

Aalto School of Art Design and Architecture

Advisory Board Report

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The Advisory Board wishes to thank the School for an inspiring and edifying meetings. Also we thank you for supplying such well-prepared meeting material containing much important information about the rapid development of the School. In light of the large transformation of the establishment of the new university and this year, the merger with Architecture, the management at Arts has maintained an admirable focus on development and innovation. This includes drive to set up an advisory board and arrange the first meeting. Thank you also to the many staff who have taken the time to talk to us and answer our many questions.

With Arts, Aalto University holds a key resource for development of the university as a whole and the realisation of the university's mission of contributing to "a better world through top-quality research, interdisciplinary collaboration, pioneering education, surpassing traditional boundaries and enabling renewal". Arts represents a definite access to rejuvenation in a time when old paradigms and forms of knowledge do not suffice in solving the challenges of the world. Indeed, where our experiences and the solutions of the past are perhaps the most important obstacles for progress and prosperity; where we need to exploit people's inherent ability to see, that which is not; to imagine; to dream – indeed need to exploit the element of art. We are convinced that the combination of artistic development work, research, and using practice as the source for generating knowledge should constitute the foundation for the university of the 21st century. With Arts, Aalto University will find great inspiration for further development and knowledge building. For that reason, please allow us to recommend the university management grant Arts autonomy and freedom, to experiment and to make mistakes.

Merging schools always entails danger of centralisation and bureaucracy. We feel confident that Aalto University will find a suitable balance between decentralism and centralism for the benefit of an increasingly strong contribution to the development of Finland and the world.

Assessment of Strategic Plans

School Plan

The School presented extensive information on its vision, objectives and strategy. This is clearly the result of significant collaborative work across the departments but is still a work in progress.

The context for the School and its constituent departments has changed in the university and in societal context. The creation of Aalto University has signified this. There is a strategic plan for the university, it is important to develop a clear articulation of the distinctiveness of the Schools vision and strategy within that context.

The panel recognised an attractive vision expressed as follows:

'The integration of research, practice and teaching in art, design and architecture that creates an operating environment, wherein academic thinking, creative realisation, proactive networkers and practical relevance support each other, and results in a school that is an international actor, that shakes up Finnish society, economy and culture in a positive manner'.

The panel recommends that this vision is kept simple and is also translated into the university strategic framework of: Research excellence; pioneering education; Groundbreaking art; societal impact. This then aligns to university goals

We would also recommend that the school also describes why this is the strategy, for example, the context, interdisciplinary nature, collaboration across boundaries, both within the university, nationally and internationally.

We found a degree of variability in the articulation of the School strategy into each departmental Strategy. Art and Design are further down the path to reflecting on their position and developing their strategy. It is important that each department should develop their own vision, based on their own identity, tradition and practice; and set this in this overall framework of the school. In doing so they should test the terms and phrases used in the articulation of the vision, especially across the departments, for example; what does networking mean to each department why are they doing it, how, with whom and for what purpose, what are the benefits.

Recommendations

Research Excellence

There is a lot of good thinking around the schools research focus, this is variable in the way it is articulated and implemented within each department. For example design have gone some way to defining their focus and implementation, whereas Architecture are at the beginning of this process. Most departments are encompassing a broad spectrum of methods and outcomes and should continue to do so.

Groundbreaking Art (architecture, design, film, new media)

Practice is as important as research, therefore groundbreaking art needs to be articulated, and the criteria for recognising it established. For example how original, significant and rigorous it is. Means of assessing this work should include peer review and external recognition such as prizes.

It is important to stress that research excellence and groundbreaking art should respect equally, they are both important in an Arts school and should be evaluated and rewarded within the system. Promotion and career mechanism should be aligned to recognising both groundbreaking art and research. It is important to understand how to evaluate quality but to recognise that quantity is part of the process of evaluation; the school should be aiming for large amounts of high quality excellent work.

Pioneering Education

The panel recognised the excellent education available to students. However they saw problems with the great variability of programmes and graduation timescales.

The panel recommends that:

In MA programmes there should be some rationalisation of the number of programmes and choices by students. The school and departments could benefit from a clearer articulation of the

education philosophy at undergraduate and masters level. For example at which level is there specialisation versus breadth.

Indeed Masters management could be a little more coherent, management of intake and graduation. It would be beneficial to ensure graduation in two years both for the department and for industry and society. Study time is a challenge and is not consistent with international approaches, a formal definition of the timescales and graduation point is recommended so that Finnish can benefit from the education. Stop automatic transfer from BA, to MA. A formal classification of the status of the students will be necessary.

