

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Författare **Bernard Coulie, Klara Bolander Laksov, Petri Heinonen, Petri Suomala, Signe Tolstrup Mathiasen, Mirella Nordblad & Niina Nurkka. Self-assessment of the University of Helsinki Päivi Aronen, Johanna Kolhinen & Anne Lepistö (eds.)**

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## 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

### - Högskolans självvärdering

#### Culture of experimentation implemented through pilots, by utilising tools of agile and lean development and introducing the project management model

Digitalisation of the activities arising from the interdisciplinary research efforts of the UH has been characteristic of development in recent years. Digitalisation has been taken into consideration in developing research infrastructures such as novel social sciences and humanities infrastructures (Helsinki Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities), while teaching has been developed by sharing knowhow associated with cutting-edge platforms in pedagogy. In terms of services, the UH has appointed a director for digitalisation. The digital skills of the staff and students are constantly upgraded. An extensive programme for the digitalisation of services has been launched by University Services.

In recent years, development at the UH has been systematised by employing piloting, agile and lean development, and a project management model. Activities are often reformed by piloting, which means that new methods, services or information systems are initially trialled among a restricted group (faculty, unit). Pilots are used to test the feasibility of concepts and their benefits before wider deployment. Examples of pilots include the gradual expansion of the YPA-Help service as well as the introduction of the HowULearn feedback system and the Efecte system. In teaching, piloting has been used, for example, at Kumpula Campus (MOOC.fi, MOOC Centre,

studies in the Open University Path in Digital Education for All).

The methods of agile development, service design and lean thinking are applied to the development of activities and services in particular, and are also used to make related processes less complicated. The methods are promoted, for example, in the DigiHUB development community for digital services, the network of lean coaches and in different development projects (e.g., Think Corner). Applying agile and lean methods has strengthened a mindset of continuous improvement at the UH. It has also promoted customer-oriented thinking, cooperation between different units and sectors, and the empowerment of staff members in improving their own work and teamwork.

The project management model has systematised project management at the university level and has brought transparency to different units of the UH.

## Strong external stakeholder activities in support of operational development

The UH's external stakeholder collaboration is active in nature and combines several perspectives. University operators are actively networked both nationally and internationally. This applies to the UH as a whole, its academic units and the University Services (e.g., international co-creation networks such as [NUAS](#), Heads of University Management & Administration 'Network in Europe' [HUMANE](#)). The UH is an attractive and respected partner, particularly in networks related to the theme of sustainability, and a pioneer in co-creation associated with sustainability-related teaching and research (HELSUS Co-Creation Lab, Sustainability Masterclass) and in responsible investment.

International partnerships and networks are an important tool in quality assurance and development, linking the university closely with the best universities in the development of research, teaching and societal engagement. The concrete focus varies on the basis of the profile and emphases of individual networks, but, overall, they provide opportunities for scaling activities (e.g., shared study modules or virtual mobility), engaging in co-creation (joint think tanks, the drawing up of common recommendations, joint new initiatives) and improving cost-efficiency (by pooling resources).

On the international stage, LERU and [Una Europa](#) are the most important strategic university-level networks. In addition, the UH has concluded strategic partnerships with the University of Edinburgh, Peking University and Stockholm University, as well as the University of Nairobi as of 24 March. The first partnerships were concluded in 2015.

The goal of international strategic partnerships is long-term and broad-based collaboration which adds value especially to research by combining the partners' complementary strengths. Una Europa offers the UH a new type of strategic framework for international collaboration, which has made collaboration efforts in education and research more focused and systematic. The UH's

partnerships have a particular emphasis on doctoral education and its systematic internationalisation in the form of, for example, shared doctoral student places, summer schools and mentoring programmes.

In 2021 the UH has also taken an active role in EVALUATE, an international project aimed at developing the assessment of strategic partnerships, which systematises quality management practices. The collaboration conducted in the project has brought together various operators at the UH (partnerships and assessment competence) and expanded assessment-related knowledge throughout the network. The activities of faculties and academic units are developed collaboratively with a range of advisory boards (e.g., scientific advisory boards), including the university-level International Advisory Board. Based on the feedback provided by scientific advisory board members, the UH is a partner eager to develop and capable of reflection, as well as willing to listen to the views of stakeholders and develop its activities on the basis of such feedback.

The UH's partnerships with the municipalities in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area are an important form of societal engagement. Cooperation with the City of Helsinki is broad-based, ranging from individual research and collaboration projects to the establishment of extensive innovation platforms. The UH has also concluded strategic partnership agreements with the cities of Espoo and Vantaa.

The partnership with the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUS) is strategic in nature, an organic part of the everyday activities of both organisations and the professionals in their employment. Other important national and regional cooperation networks include the [Open University](#) (cooperation with 22 general upper secondary schools and 22 vocational colleges), the Studia Generalia lecture series, the [University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+](#), [LUMA Centre](#) (science education), the UH's research stations in Finland and abroad, as well as university consortia in which the UH is a partner: Lahti University Campus, Mikkeli University Consortium MUC and the Ruralia Institute in Seinäjoki.

