KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS
NATIONELLA CENTRET FÖR UTBILDNINGSUTVÄRDERING
FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF AALTO UNIVERSITY

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2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Aalto University's purpose, values, and way of working define our long-term direction. All community members are welcome to join in the annual development of our living strategy.

According to the strategy, research efforts should focus not only on strong basic research that builds excellence and impact in the fields represented by the university but also on collaboration with leading companies and the development of a vibrant innovation ecosystem around the university's research, artistic and educational activities.

Renewal of research

Renewal is naturally built into the research process, as science develops through new findings, novel ideas and creative collaborations. The renewal of research is also ensured by defining the research area of each professorship in a negotiation between the schools and the president. When a professor retires or leaves the university, the position is not automatically filled in the same research area, but instead the departments and schools discuss future needs before committing to a new professorship.

Aalto participates in the biannual University Profiling funding call of the Academy of Finland. Each time, 3-4 research themes are identified for further resourcing and development.

Aalto's three cross-cutting approaches (solutions for sustainability, radical creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset) are embedded in everything we do. Our combination of science, art,

technology and business expertise allows us to rethink challenges and solutions alike. By encouraging a radically creative and entrepreneurial culture within our community, we can work together to make an impact and create sustainable solutions.

Each of the three cross-cutting approaches has a lean organisation in charge of developing its activities and inclusion in everything we do.

Radical creativity cherishes renewal, risk-taking and questioning one's working practices. As a strategic development project, we support bold, creative and transdisciplinary research approaches.

We established Space 21, a cluster of rough, free project spaces that Aalto offers to encourage experimentation and creative collaboration within its community. Students, staff and faculty are all welcome to make their ideas reality, let their radical creativity flow free and explore the realms of the unexpected.

Two university-level strategic development projects are starting in 2022 to promote and communicate impact creation with the aim of enhancing the culture of innovation within our community.

Creating a community

Aalto has been exceptionally successful in putting students in focus by trusting students and empowering them to take a central role in the university community and beyond. As an example, Aaltoes (Aalto Entrepreneurship Society) has been a driving force in the Finnish startup scene. It has changed the attitude towards entrepreneurship, developed Slush to its current scale and implemented world-class concepts and some of Europe's most significant events.

The Aalto University alumni community consists of about 100,000 alumni in more than 80 countries. Aalto offers its alumni diverse opportunities for lifewide learning and networking. Over 40 alumni associations organise activities for alumni. The Alumni Network Board brings forward the views of the alumni into the university's long-term development and supports the activities of the alumni associations. Alumni agents support students and strengthen local networks around the world. The mentoring program brings together Aalto alumni and students.

Strategic partnerships with leading universities, research organisations and industry provide collaboration opportunities, as well as joint institutes, facilities and infrastructures. In the capital region, our key partners are VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, the University of Helsinki (UH), HUS Hospital District of Helsinki, and the cities of Espoo and Helsinki. Nationally, collaboration with other Finnish universities is central for research profiling and avoiding overlaps, examples being the Helsinki Graduate School of Economics, Academy of Finland Flagships and shared research infrastructures. Aalto also has a wide network of corporate partners, and we engage in collaboration with more than 2500 companies. Aalto is ranked internationally among the 25 best universities in multidisciplinary collaboration. About 70 percent

of master's theses are done in collaboration with companies. Aalto ranks third in Finland in patent applications, and nearly 100 start-ups are set up each year in our ecosystem.

Donations contribute to Aalto's financial resilience, and our donors, including alumni, companies, foundations and public entities, contribute to form a broad network for continuous dialogue with society. Institutional donors increasingly want to build impact in collaboration with Aalto through long-term relationships.

Aalto's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system provides streamlined, high-quality data on Aalto's corporate partnerships, research projects with external partners, and alumni and donors, which facilitates the effective data-driven development and societal impact of the university.

A global vision

Internationalisation plays a significant role in enabling us to contribute towards improving the world and developing Finland's competitiveness. Internationalisation helps develop the global competence of Aalto's staff and students, as well as enriching the diversity of the research community. A working group of top management coordinates strategic partnerships and guides their development, supported by the service teams. Aalto belongs to international networks that support Aalto's strategy, especially in terms of shared research and/or education agendas. Aalto University schools participate in subject-specific networks, and each researcher also has their own international collaborations.

