

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Tekijät **Tatjana Volkova, Hans Gruber, Siamäk Naghian, Kateryna Suprun, Mira Huusko & Sirpa Moitus. Self-assessment of the University of Vaasa (eds.) Marja-Liisa Hassi & Tanja Risikko.**

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2.2 Research, development and innovation activities as well as artistic activities with impact

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Targets, goals for impact and follow-up

UVA has outlined research objectives in its strategic plans: increasing external funding, publishing impactful research, promoting interdisciplinary research, engaging external stakeholders, aligning research with the [UN SDGs](#), and strengthening its research platforms. The implementation of the strategic plan, including the monitoring and evaluation of impact, is the responsibility of the rector and a dedicated vice rector for research, and the deans and platform directors at unit level.

UVA regularly evaluates the quality of its research, the research environment, and the conditions for conducting research. Research excellence is included in UVA's strategy, and is embedded in university- and school- level research evaluation criteria, tenure track and progression criteria, and research group evaluation criteria ([RAE 2023](#)). UVA has signed the [DORA declaration](#), which seeks to improve the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated. It also has committed to the [CoARA](#) principles for advancing responsible assessment of research.

The annual reporting indicators for research include the number of PhDs, the amount and quality of scientific publications, international mobility of researchers, scholarly and societal impact, and external research funding. Publications, scientific tasks, and conferences are reported to the

[SoleCRIS](#) research database. The university also collects annual data on employees' societal impact and engagement activities. All research project applications and grants are reported via a project management system (Thinking Portfolio). Information from these systems form the basis of UVA's business intelligence system (PowerBI) allowing UVA to create reports and forecasts.

To promote faculty engagement in societal impact activities, UVA gives out annual awards for Societal Impact and the Science Communicator of the Year Award. UVA launched an initiative 'Mission Possible' to showcase the positive societal impact of UVA research, including a platform for improved science communication activities. The '[Mission Possible](#)' initiative includes a dedicated website in both Finnish and English where articles, news, events and learning resources connected to UVA's impactful research are presented. The site includes some of the societal 'impact cases' that were submitted as part of the university's research evaluation, RAE 2023.

The key accreditation bodies that UVA works with all include sustainability and positive societal impact as one of their key criteria.

Innovation activities

UVA has established the Innovation and Ecosystems team in order to strengthen its research innovation activities and commercialization. The team identifies new ideas and research for commercialization, spurs entrepreneurs and promotes co-creation across disciplines. It also cooperates with the innovation and entrepreneurship actors in the region. [West Coast Startup](#) was established by the University with [VAMK Vaasa University of Applied Science](#) to offer coaching for student entrepreneurs. A two-phased incubator programme and group mentoring in partnership with Demola also provide opportunities for students to solve industry challenges. UVA runs the [European Space Agency's Business Incubator \(ESA BIC\)](#) jointly with [Aalto University](#). UVA also organizes workshops to raise awareness about research commercialization and familiarizing researchers with different IP approaches.

Open and responsible science

The university has implemented a code of conduct policy promoting open science, ensuring high-level research in accordance with ethical principles, and establishing clear guidelines and procedures for handling research misconduct. UVA abides by The Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland 2023, [Finnish National Board on Research Integrity](#). It is committed to [the ethical principles of the humanities, social sciences and behavioural sciences](#) in all its operations and applies the principles of the European Charter and Code for Researchers as well as the ALLEA [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#). The Graduate School arranges courses on these topics for doctoral students as a part of their researcher training. The dedicated [Research Integrity Advisor](#)

is available for consultation about research integrity issues.

The UVA Research Council, chaired by the Vice Rector of Research, is responsible for developing research practices and infrastructure. The Council is supported by the Research Services unit. It monitors and develops the university's scientific activities, the practices of research ethics, good scientific practice, open science, research communication and impact of research and innovation activities. There are committees and working groups for each of these core areas – Science Committee, Research Ethics Committee, Publishing Committee, Research Infrastructure Working Group and Steering Group for Open Science – that report to the Research Council.

