

Honourable President, Provost, and Minister of Science and Culture, dear Aalto community,

Aalto University will turn ten years old during the forthcoming academic year. A great deal has happened in ten years: reform of the university structure, innovations and new beginnings. Launched in China at the beginning of the decade, 'Aalto on tracks' has led to long-term cooperation there; Dipoli, which was bought from the Student Union, has become the main building and center of events at the university; and the Helsinki campuses have been centralised in Otaniemi.

This journey has not been a bed of roses. Aalto had a rather tense beginning, in many respects. It would be fair to say that, in 2010, the old institutions were united by a brand image only. This was true at both administrative and student level when, during Aalto's early years, the student unions of the former institutions were engaged in a property dispute: understandably, this is seldom referred to in public speeches.

After so many years, there is little point in speculating about the dispute. The key issue is that we have moved on. The Aalto spirit has spread from speeches to hearts and minds.

In many ways, Aalto is a unique university. It is unique due to its range of subjects: combining technology, business studies and the arts in a single university was a bold step ten years ago. Since those days, the solution has borne fruit which includes our lively startup community, cross-disciplinary research projects, and two members of Parliament who studied at Aalto.

Within Finland, Aalto's strength is undoubtedly its agility. We are not weighed down by pointless institutional baggage. If anything, Aalto encourages taking the initiative, breaking down barriers, and rewriting the rules. This was a strong feature of Aalto's last strategy period and is crystallized by the game changer concept. Hopefully, it will be retained in future strategies.

Agility also means adopting the best ideas, no matter who they came from. In its strategy work, Aalto's strength undoubtedly lies in its strong involvement of the Aalto community, including the students. For example, it is gratifying to see how the strategy's focus areas take account of the community's concerns about student workloads and the community's wellbeing.

Participation also promotes the community's working capacity – this depends on internal motivation as well as external workloads. Internal motivation cannot be commanded into existence, but consists of being a meaningful part of the community.

My most meaningful experiences have arisen from being able to help others. Help can consist of solving differential equations, or producing specs for business partnerships on a shoestring budget. These are situations which make me feel that I am a valuable part of the community. That I am trusted just as I am, with all of my faults. On the other hand, I would not be standing here today if I had not been helped on several occasions.

Aalto's most important gift to its community is not facilities, a study programme, or impressive degree certificates. The key issue is to serve as a platform and enabler for members of the Aalto community. The wildest innovations arise from just the kinds of unconventional subject combinations, voluntary activities and range of collaboration that Aalto provides.

Aalto also has the important task of setting an example for others in the Finnish university sector. Showing trust in students and allowing freedom of choice can be promoted across university boundaries. One of the key conclusions of the Ministry of Education and Culture's 'Vision 2030' work was the need for more collaboration between universities. We would achieve more by focusing on each university's strengths and opening teaching out to others, rather than teaching each subject within individual universities.

The so-called platform university phenomenon means that not every university needs to be an independent 'full-service one-stop-shop'. Instead, students could study flexibly across the highest quality courses at whichever institution they pleased. Achieving this vision still requires the opening up of several university information systems and the provision of public money as an incentive.

The national FITech collaboration is an important trailblazer in this respect. Business needs can best be met by flexible, national collaboration, regardless of whether the need for education arises in the Helsinki region, Southwest Finland or somewhere else. Universities can no longer be monolithic institutions tied to one place and time, but must become national and international networks.

However, today we are not celebrating the end of a university year, but the beginning of a new one. How does Aalto's future look?

Has a gamified indicator on student wellbeing been built into every course? Are AI educational psychologists on hand to provide 24/7 advice and support? Does an Esa Saarinen hologram provide inspiration to learners across the country, from Otaniemi to Mikkeli and Lappeenranta to Rovaniemi?

Our future could be all of these, but the Aalto spirit is not about giving a ready answer from this podium. The answer to this can be found in the community. It can be found in every student, lecturer, professor and member of Aalto. It can be found in all of you.

I wish you a great start to the anniversary year and Aalto Day One!