Promoting international teaching and learning is a central element of Aalto's strategy. In particular, the strategy addresses how internationalisation can contribute to improving the quality of education.

Aalto is a partner in six European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC). Each EIT KIC focuses on a different challenge and sets its own strategic objectives and business plan while holistically building innovation ecosystems through a portfolio of activities that address specific societal challenges. The KICs also integrate Europe's leading players in education, research and business. Aalto receives more EIT funding than any other entity in Finland.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
Vice Deans for Impact at the schools guide decision-making in line with societal impact.	A more robust support system for the Vice Deans for Impact.
Systematic support for student-driven entrepreneurial activities, as well as entrepreneurial education (AVP).	Developing incentives for academics to create innovations and have societal impact.

Professors of Practice and Executives in Residence act as developers and bridge builders between the university and relevant industries.	Cross-cutting approaches need more clarity and systematic implementation and monitoring.
Multidisciplinary collaboration between alumni from all three fields – technology, business and art & design.	Strengthening the identity of Aalto's alumni.
Long-term multidisciplinary strategic collaboration with leading companies in their fields.	Increasing strategic partnerships with major national and international companies.

2.3 Promoting renewal through the organisational culture

- Auditointiryhmän arvio

Based on the audit visit, it is evident that one of Aalto's strengths is the organisational culture that encourages experimental activities and active engagement with stakeholders. Aalto's incubators and accelerators support societal impact. Furthermore, Aalto Startup Centre and Innovation Services have proven effective in providing support services for researchers interested in exploring the commercialisation potential of their results.

Several intentional procedures also support and strengthen the university's creative atmosphere. One such good practice is Space 21 – for unexpected ideas, outcomes and encounters – offering free studio spaces for all Aalto community members to experiment and explore new ideas.

Aalto has functioning procedures to support the use of the competences possessed by its staff and students. Many internal forums at the university, school and degree programme levels are available for joint analysis and co-development. The University Preview, University Review and University Dialogue processes are participatory and supported by collaborative discussion forums and community events. Staff competencies are reviewed and developed in the My Dialogue process, and staff may request professional and pedagogical training in specific areas they are interested.

Overall, staff workshop participants characterised Aalto's organisational culture as appreciative and supportive, stating that many possibilities are available for staff members to show their potential. They also emphasised the high level of encouragement to collaborate across the school, departmental or unit boundaries. As for pedagogical development, staff members appreciated the availability of team-based encouragement and peer-driven teacher cafes and

teacher teams for sharing problems, solutions and best practices. A!OLE project was mentioned as an enabler for teaching development. On the other hand, it was also stated that due to Aalto's founding history, different schools have different backgrounds and traditions. Thus, the challenge for Aalto is keeping those local cultures alive while still having an aligned organisation.

The HEI seeks opportunities to engage with stakeholders in activities that enable renewal and enhancement. Aalto is a strong actor with an open attitude towards society. Aalto cooperates with the community, other universities, companies and research organisations.

Alumni cooperation brings a lot of added value to enhancing Aalto's activities. As mentioned in the SER, more than 40 alumni associations organise activities for alumni. Based on the audit visit, Aalto benefits from alumni cooperation in many ways. For example, a new mentoring programme was established with about 100 alumni acting mentors for students, alumni proposals have led to new programme initiatives, and alumni have contributed to the university strategy and funding of new programmes. At the same time, as recognised by Aalto's top management and Board, alumni cooperation still has unused potential. Thus, the audit team encourages Aalto to strengthen and systematise alumni cooperation and utilise advisory boards as idea generators and sounding boards even further.

The management of Aalto's multilevel national and international networks supports implementation and brings added value to the development of internationalisation, research, artistic activities and education. As mentioned in the SER, Aalto belongs to many international networks, including six European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs). As another good example, Aalto is part of the Unite! European University alliance of innovation, technology and engineering, consisting of nine universities, brings new possibilities for Aalto students' internationalisation and joint research projects.

Aalto has defined its strategic partnerships at the university and school level, and stakeholder relations and collaboration networks are maintained through Aalto's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Based on the interview with the Board, Aalto has progressed, particularly in corporate cooperation, being more selective, seeking long-term partnerships, going to unknown areas and trying to learn together. However, as stated in the SER, Aalto strives to increase strategic partnerships with major national and international companies.