On the university level, the goal of business collaboration is to support the implementation of the UH's strategic plan and those of its partners, as well as to promote their values. Partnership models are developed and tailored together with businesses. Business Collaboration Services supports research collaboration and commercial projects, while Career Services supports partnerships related to employer contacts during studies. Business representatives contribute to the development of UH operations on different levels, from the University Board to various faculty committees and the board of the [Alumni Association](#).

The nearly 200,000-strong alumni community of the UH is important to the university, as alumni comprise an influential network of experts in Finland and abroad. Alumni are a central element of the UH's societal engagement. Alumni collaboration is conducted on both university and faculty levels. At the heart of international alumni activities are alumni clubs, which currently organise activities in, among other locations, Brussels, Berlin, Beijing, Stockholm and London.

Thanks to the UH's multidisciplinary profile, cooperation with decision-makers is active and extensive. Experts of the UH are respected, and they are an important part of central bodies which support decision-making. Cooperation with decision-makers promotes the identification of demands for research-based knowledge as well as enables the exchange of information and networking. By maintaining contact with decision-makers, the university community influences the image of the UH and its activities. The UH's image is measured by reputation surveys conducted at regular intervals, where decision-makers on the national level and in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area constitute one group of respondents.

### **Strengths**

The UH's multidisciplinary profile enables extensive alumni and stakeholder activities as well as collaborative development. Members of the UH community have strong networks on various levels, also internationally

The advisory boards of academic units have succeeded in assembling several high-profile experts to support individual fields and the UH in their development efforts

An enhanced mindset of continuous improvement at the UH with the help of agile development, service design and lean methodology

A pioneer in research and teaching related to sustainability and responsibility, impactful models of co-creation, a home base for sustainability, responsibility and climate panels

### **Enhancement areas**

Clarification of the setting of goals for external stakeholder activities: collaboration, partnerships and networks that include decision-makers

Assessment activities related to strategic partnerships to be systematised: before, during and after the partnership

Influencing opportunities of alumni and utilising EU collaboration in international alumni activities to be enhanced

Large number of sustainability and responsibility networks, development of data management associated with partnerships

## 2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

### - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

#### The organisation is open to new initiatives but has to make sure that the initiatives form a coherent ensemble

The University of Helsinki undoubtedly encourages innovative and experimental activities, not only in research and education but also in its own organisation. The whole process of the digitalisation of activities, also accelerated by the context of the pandemic, is a good example of this. If the university is in some way, and in its structure, a traditional university, it has proven to give room for pockets of creativity, to always be open to new ideas and to regularly launch new

initiatives. A good example of this is provided by the Think Corner initiative. Think Corner is an arena of open discussion and communication through which members of the university can communicate the results of their activities to a broader audience and to society. It is a remarkable success. Think Corner, among other things, contributes to strengthening the ties between the university and the City of Helsinki, and it serves as training in communication for researchers. The interventions on Think Corner are counted in the societal engagement workload of the researchers.

As such, the university is as creative as it can be. The audit team commends the university for also being a real learning organisation, learning from itself and from others, in a continuous PDCA cycle. For instance, the university is very active in different international and national networks, sees the importance in such work and uses them as a source for internal development. However, the multiplication of ideas and initiatives can at times give the impression of a lack of priorities. The audit team therefore encourages the university to better exploit its potential by affirming a stronger leadership in support of an innovative culture and to make sure that such a culture is really pushed down to the faculties. For a full innovative organisational culture, research and education could be more strongly linked. This is important for enhancing renewal in education and striving for innovation, as well as for the students to be fully creative and open-minded and engaged in the development of the university.

## External stakeholders and alumni to be fully onboarded

One of the strengths of the university is its intense network of relationships with external stakeholders, be it the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa, among others. The history, the size and the specific location of the University of Helsinki in the city and the country serve as the basis for this extensive network. A tool like Think Corner supports it. However, the university still engages with stakeholders in a rather informal way, lacking structure and systematisation. This may be due to the peculiar relationship between the university and Finland: being the largest university in a small country, members of the university quite naturally have good relations with politicians, media people, entrepreneurs and society at large, without the university controlling and monitoring it.

The same applies to alumni. They are numerous in the Helsinki Alumni Community – more than 45,000 – and benefit from several initiatives taken by the university: Helsinki Alumni Hub, alumni benefits and alumni events. Still, the culture of alumni is not yet mature and how the university can interact with them is not yet fully formulated, while recognising that there are also differences in alumni activities within the university. Alumni represent a huge potential for the university: they form for instance an important target group for continuing education. More importantly, alumni can serve as an interface between university and society, working to help the university to understand what is happening around it, and reporting on the state of knowledge in companies.

Collaboration with stakeholders is crucial for the university and it is part of its strategic choices

'Knowledge and learning are for everyone', and 'Openness enhances scientific research and collaboration'. The preparation of the strategy was a collective process in which external stakeholders were involved. The identification of external stakeholders, however, seems to arise from traditional partners of the units through a bottom-up approach, rather than from a systematic analysis and identification of the key national and international stakeholders. A more systematic stakeholder analysis would enable the university to identify its key strategic stakeholders, both at the level of the entire university and of its units, as well as the type of cooperation with each of the stakeholder groups. This would also help to monitor the effectivity of community engagement.