

# Guidelines for impact

## SUMMARY

The operational context of  
Åbo Akademi University in the 2020s

Demos Helsinki

Julia Jousilahti, Mikael Sokero, Kirsi-Marja Lonkila, Iina Koskinen, Christopher Rowley, Liisa Kolehmainen, Joonas Ottman, Ilkka Konttinen

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**The university, in Europe and elsewhere, is currently involved in changes that have potential to transform its institutional identity and constitutive logic. At stake are the university's purpose, work processes, organization, system of governance and financial basis, as well as its role in the political system, the economy and society at large."**

Johan P. Olsen



# Foreword

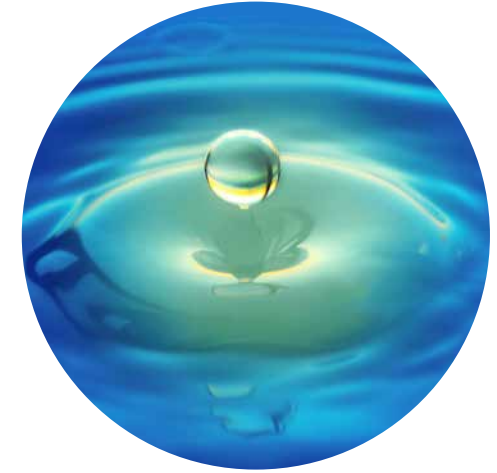
## Dear reader,

This publication is a summary of a strategy report that examines the globally occurring societal phenomena most relevant for the future of universities in Finland. The study sheds light on the constantly changing operational context of Finnish universities and presents seven theses that Åbo Akademi University will have to take a position on and engage with in order to strengthen its positive societal contributions to education and research and to make them clearer to the public. It presents visions and pathways for Åbo Akademi University to prosper in a world marked by rapid and unpredictable change.

Moreover, the study aims to conceptualise how the societal impact of universities has been understood in recent decades. Furthermore, we aim to offer a more adequate framework for universities to create and assess impact in society. We, the authors of the study, are endlessly curious about what are the current and future roles of science in society, and in relation to grand societal challenges.

We see this document as a map to guide thinking at the level of a single university. Therefore, the work is to be considered as a guideline for impact: what are the most important issues that Åbo Akademi University should consider when revisiting their strategy from the perspective of impact?

Universities have brought humankind civilisation, understanding, prosperity and important contributions to political decision-making. Today, the role and position of universities are changing in society due to global trends and drivers such as technological change and shifting demographic profiles. At the same time, scientific knowledge is being contested by individual experiences and notions, the very much Anglo-American phenomenon that has been coined “post-truth”. The idea of impact offers a way to talk about science, to conduct research and to design education. Universities and researchers should nevertheless be proactive and lead the discussion on the role of science in society now and in the future. We hope this document offers tools and a framework to support this very important task.

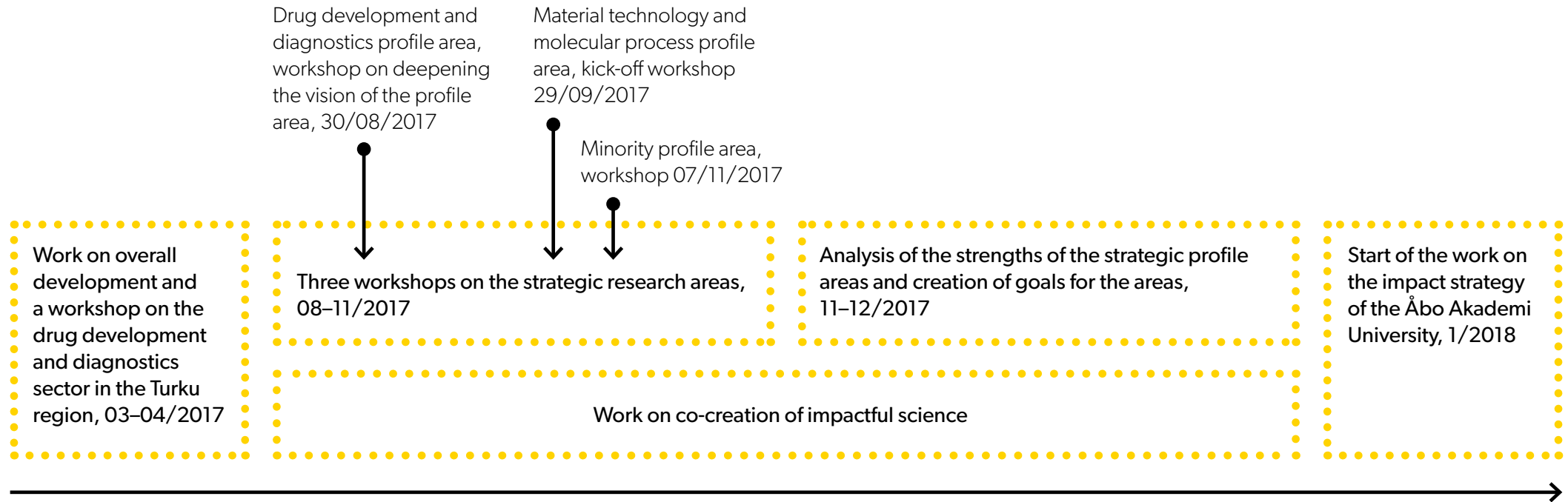


We would like to thank the interviewed experts and researchers who have shared their valuable thoughts for this study. Also a big thank you to the students, researchers, university administrators and stakeholders who have participated in the workshops and shared their insights and therefore helped us in this endeavour. The steering group of this project has been of pivotal importance, so thank you **Johanna Liinamaa, Niklas Sandler, Mats Lindfelt, Elina Pirjatanniemi, Otto Ilmonen, Thurid Eriksson** and **Mats Lundberg**, you are superstars!

