KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

- Högskolans självvärdering

Management system for societal engagement and related decision-making

Societal engagement, or public engagement, is implemented through research and teaching, the University of Helsinki's (UH) core duties. The management of societal engagement and the assessment of the results of activities are part of the operations management and management system of the UH and its units, while funding allocated to these activities is part of the core funding of units and University Services.

On the university level, the responsibilities and structure of societal engagement are divided into three tiers: 1) University leadership, that is, the board as well as the rector, vice-rectors and the chancellor, 2) the Council for Societal Interaction composed of representatives of faculty management, and 3) faculty councils and faculty-level societal engagement bodies, including unit staff and University Services specialists as members. In addition to societal engagement groups under faculties and independent institutes, a number of committees and advisory boards operate on the university level, to which partners are invited to support the UH also in the development of societal engagement. The Communications and Community Relations sector supports the UH, faculties, independent institutes and other units in the strategic planning, practical implementation, monitoring and development of their societal engagement activities.

The key UH regulations that govern societal engagement are the UH's strategic plan, Regulations and various principles associated with partnerships approved by the University Board. Regulations and guidelines approved by the board are implemented in other university

operations as part of the UH's operations management process.

Management-related knowledge pertaining to impact utilised in operations management on a regular basis

Societal engagement is developed in relation to goals predetermined on the basis of information produced by the management and quality system. This information is used to assess the impact of activities when the UH reports on and plans, for example, the implementation of the agreement it has concluded with the Ministry of Education and Culture, assesses how the strategic plan and the related implementation plans are carried out, prepares a new strategic plan and selects development projects. Data and information are published on the UH intranet Flamma and in reports, annual reviews and financial statements. Members of the UH community can explore the chosen indicators in various systems.

121 invention disclosures and 47 patent applications
39,842 registered alumni
301 organised events in Think Corner, 60,000 viewers online and on site
5.3 million in donations to the University in the With the Power of Thought for the World fundraising campaign
42 million page visits to the Helsinki.fi website
18,000 international media hits
74th in the Shanghai ranking of world universities
In the top 0.5% of the 18,000 universities in the world
Operates at 16 locations

Figure 7. Key figures for impact, 2020

The impact of research is assessed at regular intervals as part of university-wide research assessment, last conducted in 2018–2019.

Many dimensions to the impact activities of an academic community

Typical of a multidisciplinary university, the spectrum of goals, measures and results associated with the societal engagement and impact of faculties and independent institutes is broad. The

UH’s impact profile is diverse, including open science, citizen science and continuous learning as well as European and global dimensions of research and learning. Shared facilities such as Think Corner, research infrastructures, Helsinki University Library together with Helsinki Innovation Services (HIS) and University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education (HY+) provide a professional interface for engagement activities of various types. Based on the data produced by the quality system (assessments, key figures), it can be said that the different forms of impact match the special characteristics and operating cultures of different disciplines well. At the same time, the broad spectrum of activities poses a challenge to the UH and academic units; how to ensure a sufficiently unified direction and activities which are not dependent on the efforts of a few active individuals or not distributed unevenly to an unreasonable degree?

The practices of impact management and the production of situational overviews on the relevant levels of academic communities require further development. While societal engagement and impact are activities implemented through the core duties, related interpretations and meanings cannot be taken for granted, as clearly highlighted in the Council for Societal Interaction in the self-assessment stage of the audit process. The development of the process of earning credit so that, for example, business and third-sector collaboration, efforts to popularise research, and textbook writing are taken increasingly into account has been included in the UH’s implementation plan in 2021. Furthermore, a decision has been made to design a system of rewards and incentives for business collaboration, third-sector collaboration and the application of research results, including the assessment model for associate and full professorships, which has been redesigned to consider societal engagement and impact evidence.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Open science, citizen science and continuous learning are prominently displayed in the UH’s strategic plan	A shared understanding of societal engagement terminology
Systematic and comprehensive basic structure for development of societal engagement and impact	Enhancement of collective ownership in social engagement activities, clarification of the role of academic units
Societal engagement has become a concrete element of the implementation plans of the UH and its units	Development of comprehensive support services and procedures
HIS, HY+ and Think Corner supplement the impact efforts carried out through the UH’s core duties	The significance of societal engagement in rewarding and recruitment procedures as well as career advancement models and data collection (TUHAT)

2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The university attaches importance to societal engagement and impact

The strategic plan of the University of Helsinki expresses a broader vision phrased as ‘With the power of knowledge – for the world’, through the priority given to strategic choices and themes in which societal engagement and impact appear, among others through the focus on responsibility and sustainability. The self-assessment report states that societal engagement is implemented through both research and teaching. The impulse to that policy is given by the university leadership, i.e., the board, chancellor, rector and vice-rectors, and the implementation is monitored at the university level by the Council for Societal Interactions, and at the level of the faculties by a vice-dean (referred to as societal interactions or for public engagement, depending on faculties), faculty councils and faculty-level societal engagement bodies. The link between the levels is guaranteed by one of the vice-rectors acting as the spokesperson of all the vice-deans in charge of societal interactions in the faculties, but also through the annual operations planning process. The political will and the ambition for societal engagement and impact are strongly expressed in the university’s objectives and structures and were repeatedly referred to during the audit interviews. The system put in place allows for a common view of societal engagement and impact, despite differences in faculties resulting from the specifics of each field of study. The audit team commends the university for this approach.

