

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OULU

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## 2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

### - HEI's self-assessment

#### Societal engagement and impact derive from the strategy

The strategy of the University of Oulu (UO) outlines the objectives for societal engagement and impact. The UO is committed to promoting the UN's goals of sustainable development with research and education. Societal impact is included in the strategic development programmes and in the faculty strategies to ensure full societal impact of research and education. The strategic development programmes have key roles in developing societal engagement and impact.

#### Management of societal engagement and impact

The management of societal engagement and impact is built into the UO organisation and management system. There have been remarkable organisational updates after the last audit, e.g., the Vice Rector for Co-Operation, the University Innovation Centre, the Career Centre, and Key Account Manager activities are all new to the UO.

The rectorate has the main responsibility for directing the operational societal activities while the University Board steers the strategic level. The Vice Rector for Co-operation oversees the relationships with companies, other universities, and research institutions, both nationally and internationally. Key responsibilities also include strengthening research-based innovation activities, promotion of international partnerships and EU influencing.

The Cooperation Management Group led by the Vice Rector for Co-Operation supports the

rectorate in managing societal impact. All the Faculty Deans are represented together with directors of appropriate service units. The Cooperation Management Group regularly discusses and guides the UO's activities on company and stakeholder collaboration, key account management, and innovation activities. Each Dean also reports the collaboration activities within their faculties. The Council for External Relations is also under the responsibility of the Vice Rector for Cooperation. The Council for External Relations consists of five working groups, one for every focus area of the UO strategy. Each working group has several members from external organisations. The Council promotes the UO's innovation activities, research, and company cooperation, working life relevance of education, alumni relations, and fundraising.

At the operative level, the [University Innovation Centre](#) (UIC) coordinates company collaboration according to the Operational Model for Business and Stakeholder Collaboration. The model offers guidelines also to researchers about collaboration with companies and other organisations. The UIC acts as an interface between stakeholder needs and university solutions focusing on research needs whereas directing other requests to appropriate internal units. The UIC also coordinates Key Account Manager (KAM) activities of the university. There are several full-time KAMs in the UIC and Extension School, and each faculty has part-time KAMs taking care of the most important customers of the university. Altogether twenty employees are closely involved in key customer and sales activities. The actions of the UIC and KAMs make sure that customer companies and stakeholders know the service portfolio and can find wanted solutions. The systematic approach has gained a rise in business activities of the university.

The UO has several ICT tools to manage relationships and societal impact. The UO has a CRM team and uses Microsoft Dynamics as a CRM tool. The CRM is used to store information regarding collaborations between the UO and its partners and will act as organisation's shared memory once in university-wide use. Strategic goals and actions including activities for societal impact are tracked frequently by the management. Power BI visualises information from the accounting and shows how external relations provide additional funding and which research units conduct such collaboration. The UO uses the Overton tool to follow impact on public authorities, e.g. how research results are adapted by the authorities. Additionally, the UO monitors the visibility of research, the number of open access and self-archived publications and the openness of research infrastructures and metadata of the datasets.

## Monitoring the operational environment

The UO has defined a set of strategic indicators to monitor the progression of societal engagement and impact. The state of strategic development programmes is reported to the University Board in accordance with the Board's annual plan. The university administration contains outside members in the Board and Faculty Boards, and in the Council for External Relations. External members help understand the relevance of societal trends in education and research. Specific environmental scanning and foresight work is carried out in profile areas, focus institutes and Separate university units.

The inter-sectoral collaboration in research includes largely EU and Business Finland funding in addition to Research Council of Finland funded flagships and strategic research projects. The research agenda arises from the need to solve global challenges, from EU funding strategies but also from the needs of industries due to their changing operational environment. The UO facilitates interdisciplinary research collaboration aiming to establish consortia with complementary skills to solve societal challenges and create innovations. UIC and KAM persons also analyse operational environment when proposing research collaboration for companies. Daily societal monitoring is done by employees being in constant interaction with society.