PhD programmes management and strategy for supervision should be overseen at School level and guidelines for this aspect of education needs developing. A dean or similar role for graduate education, who can oversee the operation of doctoral training across the school, would ensure consistency of experience for the doctoral students.

There should be a relationship between departmental funding and successful graduation part of success criteria for education

Societal Impact

Historically the school has had a big contribution to Finnish Society, in cultural and economic terms, and through art education generally.

The representation of societal impact varied between departments, with some departments more able to articulate about how they relate to business and society, it would be good to develop some consistency of reporting, that would strengthen understanding, awareness and approaches.

We recommend improved communication and representation from each department of their relationships and contributions to business, culture and society, where staff work, do research and where students are working and where they build careers. It would be beneficial to illustrate this through case study, in a consistent manner across the school

Strategic Enablers

We saw a good management structure developed for the school; we believe this can be leveraged to continue to develop the excellent work that has already been developed.

It is critical that the school builds good leadership team, where the heads of departments develop with the dean a school strategy, that is holistic and broad enough for emergence and radicalism to occur in each the department; that they also develop a shared policy for renewal of personnel, and strategic funding to address ambition, opportunities and support strategic objectives. Also that this team consider and develop multi-disciplinary opportunities across the school for staff and students at all levels

Closing Remarks

We were pleased to see the work of such an excellent school our advice we hope will enable the school to continue to develop its work both nationally and internationally with confidence. The summary of our advice is as follows;

- 1 Manage processes, systems and monitor these in a more consistent and comparable way across the school, including more measurable targets.
- 2 Develop a more effective monitoring system in each department, student numbers, graduation, research activity, artistic activity, employment statistics to enable a more systematic presentation of their position.
- 3 Recognise artistic output and research output as one equally valued and supported.
- 4 Promote and emphasise the practice based research that the school is a flagship for.
- 5 Adapt the tenured track system to work for the both research and practice orientated staff, used appropriately for the different needs of the departments
- 6 Value the uniqueness of the departments

Appendix: Reflections on each department:

Art

The Department of Art is a national leader in creating new methodologies for artistic research; the focus of the department in art education has a very influential position in Finland. The Department is pushing boundaries and developing collaboration with new partners, for example the bio-arts projects and economics-arts projects. We applaud and support this and believe it deserves more articulation.

There are areas that can be improved these include; a more disciplined approach to managing graduation timescales, aiming to graduate 99% master students within two years and reduction of the length of doctoral studies. Thereby achieving more efficiency of curriculum delivery.

Also clarify and distinguish the role and position of the school within Finnish art education and especially relationship with the Academy of Art in Finland. Finally the department would benefit by strengthening international collaboration.

Design

Design has a very strong research reputation, strong collaboration nationally and internationally, and good track record of work with industry. They are able to describe themselves and their position effectively. Design are further down the path to reflecting on their position and developing their future strategy, especially with regard the relationship between research and education. The department has much to share with colleagues across the school and the university.

Architecture

This is a department that has huge potential and made a positive decision to join the school where we believe they can really develop and become a major force in Finnish architecture.

We believe this is an ideal time to set of a profound discussion about architectural education and research. This is the opportunity to rethink Finnish architecture education through looking for new paradigms in research and to generating new collaborations across the school, the university and internationally. It is important to build on current expertise but to also define new directions that influence recruitment policy. Is the lack of resources for Architecture, limiting its ability to renew itself?

We also believe there is also a need for more effective and consistent management and monitoring systems for all its activities. In particular, they should aim to graduate all their students within specified periods of time.

Motion Picture, Television and Production Design

This department obviously has a distinguished worldwide reputation, as evidence by the number of prizes and award achieved by students and staff. The main concern this department

has is how to effectively recognised their practice within a research university. We recommend that they develop a language that recognises artistic output as research in the context of the university evaluation system.

This department is working very well both internationally and nationally especially with the new University of the Arts. We recognise that these collaborations are a priority for this department. There is also further opportunity to work internally across the school and the university.

Media

This department has an excellent international education, is very self-confident and clear in the direction it is taking, combining media within the techno-social system. They too can recognise the value of artistic practice and output as research. There is a further opportunity to engage with other departments such as design and architecture, other university departments such as engineering especially in the area e.g. tangible and embodied interaction.

We noted some concern with regard to the new tenured track process and the possible depletion of lecture staff. We believe the tenured track system could be tailored to enable the career progression for both research professors and professors of practice. We recognise that the dynamism that results from this interaction and that both of these positions will contribute the research and educational esteem of the department. The richness and diversity is also a benefit, and a basis from which new opportunities and directions can be taken.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Cooper', with a stylized, cursive script.

Rachel Cooper

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