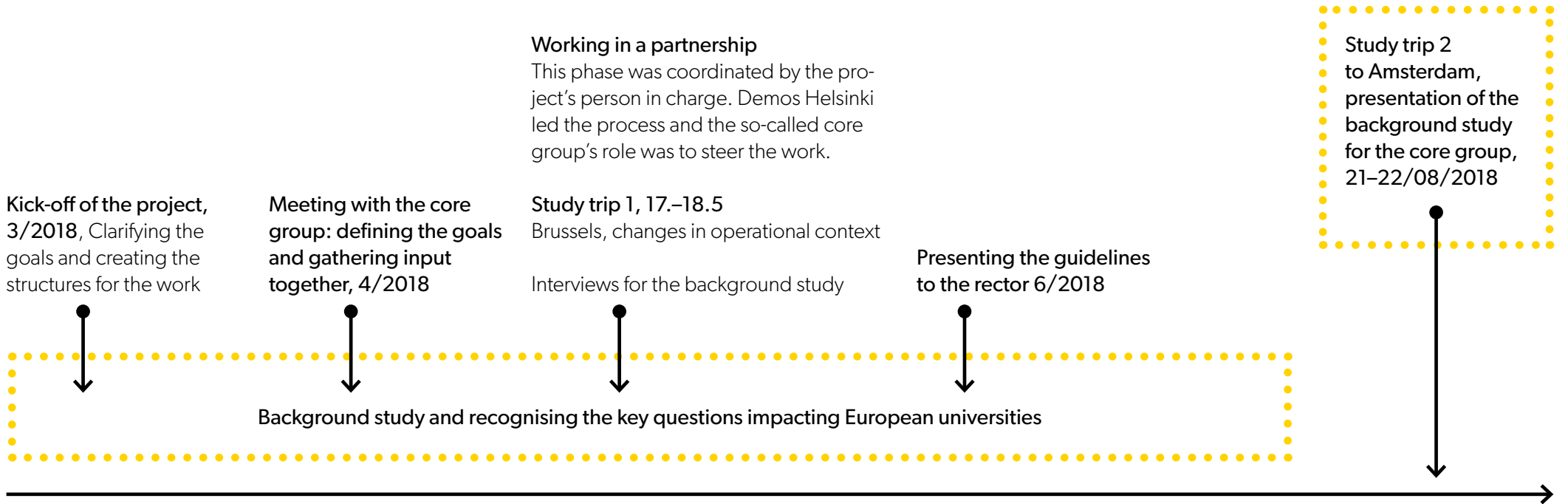
In Helsinki, December 2018

**Mikael Sokero & Julia Jousilahti**  
Demos Helsinki

# Process 1/3: Work on the strategic research profile areas in 2017

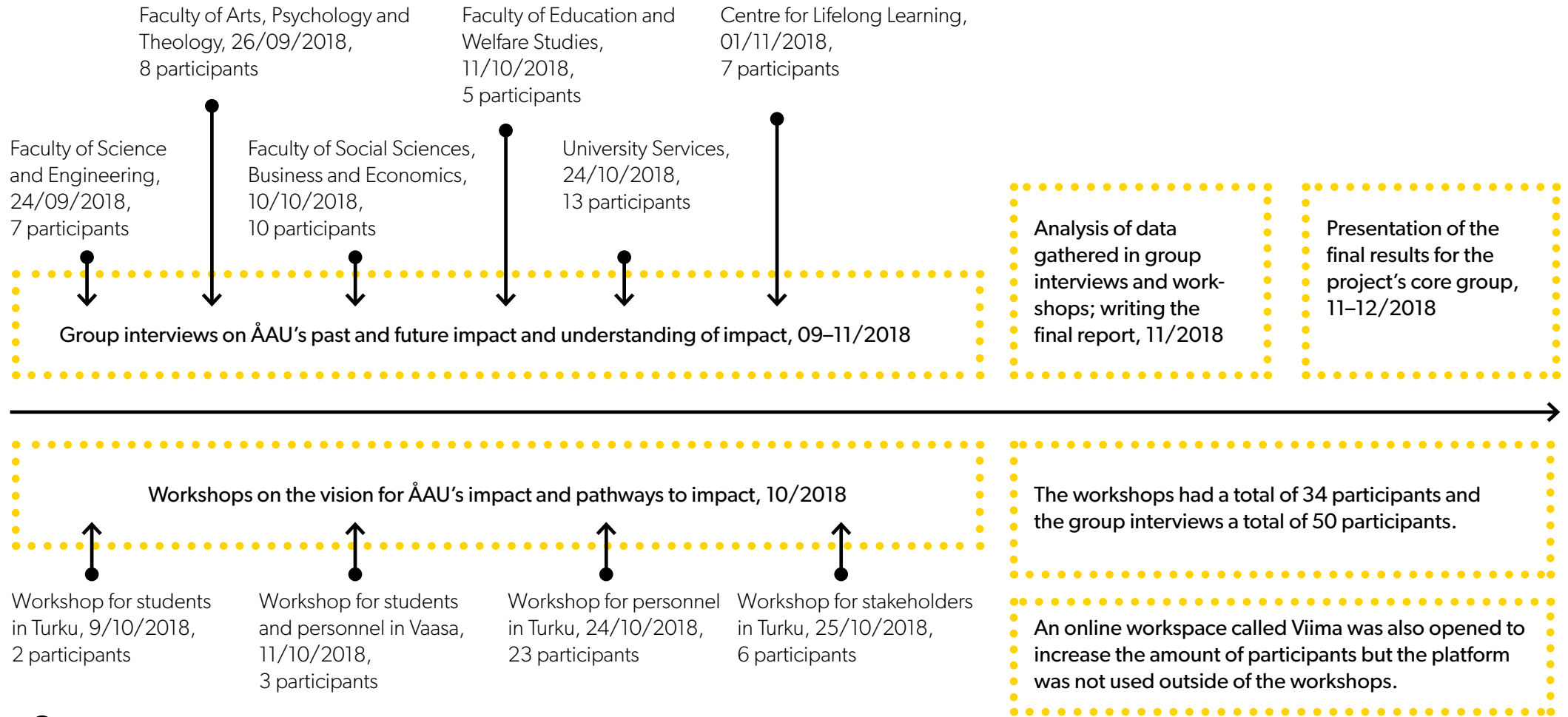


# Process 2/3: Background Study, Spring-Summer 2018



## Process 3/3:

# A co-created impact strategy, autumn 2018



# 1

# What is impact?

The societal impact of academia has usually been described as a linear process, but thinking of impact through the concept of “productive interactions” provides a more adequate framework for assessing the impact of universities in society.



