



Summary of Rector Mikael Lindfelt's address at the opening ceremony of Åbo Akademi University on 8 September 2022.

In early 2022, the European Commission issued a document that is the first of its kind and of utmost importance for universities: A European Strategy for Universities 2022. To start with, it states as follows:

“Today, our society needs more than ever the contribution of its universities. Europe, in a quickly changing world, is facing major challenges – climate change and biodiversity loss, the digital transformation and aging population – at a time when it is hit by the biggest global health crisis in a century and its economic fall-out. Europe’s position in the world and the well-being and prosperity of future generations will depend on our response.”

The objective is, unanimously and by joining forces, to strengthen the higher education and research sector within the EU and its Member States. As a university, we need to invest in providing our youth with skills and competences required by the increasing digitalization and the transition toward a comprehensively – environmentally, economically and socially – sustainable society.

Åbo Akademi University will do this in collaboration with other actors. Together with all other universities in Finland, we are involved in a huge development project concerning the digitalization of education and research. The project, Digivision 2030, will be presented in detail during the course of this academic year so that everyone will learn what it means and what changes will be actualized through the vision.

Åbo Akademi University is currently a member of the European University Alliance, CHARM-EU. Jointly with the universities of Barcelona, Utrecht, Montpellier, Dublin, Budapest, Würzburg and Ruhr West, we will proceed toward a new type of learning process to further enhance our capabilities. The university alliance will offer our students great opportunities for student exchange and learning, as facilitated by, for example, the common *Global Challenges for Sustainability Master's* programme.

I am convinced that Finland will successfully manage the required transformation, but only by utilizing our strengths, including challenge-driven research of high quality, and research-based, relevant and high-standard education. Society is changing rapidly and the universities must be ensured proper conditions to be a part of and contribute to the change through the best we have to offer: education and research.

Education and research must be resourced on a long-term and credible basis so as to enable us to manage our tasks as a university. We must be provided with an opportunity to keep pace with the countries comparable to us since we are accountable to future generations. Opportunities must be provided for our youth to gain the skills necessary to be actively involved in the future world, as well as for our researchers to create a foundation for future knowledge.

We need to communicate better than before the fact that universities make a difference in multiple ways in society. Research has shown that education and access to relevant education are essential for creating stability in society, thus contributing to a controlled, peaceful social development.

It is becoming clear to decision-makers on different levels that knowledge intensity and research are the keys to Finland's attraction. Finland is international with our universities. The new – and innovative – aspect that decision-makers and business leaders across all sectors should understand is the increasing role of collaboration with universities and our experts within research, development and innovation activities.

On 26 August 2022, Åbo Akademi University received long-awaited news. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, FINEEC, announced its report regarding the audit process, which started on 1 February 2021. It was a pleasure to read the audit report, not only because of the excellent results but also because we received a quality label that will be valid until 26 August 2028. The greatest source of joy for me was that the international audit team has seen the true Åbo Akademi University, with our strengths and weaknesses, as well as our ongoing development.

The most important message from the audit is that Åbo Akademi University is recognized as a development-oriented university. We are in a state of ongoing development, anything else is unthinkable. The question now is how we will manage the development and stake out the paths we will be facing in the future.