

Your Excellencies, dear colleagues and students, ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you a warm welcome to day one of the academic year 2018—2019!

September is an exciting time for everyone on campus—students, faculty, and personnel alike. It’s an especially meaningful time for the new members of our community. I want to give a particularly warm welcome to the new students here today, who are joining us for the first time. I wish you the best of starts to an adventure I know will take you far.

Having seen this campus with different sets of eyes over the years, I have to say, I have many fond memories of this time of year in Otaniemi. When I was studying electrical engineering here in the 80s, returning back to campus after working over the summer meant meeting friends and colleagues once again, and diving back into studies and student activities.

In the late 90s when I returned from abroad and took up new responsibilities, the start of the academic year was always full of excitement, thanks to students returning to campus with their energy.

What hit me this year, when I took a bit of distance from our campus and a busy schedule, was the enormity of what we’ve done during “Aalto times”. I actually found myself thinking many times about how much we’ve managed to do as a community.

2018 marks ten years since the Charter of Aalto University Foundation was signed.

In these ten years we've achieved a lot: it's no small thing to say that of all young universities globally, we are in the top 10. And we are now the 55th most international university in the world.

The Aalto of 2018, which I am proud to call home, is among leading universities in its fields. Yet what strikes me most is our determination to work together.

You can also see evidence of what we have achieved when you look around our campus.

The School of Arts, Design and Architecture has just opened its doors in Otaniemi. I know we're all looking forward to seeing its new home in the remarkable Väre building later today.

The School of Business will soon follow, joining us at the beginning of 2019.

This means that we are very close to achieving our dream of a diverse main campus in Otaniemi, with various disciplines, identities, cultures, and partners all in the same place.

We have laid the groundwork for a university that, when you get down to it, is really hard to create in any context.

Our campus is becoming a place unmatched in Europe. A collaboration hub that combines one of the biggest high-tech concentrations in Europe with leading schools of art and design and business under the same roof in the centre of campus.

This is something to celebrate. Our ecosystem is unique on the world stage, as well as a reflection of what we dreamed about some ten years ago.

Dear members of the Aalto community, our strides forward are thanks to you. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all your hard work and tell you how much I appreciate what you have done. We should all be very proud of the extraordinary community Aalto has become.

We've made it far, yet our continued progress relies on our ability to see and address the challenges ahead. It's now clear that there are big issues facing our university and higher education.

Incidents not so far away have brought attention to a growing faction of nationalist, closed-minded thinking. Higher education and Aalto University, in particular, stands for just the opposite. We believe in exchanging ideas. We believe in dialogue. We believe in diversity within and across borders of all kinds — and we will stand firm in these beliefs.

Internationalisation and diversity are at the heart of our university. The students, teachers and researchers at research universities come from all over the world, and the open flow of information transcends national borders: this is vital for carrying out high-impact, top-quality research and education. Aalto is inherently an international community.

Regrettably, the international practice of open collaboration is now under threat as block thinking, protectionism, insular attitudes and xenophobia have increased the borders that separate us. This dangerous development hinders all international cooperation and poses a risk also to the openness of science, art and higher education. Universities can and should serve as a counterforce.

The second challenge ahead of us is digitalisation, which is quickly changing our operating environment.

We want to turn this challenge into an opportunity. We have the chance to be leaders in capturing and shaping digitalisation, both in academic work and as a university.

With our assets and ability to make use of competencies in different fields, we have an excellent basis to make this happen. We have almost 80 professors in ICT and digitalization, and deep knowledge on key developments of relevant areas from service design and business to new digital manufacturing. We also have unique access to a wide range of university and national data, and we own our campus and ICT infrastructure assets. This is a huge advantage in the future cyberphysical world.

Which is why we are investing significantly in Digital Aalto.

In this shift, we need to remember that digital transformation touches us all. Digital Aalto will transform the way we teach and learn. It will also change how research is done. Digital services have the potential to draw more students and researchers to our community, opening up a digital campus experience and making collaboration fluid.

It's a big endeavor — and also a huge opportunity.

In the current world we need to rethink the scope of our educational activities and the role of continuous education.