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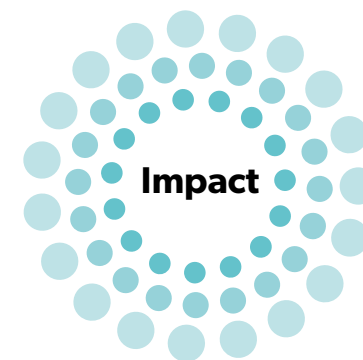
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# The traditional linear approach to the societal impact of universities is problematic

The unidirectional and linear approach to assessing the impact of universities is problematic and often false; science has a more diverse impact on the society than simply producing i.e. graduates, publications, patents or companies. This is often missed in the much-used linear approach to the impact of universities. The reason is partly practical: e.g. there can be a **long time-lag** between a research process, its application, and the social impact it produces. In addition, several other factors besides research also influence the same phenomena: It is **often impossible to attribute a particular impact to a specific research endeavour**.

It is often implicitly thought that impact is something that follows **after** universities have educated new talents in science and arts and facilitated research. More focus must be put into what kind of interaction and collaboration takes place in education and during the research process. This new focus in the actions and interventions dimension of societal impact will eventually be a question of indicators: traditional indicators used in the linear model are not sufficient and new ones are to be discovered. Moreover the quantitative indicators are to be complemented with qualitative narratives.

The **linear model can actually lead to less societal impact** as researchers are incentivised to only pursue a very limited type of impact, for example to publish articles that receive a narrow readership instead of e.g. taking part in current policy debates.





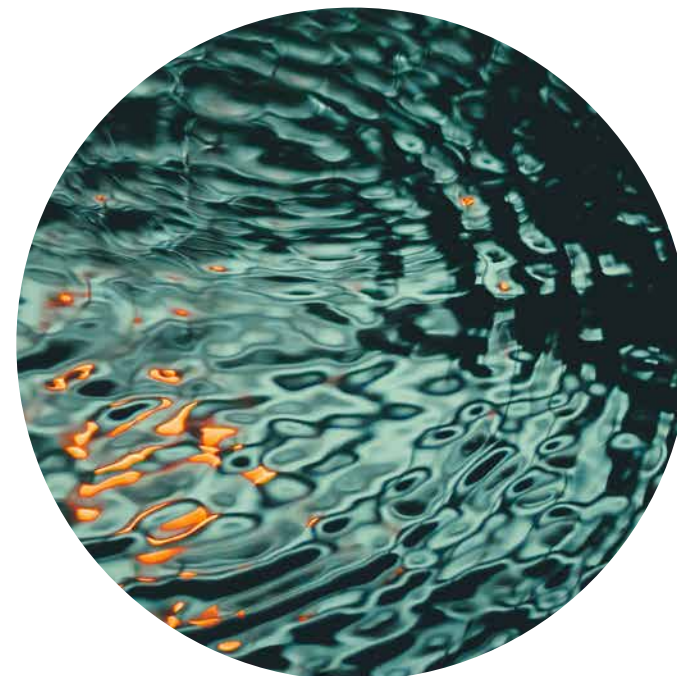
# Impact as productive interactions in research and education

Productive interactions are exchanges between universities, researchers, students and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued in a way that is both scientifically robust, educationally and socially relevant.

Productive interactions are context and often case specific. The [literature](#)\* around the topic has a strong focus on research. The idea is to be extended to the whole university, covering also education. Interaction in education could for example mean new kinds of learning spaces and places co-created with e.g. the municipality, NGOs or companies created to constantly update the educational content to better respond to existing skills needs in working life. In research on the other hand, productive interactions could be about co-defining knowledge needs of stakeholders in order to conduct research informed by practical needs of the people and organizations struggling with e.g. a societal challenge.

An interaction is productive when stakeholders seek to use or apply research results, practical information of experiences gained from the exchange = **Social impacts of knowledge are behavioural changes that happen due to this knowledge.** In education, interaction could be thought to be productive when all parties involved have recognized added value in the interaction. To document and measure the interaction, both quantitative indicators (e.g. people reached in workshops and open events, indicators of communications, number of publications written together, meetings) and qualitative (e.g. individual and group reflections, impact narratives) can be used. It is therefore essential to focus the indicators in the interaction as such.

Productive interactions can be highly coordinated efforts with carefully chosen stakeholders and collaborators (top-down) or “chance interactions” based on serendipity (bottom-up).)



\*e.g. [http://www.siampi.eu/Content/Introducing\\_Productive\\_Interactions.pdf](http://www.siampi.eu/Content/Introducing_Productive_Interactions.pdf)

# 2

# 7 Theses on the Future of Academia

The seven theses present key questions and tensions on which universities need to take a stand and react to in order to create the necessary circumstances for education and research to flourish and impact society.



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# 1. The pressure of universities to enhance and show societal impact grows

There is a growing demand for the academic world to assess and have something to show for its societal impact. This is explained by the dire need of science in providing solutions to the grand challenges of our time, such as climate change. On the other hand, as public funding for universities has been cut and a 'management by results' approach has been adopted in academia as well, universities are increasingly asked to legitimise their use of public funding by demonstrating the impact of research and education.

To respond to these challenges, universities need to proactively define their future position as part of society from the perspectives of both research and education. This is not a new task and it is not a task to be given outside academia, but other stakeholders in society must rather be consulted. Academia needs to remain active in (re-)defining how it sees its societal impact and what are the most adequate means to create it, along with the appropriate parameters to assess this.

# 2. Academic professions are changing

Deeper interaction between science and society is needed to solve the wicked problems our societies are facing. This status quo changes the profession of researchers and the ways of conducting research. It also requires a new internal division of work in universities.

Among the most important changes are the increase of inter- and trans-disciplinary research, strategic research to serve the demand from the society's perspective, as well as communication and interaction capabilities. The universities that are able to foster meaningful co-creation and [productive interactions](#) between academic and non-academic fields are going to prosper. They will be able to strengthen their role in strategically important networks and justify their role in the society at large, as well as in local contexts.

