

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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## 2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

### - Högskolans självvärdering

#### Strategy guides the management of social engagement and impact

Impact is part of the research and education activities of the University of Eastern Finland. Social engagement, interaction, and impact are achieved through high quality and effective delivery of core activities.

The Rector take the lead on the university's impact and the Academic Rector leads on the educational impact. The different forms of impact are monitored as part of the university's management system throughout the university's activities.

The effectiveness of university education is monitored through departmental indicators (student numbers, graduates, employment, credits in continuous learning). Research impact indicators comprise the number of open access publications and open data sets and the JUFO classification of the publications. The number of ecosystems of impact central to the university is also monitored.

The university actively communicates and disseminates its research and education. The university has several communication channels that reach different target groups. The university's main social media channels and followers in 2021: Twitter (10,700), Facebook (18,900), LinkedIn (38,820), Instagram (10145). The university also produces podcasts, blogs, and video content. The university monitors news coverage and visibility in online media. The media monitoring of the Meltwater service used by the university covers 3,800 Finnish and 230,000 international online media. University staff are encouraged to be active on social media

channels through regular webinars and training materials.

The university regularly organises science events for the public, such as Science Cafés, Science Days, and the Researchers' Night. The *Studia Generalia* lecture series is also organised, and it is streamed and often recorded to allow interested parties to follow the event regardless of place and time.

[The UEF shared doctoral student position system](#) promotes the employability of doctoral graduates and their employment outside universities. The operating environment is analysed as a continuous process. Board meetings are used to inform and anticipate the impact of changes affecting the university's operations. The university's different bodies discuss the forecasting information in their meetings. The university is consulted by various parties, for example on matters requiring the university's expertise in different fields. This also helps the university stay up-to-date with upcoming legislative changes.

[The House of Effectiveness](#) is a multidisciplinary cooperation network for research and education on well-being and health-related effectiveness at the University of Eastern Finland. This initiative gathers evidence from effectiveness research to support the development and decision-making of well-being and health-related services and the integration of social and health services. The network also acts as a discussion and engagement forum between different parties, promoting cooperation and networking in the sector at the national and international level. The university also offers training on the effectiveness of health care and social welfare.

The university has a model for cooperation on sporting events. In addition to increasing the visibility of the university, all contracts for sporting event partnerships have included either research or educational expertise related to the event. Almost without exception, students are also involved in the concrete implementation of sporting event cooperation. The agreements also include a commitment to the principles of ethical sport.

In 2016, the University of Eastern Finland became the first Finnish university to establish an EU Office in Brussels, which enables the university's researchers and leadership to closely follow the European Union's science and innovation policy and to network and influence it in a more targeted manner.

University partnerships are part of the university's impact-making. To strengthen its impact, the university has recruited a Director of Impact (commencing 1 September 2022).

### **Strengths**

An open culture

UEF shared doctoral student position system

Sport event cooperation

House of Effectiveness

UEF Connect – search service

### **Enhancement areas**

Greater visibility, systematic monitoring, and communication of impact

Identifying targets for monitoring social impact

## 2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

### - Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

#### Societal engagement is part of UEF's strategy and organisational culture

The audit team noticed several positive things in societal engagement and impact at the audit visit, which UEF is performing well. There is a strong focus on societal impact in UEF's organisational culture and strategy. The rectorate leads work on the impact of the university and underlines that the university has raised societal engagement in the strategy. UEF has an overall strategy with a multidisciplinary focus and profile areas on future challenges. Four profile areas and three strategic programmes build up the strategy. The implementation of the strategy is supported by the university's own funding.

The recently recruited director of impact is a great initiative of the university. However, this role is new and still needs further enhancement and clear objectives both internally and externally. The audit team recommends that the work of the director of impact should connect better with the academic leadership and strategic management.

The audit team notices that the indicators for societal engagement and impact are lacking, which restricts the quality system from functioning optimally on societal engagement. The university is aware of this lack, and the new director of impact is actively working to remedy this situation.

#### UEF has strong focus on sustainability and multidisciplinary

The audit team was delighted to see the strong focus on sustainability of the UEF Strategy 2030. Impact is measured on how research responds to the sustainability goals of the United Nations. The response has been good on climate action, health, and well-being. There are impressive initiatives such as the mostly online bachelor programme of sustainability. There are climate goals for 2025 for both education provision and research, and in view of this, climate goals are also understood as part of the university's goals for societal engagement. However, the audit team finds that communications on sustainability achievements and figures on outcomes are needed for an even stronger societal impact. Therefore, the audit team recommends that the

achievements are communicated more clearly internally and externally. The university should also celebrate achievements of climate goals accordingly.

The UEF Strategy 2030 also focuses on a multidisciplinary approach. Based on the audit visit, multidisciplinary is well manifested through the research communities and well known throughout the university. There are structured ways of cooperation between different programmes and schools. The same applies to cooperation between the two campuses in Joensuu and Kuopio. According to the interviews of the audit visit, there is a strong engagement of the staff to the multidisciplinary approach and strategy (see also Chapter 1.1). Multidisciplinary is supported by the funding system and staff. In the audit visit, impact was defined broadly for a multi-disciplinary university, both by the rectors and other, especially senior staff. The audit team considers this approach as a strength. The audit team encourages the university to communicate this approach in a clearer way. With a broad definition of impact, a more complex pallet of goals and indicators may be allowed, leading to even better results.

During the audit visit, it become clear that leadership is working towards goals of societal impact. However, the audit team did not observe a clear management system leading this work. To facilitate the development of societal engagement, the audit team recommends paying attention to how societal impact is manifested and measured as well as implementing clear objectives for both the societal impact and the work leading towards it. UEF should access new regional or international partnerships with stakeholder groups targeting a similar mission. It is vital to understand how the university is perceived both internally and externally, as this is an important attractiveness factor and a means also of student retention.

## UEF has a strong positive regional impact

The importance of the university in the local community was paramount in many interviewee's responses during the audit visit. From the discussion with stakeholders, it was evident that UEF has strong ties to the local community. UEF is regarded as a strategic partner and a broad spectrum of activities were addressed at the audit visit, such as extensive research collaboration, use of infrastructure, internships and visiting teachers. In vision of the Research Infrastructure Programme 2021-2024 collaboration with strategic partners is highlighted. It is obvious to the audit team that UEF recognises its role and responsibility in the local region in an excellent way.

In the interview with stakeholders, easy communication with an informal attitude and personal connections were emphasised and praised. At the same time, external stakeholders asked for more focus on implementation and regular meetings. The audit team proposes to think about more formalised and transparent paths for collaboration and partnerships. Informal connections, local networks, and the assumption the everybody knows each other is a huge strength but could exclude less-known partnership possibilities. The co-operation between local actors could thus be further systematised and fostered in a more structured way, so that it could grow into its full

potential. It is also a risk that collaborations can become too dependent on personal connection. As an example given by an external stakeholder in the interview, all collaborators have close ties to the university. They reported that it was not clear how to initiate interactions and collaborations without personal connections.

A participatory approach towards the local community and enterprises creates both a strong commitment and a strong impact and is therefore a regional development issue. However, the co-operation between local actors could be further systematised and fostered in a more structured way, so that it could grow into its full potential. The audit team thus recommends that the processes of becoming a partner could be more formalized.

A very good way of nurturing ties and a fruitful relationship with the industry in the region and beyond are UEF's so-called shared doctoral positions that allow the university and the industry to share the cost of an early-stage researcher's salary. For the doctoral researcher they are important windows to gain experience and form relations to the industry relevant to his or her research topic.