

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

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2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

UVA's profile is based around sustainable business, energy and society, a vision that emphasizes solutions to global challenges, and a mission that focuses on both the needs of society and the sustainable development of business. The University binds societal goals to the university's strategy, strategic development programs, the university's goal-oriented management, and the planning and evaluation of operations and faculty. These focus education, research, and innovation as well as internationalization, including knowledge dissemination, collaboration, innovation, and development actions.

The UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#), with a focus on those that reflect UVA's position as a business-oriented, multi-disciplinary research university located in the Nordic's leading cluster of energy companies (Table 1), act as strategic frameworks for the university's societal interaction and impact. Further guidance is provided by the [United Nations' Principles of Responsible Management Education \(UN PRME\)](#) and by recommendations from audits and accreditations. In addition, UVA is working towards the [Finnish Universities Rectors' Council UNIFI's](#) Theses on Sustainable Development and Responsibility (2020).

The key Sustainable Development Goals at the University of Vaasa

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|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SDG 7 | Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all |
| SDG 8 | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |

SDG 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
SDG 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
SDG 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
SDG 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

The goals of societal interaction and impact are managed by the rectorate, the deans and unit directors, in accordance with the university's management system. The University has an International Advisory Board, whose task is to act as a group that guides and supports activities towards both scientific and societal impact. UVA's plan for impact and engagement is featured in the UN [PRME Progress Report- University of Vaasa \(2022\)](#).

The University reports societal impact to its Board. UVA also reports to the Ministry, who monitor the development of the results and impact goals towards the four-year agreement. The University monitors its operating environment via continuous interaction with stakeholders and higher education, science and innovation policy reports. It also monitors stakeholders' views, as well as the University's reputation and visibility through feedback, reports and media monitoring. The feedback is utilized in the planning of operations. The operational environment data is gathered and analyzed for the rectorate and management team by the service units: finance, research services, education and student services, marketing and communications.

Based on these analyses, the university monitors its key societal impact objectives and designs the measures to achieve them through deliberations involving members of the university's management team and representatives from academic units. The societal impact processes include strategic stakeholder engagement, the use of multidisciplinary research platforms to connect the university and the business community, the use of research, development and education activities as examples of societal impact, diversified science communication, and alignment with the strategic sustainability impact goals.

UVA also seeks to develop a more structured way of capturing its societal impact. To that end it is engaged in the [Business School Impact System \(BSIS\)](#) which offers a systematic approach of recording and analyzing institutional impact on society. UVA participates in societal impact rankings. In the [THE Impact Rankings \(2024\)](#), and aligned with its profile and mission, UVA is ranked 201-300 globally for SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 13: Climate action, and SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.

Strengths

Enhancement areas

Strategic approach: target setting, monitoring, and rewarding for societal impact are visible and clearly communicated in UVA strategy

Close connections to external stakeholders for proactive monitoring of the operational environment

Societal engagement and impact integrated into evaluations: UVA includes societal and scholarly impact into evaluation processes at institutional and individual level

Awareness of the university's many societal impacts among its [stakeholders](#) should be further translated into milestones and metrics to drive future activities

[Diversify funding sources](#) to enhance societal impact, including the roles that [the research platforms](#) play in promoting societal impact

Establish an institutionalized, visible framework for UVA's Industry-University collaboration (e.g., internships, project work, thesis collaboration)

2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

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Goals and indicators for societal engagement are in place

UVA's revised 2030 strategy encompasses the societal impact of research and education. It serves as the foundation for the vision and mission of the university which, along with its strategy, have been organised around a relevant and tangible core, sustainable business, energy and society. According to the audit visit, UVA is extremely important for the Ostrobothnia region. It acts as an anchor, driver and dynamo for the region. The region operates in a triple-helix model, with the university, government and industry working together.

UVA developed societal engagement and impact strategic frameworks using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). In its strategic plan for impact and engagement, UVA has defined the steps towards reaching the sustainability priorities and objectives set for 2030. Based on interviews and the strategic plan, UVA considers societal engagement and impact holistically. Sustainability is seen as a horizontal layer throughout all activities driving UVA's impact and is well presented in its strategic plan for impact and renewal. According to the audit visit, these include ecosystem and partnerships, commercialisation, intellectual assets management, education, and competence development. According to the audit team, UVA's sustainability framework based on these horizontal layers is well established and has a positive impact on the university's societal impact.

At the leadership level, the goals of societal engagement and impact are integrated to the management system. According to the self-assessment report, the management system is led by the board, rectorate, deans and unit directors. UVA reports on its societal impact to its board.

UVA also has an International Advisory Board, whose task is to guide and support scientific and societal impact. According to the audit visit, schools and degree programmes can also have their own advisory boards. Involving external stakeholders, monitoring operations, collecting feedback from industry and follow-up reporting tied to the Ministry of Education and Culture provide a good management framework to steer the societal impact of the university's activities. Committing to a sustainable future, pursuing carbon neutrality and the principles of internationalisation and inclusion outline a clear long-term strategic intent for UVA.

The strategic plan for impact and engagement defines measures and key indicators, but not all of them have measurable goals. The audit team recommends setting strategic goals for key sustainable development dimensions, such as economic, social and environment, and integrating them into the UVA 2030 Strategy. This would help to ensure a strategic approach to sustainability. The strategic plan for societal engagement and impact in the medium and short term could be used as a road map for achieving strategic goals and its monitoring would be helpful in decision making. According to the audit visit, UVA's short-term goals serve the long-term goals. The audit team recommends, in order to monitor such development, attention should also be paid to the monitoring of short- and long-term societal impact, including quantitative and qualitative metrics. According to the audit visit, UVA has also evaluated its economic impact. The audit team recommends better monitoring of student employment, in particular of international students, in industry and society in the region. This is critical for the long-term societal and regional impact of UVA.

During the audit visit, the audit team observed that there was only a limited summary of the CO₂ calculation available and there was only one person who knew about the calculations. It is critical to integrate sustainable development into the quality system of UVA to ensure the quality, communication, and efficiency of the operation. The audit team recommends implementing a systematic way of controlling and tracking CO₂ to manage the environmental impact of UVA's operation and research results. Such activities should also be continuously communicated to the UVA community and externally.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA's service units collect and analyse operational environment data for the rectorate and the management team. Based on these operational environment analyses, UVA monitors its key societal impact objectives and plans measures to achieve them. This is done through discussions between UVA's management team and academic units. The audit team recommends that strategic decision-making would benefit from a more balanced approach to strategic, tactical and operational goals and key performance indicators, considering the economic, social and environmental impacts of sustainability.