The pressure for scientific excellence while also performing other duties such as project management, communication and interaction, applying for funding and managing finances also redefines the traditional academic profession. Academic leadership and the legitimacy of the management have raised discussions within academia as university management structures have been seen to gain power while the scientific community has been diverged from decision-making.



### 3. The autonomy of universities and academic freedom are facing tensions

The urgency to solve big societal challenges and the increased demands to show results achieved with public funding place multifaceted pressures on the research and education agenda of universities. Academia needs to hold on to its academic freedom and autonomy while having strategic demands and needs met within academia (e.g. university management), and by ministries and international bodies. The state explicitly promotes the autonomy of universities while still governing higher education with a unified 'National innovation system' [strategy](#). Long-term strategies can be hard to maintain when universities are vulnerable to changes in the Parliament (usually) every four years.

A key question to consider regarding the impact and stronger role of universities in Finland is: How will universities open up for collaboration with non-academic actors including industry, engage in the [open science agenda](#) and make the most use of it, while still maintaining autonomy, academic freedom and nurturing scientific sustainability and responsibility?

### 4. Providing new solutions for lifelong learning will be the core task of universities

The quickening cycle of the transformation of work requires the constant upskilling and reskilling of people as the existing resources or tools are not sufficient. Universities have a double task: to increase the education level of Finns by educating young people, while strengthening the knowledge base and skills of the population by upskilling adults.

Universities have a natural position as well as the responsibility to produce new, inclusive lifelong learning solutions. Science and humanities, their results and outputs, and learning and cognitive capabilities belong to everyone. If universities do not respond to the need to offer new upskilling services and products, the private sector most definitely will – with a huge market. The risk of this scenario is that education would slip away from its academic background.

The need to serve people in working life has nevertheless created tensions between supporting the development of the right working life skills, entrepreneurial activities and an entrepreneurial mindset among students while carrying out long-term research and education strategies.



## 5. Open science is the way

The open science question(s) can be defined as the number one science policy issue in Europe today. The situation is not dire: it has been estimated that about 48 % of all published scientific publications in the years 2008–2011 have been published [openly](#), with the EU aiming at 60% by the year 2020. It seems that the trajectory of open science is here to stay, at least for the time being.

The 'Open science' ideal affects the whole education, research and publication process. Open science does not only mean open access to publications. It also refers to the openness of data, sources, methodology, peer reviews and educational resources. While open science is rather widely celebrated as a key element of what research and science should be in the future, universities still need to develop a comprehensive approach to collect, use and manage data. How to better incentivise universities towards open science and how to incorporate open science into all university operations are questions that remain to be solved.

## 6. Pressures on the public purse challenge academia

Cuts in public basic funding has increased the competition of universities and researchers over other sources of funding. This has raised criticism in academia as the time spent for making research funding applications is time away from the research itself. Moreover, different funding bodies have different demands for what is being funded. Universities need to take an even more proactive stand on defining international, strategic funding models to suit their needs. Increasing global competition demands strategic profiling from universities. The internationalisation of education and research is a prerequisite for impact in the future.



## 7. Universities need to define their meaningful geographical context

Universities have always had an important local role, but competition (for funding, staff and students) and possibilities are increasingly global. Also due to the ongoing developments of the European Research Area, Erasmus and other similar projects, the future universities of Europe will find a more and more European identity as opposed to a national one.

Universities need to define the most relevant geographical context for them: where do they aim to attract funding, staff and students, what value can they have at the local or national level, how can they best strengthen and make use of their international networks.

The placement of universities raises national and regional political tensions. Universities are demanded to profile themselves more strictly and to aim to become world-class institutions. In the meanwhile, they also need to serve as educators and attractions in Finnish regions outside the main cities.



# 3

# Visions for Åbo Akademi

**This section presents visions co-created by students, researchers, educators and administrators from Åbo Akademi University in 2017 and 2018. They outline positive futures of an impactful Åbo Akademi University.**



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# Introduction:

## Vision for an impactful Åbo Akademi University

In early 2017, Åbo Akademi University approached Demos Helsinki to help with the vision work of the Drug Development and Diagnostics profile, one of the strategic research areas at Åbo Akademi. As the cooperation grew to cover all aspects of impact, so did the vision process that began in April 2017. This vision is an expression of that process, and outlines a positive future of an impactful Åbo Akademi University. In this section, we present the reasoning, process and results of the vision process. In Section 4, pathways to impact based on changes in operational context and the key questions for academia are presented. A vision was needed for at least three reasons:

### To highlight the strategic significance of impactful research and education.

While the notion of impactful science had existed for quite a while, at the outset of this process there was a need to make sense of the concept impact itself: how can we conceptualise impact and why is it strategically central?

### To create a shared understanding.

There was a strong need to create a joint picture of not only goals and aspirations, but of the underlying values. There was also an apparent need for a joint narrative on impact: how do our research and cooperation activities link with the broader narrative on societal and scientific progress?

### To motivate action.

For any kind of sustained action, a vision is needed not only to coordinate activities and synthesise goals, but to inspire action. A vision is therefore a starting point for action and the first step in creating a strategic roadmap.





# Vision: a summary

In this vision, Åbo Akademi University is a daring, international, and societally ambitious university. Furthermore, in the workshops, the future ÅAU was described as:

- Active, unique and bold
- A leader in research both regionally and globally
- Challenging and critical
- A friendly environment for conducting research and for studying
- A laid-back, creative Nordic university
- Barrier-breaking and boundary-crossing
- Having the highest academic authority in key profile areas
- Swedish-speaking milieu for international and competitive science & research
- Multicultural university sustaining humanity and solving global challenges
- Internationally renowned and connected, tackling big questions
- The most socially impactful university in Finland
- The world's best Finland-Swedish university!



# 5 Vision areas



The vision here is presented through five key areas.  
The five vision areas are:

- 1. Science**
- 2. Society**
- 3. Support**
- 4. Education**
- 5. Stakeholders**

For each of these five areas, the vision outlines a description of a best possible future – a set of goals that provides a focal point for aspirations and inspire action.

