

Opening ceremony of Aalto University's academic year 1 September 2015

President Tuula Teeri



Aalto University

The new academic year begins with changes once again. I would like to begin by welcoming our new School of Business bachelor students to Otaniemi! Consolidating bachelor's studies to our main campus at Otaniemi is an important milestone on the way to our goal of becoming a multidisciplinary university that provides students, researchers and partners with unique opportunities. The next concrete step will be the transfer of the School of Arts, Design and Architecture to Otaniemi within a couple of years. The combined campus will reinforce the Aalto spirit that we already share.

Aalto University has now been operating for five and a half years. We are now at the mid-point in terms of the goals we set ourselves for 2020. Our determination to excel and our passion to seek new solutions are obvious when looking at our results of the past five years:

- The reformed Universities Act allowed us to establish a new academic career system which now attracts top professors from all over the world,
- Our scientists have been tremendously successful in winning the EU's most competitive research grants,
- The impact of our scientists' publications is steadily increasing,
- We have been, and will be, constantly renewing our educational curricula to give our students a solid foundation and excellent working life capabilities,
- We have improved the way we guide and supervise our students, and this has resulted in rapidly improving study performance.

We can be pleased with our achievements so far, but the journey must continue. Aalto is most definitely a community in action – huge numbers of activities going on constantly and vigorously. Our work is increasingly recognized by international peers – one good example is the prominence of Finnish fashion design in one of the World's most important fashion design competitions.

I consider the increasingly strong community spirit at Aalto to be one of our most important accomplishments. More and more of us have a strong sense of being members of the Aalto community. Today, we really are more than just six separate universities. We are a community that studies, researches and does things together; we are more than the sum of our parts.

We need a clear vision of how to develop our campus into a competence and innovation cluster that meets international criteria. All renovation and construction should be based on the idea of creating the best possible conditions for learning, research and collaboration. This building, which was designed by Alvar Aalto and completed over 50 years ago, is a prime example of how a facility can be renovated to meet the demands of modern university teaching and learning.

Next year, many of you will take the metro to this ceremony. The metro station will bring a variety of services to our campus. The tracks will also have a strong

regional impact, linking the Helsinki area university centres to each other and to the rest of Finland.

Otaniemi is already an internationally significant regional centre of expertise, and investing in its development is worthwhile. We build our campus to also serve all of our partners. More than 800 companies operate in the immediate vicinity of our university, including the largest companies in the country.

We will continue to work hard to increase the international appeal of our innovation ecosystem and attract new investments to the area. Digitalisation, bioeconomy, clean solutions, the technology industry, and Arctic technology are areas in which we have the necessary expertise and infrastructure.

When Aalto University was founded, it was given the national mission of supporting Finland's success and contributing to Finnish society, its internationalisation and competitiveness, and promoting the welfare of its people through top-quality research and teaching.

High-level expertise and its utilisation are also among the primary goals of Prime Minister **Sipilä's** Government. However, in order to succeed in this goal, we first have to successfully invest our limited resources in the right way.

During the first five years of Aalto University, a lively national dialogue has been conducted concerning the division of work among universities and focusing on certain areas of strength. Profiling both nationally and internationally is a necessity in order to ensure sufficient resources for the fields with the best opportunities for success. A small country has to make choices. It takes courage to make choices: strengthening one area of research means giving up another. We have to meet this challenge together, the university field and decision-makers have to increase their cooperation in order to achieve a successful outcome.

At Aalto University we have, from the very beginning, worked purposefully to build a strong and unique profile in which science and art meet technology and business. Our focus has become even clearer during the university's five years of operation, as we have systematically targeted resources to our strengths. Last spring, we worked hard to describe the focus points of Aalto University when applying for profiling funding from the Academy of Finland. We applied for and received funding in four key research areas: ICT and digitalisation, materials and sustainable use of natural resources, global business, and art and design. The Academy funding means that our profiling work can now proceed as planned. A good example of this is the Industrial Internet Campus, which was recently established by Professor **Martti Mäntylä**.

These four fundamental competence areas have three integrative multidisciplinary themes – advanced energy solutions, health and wellbeing, and human-centred living environments. These are the fields in which we are best equipped to produce unique research in close

cooperation with the end users of that research. Our strengths focus on solving challenges that are important both globally and to the Finnish economy. These multidisciplinary themes sum up the most important elements of teaching and research related to art, technology and business in the years to come.

The vision we created five years ago was right on target. The new Finnish Government has selected the same focuses for its spearhead projects. Work is progressing well in all of our fundamental competence areas. For example, digitalisation affects almost everything in our society. For Aalto University, this represents an exciting challenge and a major opportunity: At our university, ICT and digitalisation make up an expertise cluster of over one hundred professors that benefits all of Finland.