The clock speed of working life is ever increasing and current degree cycles are simply too slow to keep up. We already know that most of today's graduates and professionals will have to update their competencies over their careers, which are getting longer and longer as average life expectancy increases.

Continuous learning is an growing concern in society. I have actually spoken with alumni from various disciplines about this very issue. It's natural for them to expect that their alma mater supports them as work fundamentally changes.

And I firmly believe that, as a university, it is our duty to act.

The university's role cannot be limited to just building new knowledge or educating only young people. Going forward we must be a meeting point for different generations, where people returning to university with work experience and invaluable skills come together with faculty and those about to start careers.

It is estimated that over the next decade, one-third of today's professions in Finland will disappear due to digitalisation and robotisation, and these changes will affect all sectors of working life. We cannot allow the generations now in the workforce to be cast aside, and so, lifelong learning is critical to this time of accelerating change.

Society needs individuals of high proficiency and expertise in areas of rapid development, and therefore university graduates will repeatedly need to update their knowledge and skills over the course of their careers. Up to a million Finns – 40% of the workforce – may need continuing education in the near future in order to manage these changes.

Our core task as a university remains, however, the building of new knowledge and the educating of young people for the future; young people have the right to receive optimal opportunities from their education to get a good start in life. A higher education degree will continue to provide the essential foundation for lifelong learning, and the deep learning and skills that arise from a university education, as well as the capacity it gives for rigorous thinking, evaluating information and learning new things, will continue to be key factors for success in working life.

As the world changes around us, lifelong learning will expand the role of the university beyond educating young people only; it will entrust us with an entirely new mission. Alumni will become our partners for life, returning to the university from time to time, bringing with them the latest understanding of the changing requirements of the world of work. The university can develop into a lively meeting point for different generations.

Enabling such a development requires both new ways of operating and additional resources. As the need for lifelong learning has been brought on by a vast and all-pervasive social change, we will not manage to address this challenge if we are not prepared to do wide collaboration with different administrative sectors.

Aalto is ready to take on the challenge of continuous learning by not only taking responsibility, but by leading the way.

We can't do it alone. Lifelong learning demands transformations in how society approaches a number of areas: education, employment, health and wellbeing, to name a few.

But one thing is clear. People of all ages deserve the tools they need to be part of society, to lead healthy and productive lives. And we have a critical role to play.

Dear friends,

Aalto is a research and teaching university, which combines scientific and artistic ambition with impact, in practice and for society. We've created a really exciting environment and we excel at so much of what we do.

At the same time, we want to shoot higher.

The term of our current strategy will soon come to an end. We need the entire Aalto community to contribute to our future direction, a strategy that we all stand behind. As we do this, we need to remember we're not just adapting to the changes of tomorrow's world: together we'll also have a strong role in shaping the future ahead.

I'm inviting everyone that calls Aalto home to participate in the strategy-building process. Your expertise, views and insights are truly needed and very much appreciated. I hope you join us as we think about our future.

Dear friends,

One of the key goals set forth in the *Vision for higher education and research 2030*, released last year by Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture, is for Finnish universities to establish competence clusters that are, from an international perspective, attractive enough to gain entrance to the global

networks of the greatest interest. To meet this goal, Finnish universities need to work with determination to clearly define their research profiles.

Competence clusters of an international scale and stature attract global talent, partners and investment, and the multiplying effects will spread quickly in a well-network country like Finland.

Securing the international competitiveness of the Finnish university system requires that the direction and funding of universities supports their profiling. The universities' accomplishments should be assessed against the highest-ranking international players in their own fields, while the funding model should give weight to the societal impact of research and the resource needs of different fields.

Dear friends,

The Aalto University of today is the home of dozens of disciplines and creative cultures. It's the home of curious minds and dreams of a better, more sustainable future.

In the years to come, let's make it also a home of continuous, lifelong learning. A place where generations come together to prepare for new ways of working. A truly digital university that makes use of its vast array of expertise.

With these words, I want to thank you for being here today as we officially start the autumn. I declare the 2018–2019 academic year now open!