# ÅAU's values



# Science: Åbo Akademi University making world-class science

## Being a world-class actor in conducting forerunner research, especially in the focus areas.

The research and its results are of high interest in the scientific community, high-level publications and (international) society. Åbo Akademi University is the best university in Finland in many areas, particularly with regard to research on drug development, diagnostics, molecular & material science, minorities, and the sea. ÅAU efforts have been recognised with a Nobel prize.

## Openness as a new operating paradigm.

Åbo Akademi University focuses on fostering open science as a standard for making world-class science. This includes not only the use of citizen-led science, open data, and open-access journals but, most importantly, openness as a well-functioning and normatively ambitious operating model. This approach is not only open, but connected through interaction and open interfaces.

## Cross-, inter-, multi- and transdisciplinarity.

Science has a critical role in solving wicked problems. ÅAU takes a role in solving grand challenges through cross-, inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary research and projects. ÅAU approaches these questions from its strategic profile areas of research and by combining different disciplines to find solutions to wicked problems from the perspectives of these profile areas.

## High-quality education.

Education is the backbone of ÅAU's scientific footprint. ÅAU educates the next generation of scientists, and its education programmes are founded on cutting-edge research and science. The education experience reflects this and produces graduates with world-class knowledge and skills.



# Society: Science benefits society through impactful research and interactions

## Impactful and collaborative education.

Education at Åbo Akademi University is collaborative and impactful. The graduates of Åbo Akademi University are attractive to employers because of their comprehensive and diverse skills. Students know their studies are relevant for the future and for society. A key motivation of the study programmes is tackling of global issues, and students take part in ambitious projects during their studies. This not only creates impact but provides graduates with competences they need in their professional life.

## The research conducted at Åbo Akademi provides immense benefits for society.

ÅAU's research provides solutions and benefits for society across a range of topic areas. The results of its high-quality research are valuable to, for example, public health, public services, societal justice, industry, global development, the environment, international and non-governmental organisations, not to mention researchers struggling with applied problems.

## Integrated communications and interaction.

Through productive interactions throughout the research process, research attains a high impact. For this to happen, there is in place a robust system of services available for conducting impactful research and communicating effectively. This allows for the proactive communication of solutions offered that translates into benefits across society. Researchers have public credibility in the related topics and are comfortable in appearing in the media. Interaction and communication are funded appropriately.

## ÅAU's mission is to change societies.

The foundation of all activities is ÅAU's societal mission. ÅAU is an international university grappling with global challenges and contributes to sustainable development and social justice, including the role of minorities and the disenfranchised. By informing society, ÅAU empowers it – leading to appreciation of knowledge, less exclusion and more understanding.



## Support & services:

# There are high-quality services that support the everyday work of impactful science

### A transformational leadership model for a small, agile university

The leadership and management of ÅAU is well-equipped and motivated to enable transformative research and interaction. This means that the leadership system in place produces lean processes, fosters equality, manages change skillfully and sustainably, and creates an environment for well-being in the organisation. The transformative leadership model enables ÅAU's research to be more connected to the society as a whole. It is based on transparency, and guarantees solid funding for basic research through active discussion with the decision-makers. There is unique possibility to recognise the potential of and act upon so-called weak signals. All in all, this model supports the agility and flexibility of ÅAU as a small, bottom-up university.

### A cohesive administrative culture based on design thinking and a joint vision.

This means three things. Firstly, there is a high level of cohesion between administration and other functions, chiefly research. Scientists feel that they receive the services they need, and administration feels they have the necessary resources, skills, mandate and, above all, mutual understanding and joint vision about what is important. Secondly, there is a high level of cohesion between the needs of services and the services provided. This comes about by applying a user-centric, design thinking framework in the provision of services. Thirdly, there is a culture of support and collaboration that is supported not only by administration, spaces and services, but by the will of the ÅAU community to work together.

### Funding secured for ambitious services & science

There are two main prongs of funding support. Firstly, there are the necessary resources to provide excellent university services in a way that is sustainable and highly motivating for the administrative personnel providing these services. Secondly, there are very, very useful services in place for researchers to use in order to get help in identifying and applying for research funding.



# Education: Åbo Akademi University is a great place to work and study

## Sense of purpose.

Work and studies at ÅAU are underlined by a sense of purpose. This means two things. Firstly, people who work and study at ÅAU know that their contribution is valuable with regard to solving some of the most pressing challenges today. That is to say: the societal mission of ÅAU drives staff and students. Secondly, there is a sense of purpose because of a trust in the competence and reliability of others. Staff and students know their efforts are not in vain because ÅAU is a well-oiled machine.

## Staff and student wellbeing

Staff at ÅAU know they have the support and care they need to succeed as professionals. This includes not only healthcare and support services, but also the realistic staffing of projects. ÅAU staff cares for one another and want their colleagues to be well and to thrive. The same goes for students: they have the support needed to cope and bloom in a competitive, challenging atmosphere of academic excellence.

## ÅAU is “spännande”.

Through its internationality, diversity as well as investments in spaces, ÅAU is an exciting place to work and study. The diversity of the student and staff body not only means an exchange of ideas, it is also a matter of equality and close to the core values of ÅAU.

## Collaborative culture.

Through its interdisciplinary foundations, ÅAU is fostering a culture of collaboration. A key element of this is the constant openness and critical thought put into what is important, meaning that ÅAU can stay on top of what is societally relevant. This leads not only to cutting-edge research, but a student experience that prepares graduates for a fast-changing professional and civic life. None of this means impatience or lack of commitment, but rather the opposite: instead of chasing trends, ÅAU invests in what its people believe in. As a participant in one of the workshops put it: “We lead, we do not follow.”



# Stakeholders and ecosystems:

## Partnerships support research, societal interaction and the student experience.

### ÅAU has a unique and rigorous model for stakeholder engagement.

At the core of this model is the premise: cooperation not for its own sake but for the sake of meaningful and productive interactions. The model is built in a way that serves three goals. Firstly, the model is built in collaboration with the stakeholders themselves. Secondly, the model is elegant enough that it can be understood not only by ÅAU personnel but, where relevant, by the stakeholders as well – especially since they have been involved in crafting it. Thirdly and most importantly, the model is more action-oriented than abstract. Overall, it will serve especially the focus areas with their respective stakeholder groups.