We have been and we continue to do the right things. This is also apparent in the results of our first five years of operation. I'd like to thank each and every one of you for your hard work.

According to the Universities Act, the mission of the universities is to promote free research and academic and artistic education, to provide higher education based on research, and to educate students to serve their country and humanity. In carrying out their mission, universities must promote lifelong learning, interact with the surrounding society and promote the impact of research findings and artistic activities on society.

Aalto University's agenda relies heavily on innovation. For us, understanding and responding to the needs of society is as important and integral to our core mission as long-term scientific research.

It is, however, worth remembering that the evolution of new discoveries into successful applications requires both patience and co-operation between many different operators. Universities need stable and predictable core funding so that they can build first-class research expertise and a unique knowledge-base. It is this unique knowledge-base that gives rise to excellence in education and – in the long run – breeds innovation. At the same time, practical challenges inspire new research questions, helping to further fundamental science. Long-term fundamental research and the application of research results should never be at odds with each other – they are two sides of the same coin.

As expected, the information available suggests that the government budget will comply with the Government Programme when it comes to the university sector. The Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government focuses on expertise, innovations and creating growth. This is the right path. Finland is facing structural change in more ways than one, and now is the time for new initiatives in terms of both renewing our industrial base and improving services. However, at the same time, the government is making heavy funding cuts to the very activities that are

intended to create innovations and competitiveness.

The cooperation between universities and companies, and the innovation clusters developing around universities play an important role in creating knowledge-based growth. This is why I'm worried about cuts to funding innovation cooperation between companies and universities, and especially about the pressure that Aalto University is under to save money. When Aalto University was founded by the Finnish government and the business community just five years ago, the goal was to support the renewal of our technology-driven export sector and competitiveness. Dramatic and sudden funding cuts, particularly to collaboration between universities and companies, now pose a threat to this mission.

Declining resources are a fact of life that we can't really do anything about. Another fact is that the best experts are the first to leave if the operational conditions deteriorate. This is something that we simply cannot afford. Now that we have to make cutbacks, it is absolutely essential to ensure that the remaining scientific and research resources are allocated to the best experts. We have to invest in quality in order to preserve the central core of science and our ability to innovate.

How can we do this? By making sure that we set challenging goals for the entire university sector and that we measure the achievement of those goals. By making sure that an even greater part of common resources is distributed on the basis of quality. By making sure that societal impact plays a stronger role in the funding criteria for the university sector.

Finland is facing a challenging situation. In addition to solving today's problems, we also have the responsibility of looking to the future. We are responsible for educating the experts that will be building Finland for decades to come. What kind of skills and expertise do they need to create a better society, more effective treatments, new design, technology that makes life easier, or new industrial innovations?

Universities all around the world are going through massive changes. International competition is tougher than ever. Our education has to be outstanding in terms of international quality indicators or our top young people will leave the country.

Research provides the foundation for university education. This is another reason why it is important for Finnish research to be a frontrunner. In order to do well, Finland needs strong units that are large enough and internationally competitive. Aalto invests in international cooperation continuously. Isolated experts are not enough to bring about success; long-term work will ensure that innovation activities, networks and international research collaboration develop around our focus areas and our top researchers. It takes time to create this kind of synergy, but I think we're doing very well so far.

This week, we have the honour of hosting one of the world's leading experts and enthusiasts on entrepreneurial education: Professor **Tina Seelig** from Stanford University. Professor Seelig has been a key driver of the collaboration between Stanford and Aalto on entrepreneurial education. The result of this co-operation is the Aalto Ventures Program, and now she is here again to share her expertise on integrating entrepreneur skills into even more of our courses.

Internationality and multiculturalism are integral elements of Aalto University. Openness is one of our core values. It stands for more than just one thing. Finland must be able to provide younger generations with enough opportunities to ensure that they choose to stay in, or return to Finland to help secure our future. Openness also means acknowledging that Finland can't succeed on its own. We need teachers, scientists and students from all over the world. We must be able to attract the best of the best, regardless of nationality or origin. Openness can also stand for curiosity and the ability to see what others see. The creativity and richness inherent in different cultures, fields, people and ideas is at the core of this university.

Universities live and change with the times. This is important. However, research and education also require long-term strategic vision and the patience to make mistakes and learn from them. Right now, choices are being made that will either keep Finland in the running with regard to international competition or leave us sitting on the sidelines. This is why we have to choose wisely.

Aalto University participates in building the future of Finland by doing what we are best at: dedicated, ambitious work and producing high-quality results. This requires each and every member of our university community.

I wish the whole faculty, staff and students enthusiasm, perseverance, desire to develop, courage and spirit of co-operation in the coming academic year. At the same time, I want to thank you all for your contribution to the work of our university.

I declare the 2015–2016 academic year officially open.