts both in the public and church sectors. These degrees are structured to enable the graduate to work in the social and health sector, in parishes and in various organisations. In addition to interpreting, Diak interpreters also have the skills required for teaching and translating jobs.

Diak education also aims to empower the students to reflect on the ethical sustainability of their own actions. Such studies invite all of the student's personality to become involved.

Jessica, soon a Bachelor of Social Services, says, *"I have obtained the best skills for my new profession through my studies. The*

*good in me is being refined and will benefit my clients in the future. A multidisciplinary working mode and extensive expertise are good strengths to have".*

According to feedback from working life, Diak graduates demonstrate their values through their work. In addition to their excellent professional skills, they know how to cooperate and are able to work in multidisciplinary and multicultural contexts. They know how to develop their own jobs, their field and their professional skills.

*"I don't administer to the patient; instead, I view him or her as my fellow human",* says Minna, a nurse-deaconess and a recent Diak graduate.



## The Student in the Classroom, the Web, Working-life Learning Environments and Various Workplaces

Today, studying does not take place in classrooms only. The web is a learning environment involved in all studies, but at Diak, besides the traditional daytime classes, the student may obtain a complete degree through blended learning only. In such a case, the studies take place through the web, and the student visits the school only on contact teaching days. A key feature in the learning is practical training in different workplaces.

A part of the education provided by Diak is given in working-life learning environments combining research, development and learning. Working-life learning environments are structured to relate to Diak's key areas. Working-life experts, students and instructors learn from one another in these environments as they conduct their everyday work. Even traditional lessons may



take place integrated into work as usual, benefitting from the expertise of instructors, students and working-life experts alike.

*“DiakOppi, the working-life learning environment, is important for students as it provides them with opportunities to interpret in actual contexts”, say Salla and Marja, both studying to be sign language interpreters. “Only such opportunities allow the student to truly appreciate the interpreter’s role, power and responsibility. It has been a great pleasure to pair with familiar, trusted*



*instructors for interpreting assignments*". Marja hopes that other students have as positive learning experiences as she has had.

Regardless of the learning environment, students appreciate the atmosphere and instruction in Diak. Student feedback obtained from the quality system, more extensive investigations and inter-university comparisons have indicated Diak's learning atmosphere to be excellent. Diak also aims to offer instruction and courses in a manner that enables students to progress at a good rate.

*"Diak is an unbelievably warm and welcoming community. Every time I come to school I feel at home"*, says Annina, who is taking her courses through blended learning.

Student input is important for Diak in the development of courses. Student feedback is used in, for example, writing new curriculums.

## Diak Graduates out in the World – and the World in Diak

*“During the first week of the course, we focused on questions of aging and research. At the beginning of the next week, the bus took us up and down the slopes of the Manzini area mountains, and dropped off each of the four research groups in their villages. This intensive course was a new way of working. The students and their instructors formed a research group and everyone pitched in their special expertise for the common good. The student feedback from this course shows that the students learned a lot, they were satisfied with the contents of the course and most of all, they were satisfied with their personal experiences as researchers. First and foremost, we produced important information to help the development of the living conditions of the elderly in Swaziland”,* says Eila, one of the lecturers participating in this intensive course in Swaziland, planned by Diak and the University of Swaziland.

The international aspect has been strong in the course of Diak’s history, Diak is a strong international developer today, and will

be so in the future. Diak’s international work emphasises global responsibility and promotes equal opportunity. The key partners, in addition to European countries, are found in Asia and Africa.

Student and staff exchanges with the related mobility projects make the cooperation with developing countries closer. The practical training and the theses of students are always closely related to the staff’s research and development activities.

Diak’s degree-oriented instruction integrates the idea of a multicultural society and an open world in which professionals graduated from Diak live and work. Internationality is implemented in everyday practice through student and staff exchanges as well as through RDI cooperation.

Degree programmes conducted in English and immigrant students make Diak truly international on home campuses as well.





## Partners in Europe

Diak is skilled in interreligious dialogue, and its most natural partners are found in the Network of European Universities Involved in Teaching and Research of Diaconia. This network was founded to advance the teaching and research of diaconia in Europe.

Students may complete a part of their higher UAS degree in any partnering university. In addition, the parties have agreed to promote exchanges of teaching and research staff. The forms of cooperation include joint publications, conferences, seminars, workshops and research work.

Diak's networking has also given rise to Interdiac (International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action), which pro-

motes education, networking and RDI in diaconia and social work in Central and Eastern Europe. Diak develops tertiary education in that area in cooperation with other parties. Interdiac education emphasises skills relating to the support and empowerment of those in weaker positions.

European student exchanges take place within the Erasmus Student Network. Some exchanges relate to studying, some to practical training. Some students are able to combine the two in their exchanges. In addition to Erasmus destinations, Diak has partners in Russia in the regions by the Finnish border.

## Vision, Values and the Law Guide the Modern Professional in Diaconia

The ways in which modern diaconia manifests itself are varied. Diaconia can be viewed as an approach and a value in itself, but it also comprises practices of helping and of Christian education. Other than in a parish, a professional in modern diaconia might work in a non-governmental organisation or in social and health care in the public sector.

Modern diaconia in Diak refers to the fact that we are an ethically responsible multidisciplinary university aiming to improve inclusion and welfare in society. As an educator and developer, we hope, we are a respected national expert in our key areas and an international expert in our core competence, diaconia.

The statutory tasks of universities of applied sciences are specified in the Polytechnics Act. Diak's business idea is to educate competent professionals and experts for the church and society and to participate in the development of its fields of study at the regional and national levels. In addition, Diak works actively to promote social cohesion, public health and the foundations of education.

The defined strategic values guiding all work at Diak are Christian love for one's neighbour, social justice, open interaction and effective work.



Studies at the universities of applied sciences are a practical-oriented alternative to traditional university education.

The bachelor-level includes 210–270 ECTS credits that take an average of 3.5 to 4.5 years to complete. Postgraduate, professional master's degree programmes offer gainfully employed graduates an opportunity to deepen and expand their expertise. These studies are implemented in a blended learning model and take 1.5–2 years (60–90 ECTS) to complete.

More information concerning our degree programmes and our work is available on our web pages at [www.diak.fi](http://www.diak.fi) and facebook.



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