### ÅAU as an ecosystem leader, also internationally.

In relevant ecosystems, ÅAU is not only a node in the system but a leader of cooperation. For example, ÅAU can lead the EU-level cooperation of universities regionally. Overall, the cooperation ÅAU pursues is Nordic and international by nature. This serves many different goals, but perhaps most importantly links the relatively small ÅAU with the right actors across the globe to bring about impact in the most efficient way. This includes working with industry and the third and fourth sectors.

### Support & services for stakeholder engagement.

Administration has a clearly defined role and the necessary skills and resources to play a key role in facilitating stakeholder management and ecosystem leadership. This includes a strong role in communications, leading to efficient and forerunning communication of research. Communication efforts are built around constant interaction throughout the research process, meaning that there is genuine dialogue between ÅAU and its stakeholders. This dialogue serves not only the calibration and recalibration of ÅAU's impact agenda, but ensures that stakeholders play a strong role in building on the insights from ÅAU's research.



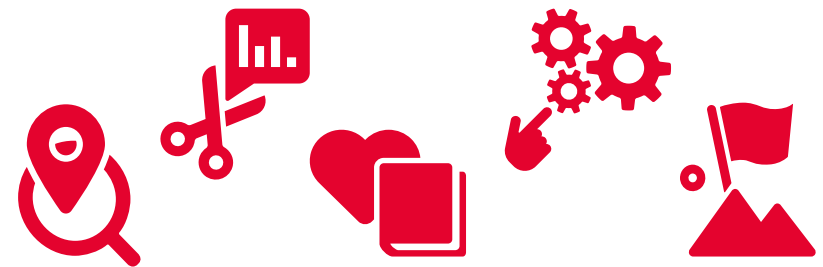


# Visions and pathways?

Visions are ideals and normative descriptions of states of affairs in a certain context. Collective impactful action is meaningful if the vision is described in a distant enough moment in the future: a short time span is too tied to the so called realities of today and the path dependencies that more or less shape what the future will eventually be like. A more distant moment in the future opens up possibilities because of the increased uncertainty and complexity of the more distant future.

Visions of the future therefore create action because our understanding of the future, our hopes, goals, fears and doubts all make us anticipate the future. Anticipation is a two-way process: on the one hand we today project our thinking and attitudes towards the future, so we collectively create the future in our imagination. On the other hand this collectively created imagination shapes our actions, decisions and plans today. Future visions hence shape partly how the world is today. Therefore it is important put effort in imagining and hoping together.

The visions described in this section are exactly those action creating products of the collective imagination of the ÅAU community. Pathways described in the next section are examples of how the visions won't just remain as visions but are turned into meaning and concrete action where the members of ÅAU community are able to recognize their role and position.



# 4

# Pathways to impact

**This section presents several pathways to impact stemming from the changes in operational context and key questions for academia as well as from the data gathered in the co-creation workshops.**



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# Impact pathways?

Impact pathways are a combination of analysis concerning the current state of affairs regarding the theme of the pathway and a set of recommendations and possibilities for experimentation. The pathways support strategic thinking and planning by describing how societal impact could explicitly be addressed. Åbo Akademi University has had numerous successes in creating impact. These are to be seen as existing strengths to be utilized in the future.

The pathways described here are formulated as a combination of the (a) data acquired through the interviews and workshops, (b) incorporating the visions of ÅAU to the pathways and (c) tackling the societal challenges and tensions in the operational context.

There are two specifically cross-cutting issues in all the pathways: the increased complexity in the operational context is addressed through the experimental approach and open science is not presented as a pathway per se, but rather as an approach included in all the pathways.



# 1. What are the geographical contexts of ÅAU?

The challenge for ÅAU is to combine its current local role and its attempts to increase its meaningful international reach and impact.



## Current performance

Currently the focus is providing educational services for Swedish-speaking Finland and ÅAU is struggling to reach the Finnish speaking population.

ÅAU is to some extent active in regional cooperation with different non-academic stakeholders and has a tight-knit community in Turku and Vaasa.

ÅAU has a lot of cooperation and broad connections in the Nordic region as well as internationally. There is a wish for more collaboration both within Finland on European and international levels. The European level is also seen as the preferable level for international funding.

ÅAU has not had enough success in receiving EU-funding.

The Swedish-speaking age groups in Finland are becoming smaller, and larger bases for student recruitment are needed. There is an interest on focusing on the recruitment of international and Finnish-speaking students.

## What excellence might look like

Research is published and teaching is done in multiple languages but most of the students graduate with good knowledge of Swedish and good communication skills.

ÅAU brings together Swedish-speaking and bilingual actors (e.g. NGOs, municipalities, companies) from around the country. ÅAU builds bridges between the Finnish-speaking public and private sectors and Swedish-speaking academia.

ÅAU popularises science for the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking audience in Finland.

ÅAU is the gateway to the Nordic region, which collaborators find valuable. ÅAU builds bridges between the academia in Finland to the rest of the Nordic region.

ÅAU has multiple cooperation projects with universities in Finland, Europe and globally. Students are included in research projects such as the Archipelago Business Development Project. Alumni from ÅAU are recruited around the world.

ÅAU is the leading university in Vaasa and Turku regions in European research funding.

ÅAU is an attractive university indicated by the large number of students applying from different parts of Finland and the world.

## Recommendations

Define the most relevant geographical contexts for ÅAU operations in the future.

Create a clear language strategy. The current multilingual setting is a strength for internationalization!

Organise a series of phenomenal seminars or lectures in multiple languages (Fin, Swe, Eng) around Finland to promote work done at ÅAU

Anytime, anywhere: digital platforms and digital collaboration bring an entirely new layer to the challenge.

Embrace digitalisation and take a leap forward. Incorporate open science into all digitalisation processes of the university.

Strengthen the capabilities of succeeding in EU funding applications, including support services and investing in the presence in Brussels. Create strong and trusted regional, national and international networks based on openness.

Make an internationalization strategy with clear measures and goals. Decide which countries and areas to focus on and run recruitment campaigns there. POIS: a recruitment campaign in Finnish-speaking schools and selected destinations in the Nordic region.