A more systematic university-wide approach to management and follow-up of societal engagement is needed

The university’s self-assessment report (SAR) indicates that the management of societal engagement and the assessment of the results of activities are part of the operations management and management system of the university and its units. The central process is the strategic operations planning with four-year strategic implementation plans and interim assessments and rector’s negotiations conducted annually. The process, which includes the university as a whole, faculties, independent units, university services and doctoral programmes, has been further systematised along with the new strategy and the use of the Suunta system. There is also built-in dialogue in the process through the rector’s meetings with campus leadership, the leadership seminars and the involvement of the university and faculty/unit boards.

Overall, the process is well-structured with clear target setting and division of responsibilities for the implementation of the strategic objectives at university and faculty/unit level, also in relation to societal engagement and impact. The process engages and commits the faculties and units in the process to identifying their own strategy-linked objectives and actions. However, there is also an apparent risk of duplication and ineffective use of human resources, when all faculties and units are looking for their own ways to implement the strategy, e.g., in relation to sustainability

and responsibility. Therefore, it is important that the university tries to maximise possible synergies between faculties and spreads the initiatives and ideas created in individual faculties. A good practice already in place is to make a synthesis of faculty actions and good initiatives as part of the annual process. The university should also consider where unified actions for the university as a whole would be more beneficial. What should still be strengthened in the process are the 'Check' and 'Act' parts of the process. There is variation between the plans, and clear follow-up measures linked to concrete actions were not identified in most of the plans reviewed.

Societal engagement is not directly taken into consideration in the funding allocation model for faculties (as of 2022), in which the 10% of the funding based on performance of faculties concerns education (5%) and research (5%) activities, and strategic funding (10%) may be open to societal engagement activities but is not necessarily. Opportunities for funding exist but are not formalised. The same applies to the monitoring of the societal engagement activities, mostly left over to faculties and units or to the Think Corner system that count, for instance, the participation of members in public debates and media. There are no quantitative measures at the organisational level. The key figures for impact are listed (SAR fig. 7), but it is not clear how these figures correspond to the set objectives or are based on an analysis linked to the university's environment. Overall, there should be better strategic university-level indicators (quantitative and/or qualitative) to follow up on the strategic objectives. There are no follow-up indicators that relate to sustainability and responsibility, for example. Such indicators could be linked to the operations planning process.

A clear definition of societal engagement would bring structure to the management of societal engagement

Although good operations planning and management structures are in place with clearly assigned responsibilities, among others to a vice-rector and to vice-deans, some leadership and systematisation is still lacking in societal engagement. It is often hard to determine whether societal engagement activities were a result of the university's strategy or whether they grew organically from activities in faculties and units. The respective roles of top-down and bottom-up approaches are not well identified. In audit team's view, this is mostly resulting from the absence of an official shared definition of what societal engagement and impact mean for the university as a whole. As explained during the audit visit, the aim has been to keep the definition open, to give room for disciplinary differences and not to get stuck with a single definition. There is clearly a respect for discipline-specific needs and solutions at the university, which applies not only to societal engagement and impact but to all activities. This is commendable. However, the other side of the approach is that leadership in societal engagement and impact for the university as a whole is then more difficult.

Given the place of the University of Helsinki in its city, region and country, and the multidisciplinary nature of the university, there is a great potential for societal engagement and impact. Indeed, some of the external stakeholders met by the audit team expressed that the

leadership in leveraging this interaction potential could be more present, especially in wider issues that concern national development. This gives the impression that the impact of the university is not as broadly realised as it could be on local and national levels. The stakeholders emphasised that this is more a question of high-level leadership than individual academic actors, for there are many good examples of members of the community having a big footprint in society within the limits of their expertise. On the other hand, the expectations on the University of Helsinki to show leadership in national development are also very high, perhaps higher than for any other university in Finland.

The lack of systematisation and formalisation could have an impact on the career path of teachers and researchers. At recruitment, research and teaching are usually emphasised more in the evaluation of applications than societal engagement. Reported activities may play a role in the advancement of a career, but it mostly depends on faculties and units. A clear recognition of societal engagement activity making it an integral part of the work portfolio, based on a common definition and shared objectives and ways, of course respective of the characteristics of faculties and fields of study, would have a positive impact on staff well-being. It would also raise even further the awareness about the importance of societal engagement. This could also facilitate the development of real impact management, a desideratum pointed out in the SAR, and allows for a better analysis of societal engagement activities in the recruitment process of faculty members, as noted in this report (Section 3.2).

The university wants to have a strong global influence and to be an influential social force. A clear definition would make it easier for the university — at university level, in the faculties, and in the management system — to translate the ambition in defined goals and ways, and to support it more adequately than is the case presently. Also, the analysis of the operating environment and the integration of that analysis in the management system of the university needs more systematisation.