In education, the career monitoring surveys for bachelor's, master's and doctorate graduates are the most important feedback channels for alumni. The information on graduate employment is analysed for insights into how the UO is responding to demands concerning working-life competences. The results are presented to Faculty Educational Development Committees and used to enhance their courses to be in line with career and professional needs. As an essential part of JOY ([Jatkuvan Oppimisen Yliopisto – University of Continuous Learning](#)), the Open University of the UO also collects the feedback on its activities twice a year and the analysed feedback is used to develop continuous learning offerings and studying experience.

The Unit for Strategy and Science Policy produces information and visions to support the university's decision-making and operations management. The unit is responsible for knowledge-based management and information production, operations management, assessment of responsible science, internationalisation and sustainable development policies. Though there are several service functions to foster and monitor societal impact, more emphasis should be placed on encouraging the creation of impact in the faculties considering the full range of societal impact. Impact is not yet seen as a common goal.

#### **Strengths**

Societal impact driven by strategy.  
Council for external relations.  
Operational model for business and stakeholder collaboration.

#### **Enhancement areas**

Consistent implementation of the strategy through the organisation.  
Building of impact capacity at the faculties and units.  
Challenges of information-based management.

## 2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

### - Assessment of the audit team

#### Strong track-record in regional cooperation

The University of Oulu has an essential role in creating, promoting, maintaining, and enhancing the regional innovation ecosystem. The audit team found that external partners are highly

contented to cooperate with the university and there is a long history of cooperation. The University of Oulu works together with its many external partners on long-term projects to bring about sustainable societal change. The ecosystem includes several excellent collaboration networks, such as the Oulu Innovation Alliance established in 2009. The Oulu Innovation Alliance is a strategic consortium of significant research, development, and innovation operators in the Oulu region. Its goal is to strengthen the innovation capability in the region along with the global competitiveness of Northern Finland. The audit team recognises a strong linkage between the university's strategy and the regional networks through research focus areas and strategic development programmes. These were well noticeable to the audit team during the audit visit.

The audit team recognises several excellent practices at the UO for managing the university's societal engagement and impact. Societal engagement is led by the Vice Rector for Cooperation and supported through the work of the Key Account Managers, University Innovation Centre, the Career Centre, and network of faculties. These provide a comprehensive and multidisciplinary basis for internal and external collaboration.

According to the self-assessment report, the Unit for Strategy and Science Policy produces information and visions about the University of Oulu's operating environment, and this information is used in decision-making and operational enhancement. The University of Oulu ensures that societal engagement supports the implementation of the overall strategy.

Societal engagement is reflected through varieties of cooperation areas connected to the university's strategy, including the Arctic research and cooperation, industry cooperation as well as social and cultural cooperation with schools and institutes. The regional research and cooperation activities such as work related to the Sámi culture are distinctive. The university also has a working environment for digital manufacturing and design called FabLab, which is open to all.

## The objectives for societal engagement are well defined

The University of Oulu has defined goals for societal engagement. The university's strategy includes objectives for societal engagement and impact, and social interaction is integrated into strategic development programmes. Strategic development programmes have a key role in enhancing social engagement and impact.

The university has also defined a set of strategic indicators to monitor the progress of societal engagement and impact. According to the audit visit, the indicators include both quantitative and qualitative indicators like number of publications, white papers and events, cooperation initiatives, participation in different boards, visibility in media, number of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) granted as well as number of initiatives which lead to new start-ups. In addition, the university uses surveys for reputation and liability.

The university has well integrated sustainable development into its strategy and activities based on the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), linking its goals and efforts

for sustainability to the global framework. The university's Action Plan for Sustainability and Responsibility outlines the objectives for sustainability and responsibility in relation to its core duties: research, education, and societal impact and cooperation. It also describes the actions taken and still to be taken to achieve these objectives. The audit team encourages the university to regularly review the sustainability objectives and monitor the achievement of these objectives. The audit team also commends the university's actions towards carbon neutrality and encourages the university to consider making the carbon footprint calculation automated and real time.