Internationalisation requires international experiences and people from new contexts. Make internationalisation explicit in recruitments.

Internationalization requires solid leadership, make sure the university leadership has necessary space and resources to lead the change.

## Experiments for implementation

**Invest considerably for two years in EU funding.**

Co-create support services and identify needs for new capabilities and recruit accordingly.

Build up visibility in Brussels and experiment ways to make most out of the presence in Brussels.

Co-create measures to build a stronger connection between Turku and Vaasa.

Run recruitment campaigns in selected countries.

**Experiment how investing in communication aimed at prospective students in the Nordic region will affect the amount and quality of applications.** Co-create incentives for students across the Nordic region to apply.

Collaboratively identify the biggest challenges and possibilities of digitalisation to break out of the necessities dictated by geographical boundaries and digitalise everything worth digitalising.



# 2. How does ÅAU maintain relevance of its education?

The challenge for ÅAU is to constantly evolve into a provider of societally relevant and impactful education.



## Current performance

**Competition of students in the Nordic region:** Many leave their studies after graduating as bachelors or do not finish their master's degree since there is a labour market for bachelors in Sweden. The relevance of master's programmes is important and their length is discussed since many programmes internationally are only 1 year long.

**The current small base for student recruitment** presents a challenge and there are not enough applicants to ÅAU. To recruit more Finnish-speaking and international students is important. POIS: an option, but this might clash with the mission of educating Swedish-speaking experts.

**Many study at ÅAU to make a difference in the world** and are societally active also outside academia. To motivate its present and future students ÅAU could better show what kind of societal impact it is aiming for and has achieved.

**Responding to students' expectations regarding eg. technology** Students are used to the latest, well-functioning technology in their everyday lives. There is big variation between different subjects and teachers in how well technology is applied in teaching.

**Taking care of student well-being:** Studying skills and life managements skills should be emphasised more in teaching to avoid burn-outs.

## What excellence might look like

**Students stay in ÅAU thanks** to the master's programmes that deepen relevant skills needed in working life.

ÅAU has managed **to identify its strengths and to tell them as an intriguing, clear story.** ÅAU is the first choice for Swedish-speaking Finns thanks to the aforementioned qualities, but more and more Finnish-speaking Finns apply to ÅAU as well as international students from targeted markets.

ÅAU offers **courses that bridge course contents with ongoing societal challenges. It experiments open-mindedly with the latest teaching methods and technologies.** However, digital tools cannot entirely replace physical meetings.

ÅAU is well known for **actively engaging its students** in the development of study programmes and projects with external stakeholders. Students feel a strong ownership of ÅAU and thus want to continue to their master's studies there as well.

As a small university, ÅAU has succeeded in **building and actively managing its tight-knit community** where students and teachers know each other. A lot of focus has been put to new, first-year students feeling at home at ÅAU. ÅAU is known for its high emphasis on study counselling and student well-being.

## Recommendations

**Work on profiling courses and study programmes.** What are ÅAU's best assets here?

Increase the flexibility and chance to choose in examining which contents (.e.g. Logopedics, teachers) are not steered by the law.

**Stay relevant: Offer interdisciplinary study packages on current issues,** e.g. climate change.

Create a **strong narrative and story** on what ÅAU is and what does one achieve by studying there.

Choose: **Who are the number 1 potential students we should target?** What are our core messages to these groups (they can vary).

**Run recruitment campaigns** in the Nordics to recruit students especially to master- and doctoral programs. Utilize ÅAU's strong alumni- and other networks.

**Strengthen student inclusion** in development and impact work to foster student ownership of the university. As a small university this is easier for ÅAU than many others. In addition, support peer-learning.

## Experiments for implementation

**Co-write ÅAU's story with staff & students** and with the aid of the best communication agencies in Europe.

**Create information packages for upper secondary school student counsellors** on why and how to apply to ÅAU.

**Experiment with courses that enable fast treatment of issues that are being discussed in the public** ("ÅAU task-force on solving challenge X.") to showcase ÅAU's societal relevance to students, stakeholders and the public.

Test and start **one-year master's programmes.**

Experiment with **stronger inclusion of students in the planning** of study programmes in all stages.

Test the **inclusion of the latest teaching methods and technologies in education.**



# 3. What Lifelong Learning could be at ÅAU ?

The challenge for ÅAU is to become an active provider of lifelong learning



## Current performance

CLL is the place where ÅAU provides lifelong learning (especially for Swedish-speaking Finland). CLL's teacher training reaches nearly the whole Swedish-speaking Finland ("training of trainers") and it also provides adult education, language teaching and training for organisations. It works on lifelong learning in various research and development projects (see pages 73–74 for past successes). It has a lot of understanding of technological possibilities in teaching.

However, ÅAU could have an even bigger role in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is a huge societal challenge to solve and it will demand new models of collaboration e.g. between academia and companies. CLL sees itself as a bridge-builder between research and companies, **but there is still untapped potential in co-creation with corporations.** Combining studying with working life and family is still viewed as difficult by many. Challenge: Curricula are intrinsically behind societal development.

Silos within ÅAU, slow changes and a somewhat rigid "top-down culture" was seen problematic for creating something new. Profile areas are a good start, but even stronger collaboration between different subjects is needed. Stronger legal and economic support for co-operation innovations work would be beneficial.

## What excellence might look like

ÅAU's CLL is one of the leading developers of lifelong learning solutions in the Nordics. **It functions as a facilitator and bridge-builder** between latest research, the needs of corporations and e.g. trade unions. It provides lifelong career guidance for students and stakeholders.

As a small university, ÅAU has managed **to bring researchers from different fields into the sphere of development work.** It constantly trials its new concepts with stakeholders and thus keeps itself well connected with the needs of the "outside world."

ÅAU provides "mini-diplomas", i.e. modules of degrees for professionals. It has **the best online courses** in Finland that make lifelong learning easy for busy adults. Through its research, it has developed new, better ways to **identify extracurricular learning.**

ÅAU maintains **strong connections to its alumnus network**, which uses a lot of ÅAU's lifelong learning services.