Strengths

Opportunities to collaborate with industry and the third sector in multidisciplinary research, driven by active ecosystem engagement

Number and quality of scientific publications, including citations and international co-publications: RAE 2023 revealed that many UVA research groups are at a high international level, and international rankings place UVA among the top in Finland

Responsible evaluation of research, as reflected in the inclusion of both scholarly and societal impact criteria at university and individual level

Enhancement areas

Refining the criteria, measurements and reporting requirements for research impact at university and individual level, as well as researcher training

Strengthening international research collaboration, with a focus on sourcing competitive external research funding from EU funding instruments

Ramp-up innovation and start-up incubation activities for researchers and students together with partners

2.2 Research, development, and innovation activities and artistic activities with impact

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Research is deeply connected to industry and society

UVA has adopted the ambition of becoming an internationally recognised, high-impact research university. According to the self-assessment report, the university has outlined research targets in its strategic plans: increasing external funding, publishing impactful research, promoting interdisciplinary research, engage external stakeholders, align research with the UN SDGs, and strengthen its research platforms. The implementation of the strategic plan, including the

monitoring and evaluation of impact, is the responsibility of the Rector and a dedicated Vice Rector for Research, and of the deans and research platform directors at unit level.

UVA's research and cooperation activities are organised in the research platforms Vebic, Digital Economy and InnoLab, which are cross-disciplinary and connected to regional industry and global needs and trends. This is a promising approach to support university's closer engagement with the surrounding society and its impact in practice. According to the audit visit, UVA's board monitors the activities of the research platforms and their cooperation with schools.

UVA engages in broad and continuous industrial and regional cooperation based on joint ecosystem thinking. The cooperation focuses on regional heritage and strong industry and work communities. It is well harnessed in the building of a foundation for long-term development, research cooperation and innovation. During the audit visit, various ways of involving different stakeholders, including industry, in joint research projects at different stages were discussed. The audit team concluded that stakeholder collaboration is one of UVA's critical strengths and should be maintained in the future. The team also found that research and project work are deeply connected to industry and society.

Research excellence is at the core of UVA's strategy

Based on the Quality Management Manual, the university's objectives for the quality of research are to support the strategic goals of the UVA and to ensure that research and innovation activities are impactful, high quality and responsible. The Research Council is responsible for the quality control of research outcomes by applying peer review methods. UVA Research Platforms operate in extensive cooperation with partners and the public sector. Several vital actors are responsible for high-quality and impactful research at the university: the Vice-Rector for Research, the Management Group of the Graduate School, Research Groups, Research Platforms, and others. Key stakeholders are involved in research planning and the implementation of research activities.

Research excellence is at the core of UVA's strategy. It is also embedded in university- and school-level research evaluation criteria, tenure and progression criteria and in the external research assessments of research groups (RAE 2015 and 2023). According to the self-assessment report, UVA regularly evaluates the quality of its research, the research environment, and the conditions for conducting research. The evaluation of tenure researchers is based on the tenure track criteria and annual development discussions guided by the appointment committee and personnel services staff. According to the self-assessment report, as well as the audit visit, research is assessed based on peer review, the number of PhDs, the amount of external research funding, the amount and quality of scientific publications, the international mobility of researchers and the scholarly and societal impact. These are collected in the Solecris research management system.

Performance excellence and building UVA's profile and brand create a strong driving force for creating a network of internal and external researcher communities. This is essential for open science and research quality. A combination of private and public research activities creates great opportunities for joint research activities with external stakeholders and the practical results of the research activities contribute to the evaluation of the university's outcomes.

The Research Council monitors research ethics and open science

The Research Council is responsible for the quality control and development of research, doctoral training and innovation activities. It monitors and develops publication activities, research funding, research cooperation, and the quality management of research projects. It also monitors and develops research ethics, good scientific practice and open science practices.

According to the self-assessment report, UVA has implemented a code of conduct policy promoting open science, ensuring high-level research in accordance with ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research, and establishing clear guidelines and procedures for handling research misconduct. According to the audit visit, the research ethics course is compulsory for doctoral researchers. UVA is transparent about the open science principles and approach, as the relevant information is publicly available on its website. The audit visit found that open science is a key priority at UVA. It is also appreciated by funders and industry, although sometimes IP agreements have to be negotiated. UVA has also signed the DORA declaration, which seeks to improve the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated. It has also committed to the CoARA principles for advancing the responsible assessment of research. The audit team recommends that systematic procedures for ensuring the responsible conduct of research be included in the Quality Management Manual.

The strength of industry in the region may lead to a situation where most of the research at UVA is tied to short-term demand-based activities and subjects. The university has excellent practices to showcase the positive societal impact of research, while creating inclusive communities and reinforcing networking in the region. These include the Mission Possible programme, Vaasa future festival, Energy Week, Science Festival and Science Day. According to the audit visit, UVA could be even more visible within and outside the region. Many of the challenges of today and tomorrow require a multidisciplinary and future-oriented approach in research. The research activities of the UVA could be strengthened by increasing multidisciplinary and future-oriented research. The university also needs to ensure a balance between its short and long-term research activities.