## Recommendations

Reclaim the position of a leading developer of lifelong learning solutions by working in strong collaboration between employers, trade unions etc. to understand the societal need and pinpoint what research can provide.

**Development and co-creation of easy-access study modules** for continuous learning built for the needs of companies.

**Development of lifelong career/learning guidance centres** into a centralised service that also includes a mobile application.

**Expanding lifelong learning services to all of the Nordics** (at least Sweden). Expanding cooperation (including development projects) with industry to the whole Nordic region.

Request every graduate of ÅAU to draft a **lifelong learning plan.**

Focus on finding efficient ways **to recognise extracurricular learning** as there is a growing societal need for this. Support students in better understanding what skills they have in general.

**Think systemically in collaboration with other research fields:** What would a new, comprehensive system of lifelong learning demand from e.g. legislation or social security.

Don't forget global impact: What are the ways to offer **lifelong learning solutions abroad** and to make use of Finland's excellent reputation in education?

Identify **potential for commercialisation** of courses, modules and educational programmes.

## Experiments for implementation

Raise the **profile and presence of CLL within the ÅAU.** Make the director of CLL a member of the rectors leadership group.

Develop, conceptualise and experiment with **lifelong learning study packages** for industries affected by technological unemployment.

Based on ÅAU's research, offer a company **training on how to support lifelong learning inside organisations.**

**Co-create and trial mini-degrees** (the new university law should enable this) with people in working life.

**Position yourself and tell a story of ÅAU as a leader in this field:** Organise a bold international festival of lifelong learning with academic institutions, frontrunner organisations and start-ups developing new solutions (the Slush of lifelong learning?)

# 4. Productive interactions

The challenge for ÅAU is how to encourage, motivate and activate researchers in different career phases to strengthen interaction with non-academic collaborators to enhance both research and education

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ÅAU staff has good formal and personal contacts, but they could be used more efficiently and widely. Co-creation of ideas within and with a small university is easier. Students should be more involved in projects outside the academia. It is good that ÅAU has already recruited administration specialists in open science.

## What excellence might look like

ÅAU sets up institutional arrangements for systematically supporting, incentivising, encouraging and motivating research and education to engage in productive interactions with other than academic actors in the society.

When representing ÅAU outside, its staff and students are able to tell an intriguing story on what makes ÅAU special and what its mission is in the world.

ÅAU has a strong, positive brand and is known as an excellent collaborator.

ÅAU is a leading university in the popularisation of science. Its researchers and staff are regularly trained on how to communicate their research in different channels. Good incentives (“money-time-thank you”) ensure active participation in public discourse.

ÅAU has a working culture and incentives that support active societal interaction. Teachers use their networks for example in the industry to find contacts for students. The majority of students remain actively engaged members of the alumni network.

ÅAU has significantly resourced digital development and has become a digitally ambitious university.

## Recommendations

Invest considerably in communication and collaboration training offered for educators and researchers.

Co-create formal models for societal interaction based on the previous success stories. A lot has already been done, make that better visible, accessible and re-usable.

Establish support mechanisms for researchers in different career phases:

- **PhD students** are the next generation(s) of academics. They are more open to new practices and interested in outreach. Build a co-creative process to develop PhD curricula that give future researchers know-how, confidence and tools for productive interactions as well as interdisciplinary, more co-creative and open ways of doing research.
- **Postdoc phase researchers** are in the critical part of their career, where they most need efficient support functions to communicate scientific discoveries. Offer systematic support functions in e.g. communicating, commercialising, licensing scientific discoveries.
- **(Assistant) professors** are key in the university community. Involve them to kick off the cultural shift towards collaboration in teaching and research.

Co-create a platform (digital or physical) for academia and the society to meet, similar to the Mind Club in Vaasa. Create places for interaction, such as the Think Corner in Helsinki, to stimulate and display the demand for interaction between academic and non-academic parties.

Create structures enabling participatory leadership. Adopt experimentative approach to leadership and communicate learnings openly.

Tell “donation stories” to show collaborators how external funding is used.

Encourage and strengthen open publishing and open accessibility of research in order to ensure the usability of research among academic and non-academic communities.

Besides being a university, ÅAU is a community of people. Continue to strengthen the role of ÅAU as a community with a strong feeling of belonging and togetherness.

## Experiments for implementation

**Community for change.** Build a task force consisting of researchers and educators to identify barriers, bottlenecks and challenges experienced in productive interactions. Ask them to present a community-led approach for mainstreaming productive interactions. Run an experiment where a considerable share of time of the participants’ work is reserved for interaction. Offer training. Create indicators for following development.

**Catalyse.** Appoint a team in the ÅAU administration who would become responsible for catalysing new interactions between science and society.

**Business models.** Establish a company with the mission of creating business models and operational models for research findings.

**Open and collaborative education.** Co-create new project-based learning environments with e.g. industrial partners.



# 5. Grand Challenges

The challenge for ÅAU is to create optimal conditions and a flourishing culture enabling the co-creation of solutions to grand challenges.



## What excellence might look like

ÅAU focuses on **interdisciplinary research** in order to provide scientifically sound, broader and alternative perspectives and time frames to humankind's big problems.

ÅAU institutions are capable of **supporting researchers in carrying out changes** to the research profession and ways of doing research.

Small size enables agility in collaboration.

**Trust** inside the ÅAU is strong. Bottom-up initiatives flourish and people are supported and encouraged to initiate new collaboration and take responsibility..

**A clear narrative** is created with the topic: "How does ÅAU solve the seven challenges of humankind"

Enough time is allocated for **collaboration with non-academic partners**.

Collaboration and **responsibilities are clear** and they convert into better research.

**Collaboration and interdisciplinary** research have become a spearhead at ÅAU.

**Solution orientedness** is made strategically important and it dribbles down to the project level.

## Recommendations

Create clear support services for collaboration and **innovation**. Clarify the role of administration and the value-promise of the services they provide.

**Start building trust with new organizations and maintaining collaborative relations with existing partners** in order to have strong networks and clear narrative anticipating the FP9. Key to success is to build trust through individuals: who are these people at ÅAU? Prioritize the Nordic collaboration.

Invest considerably to **enhancing communication and collaboration building skills** of the researchers.

Prepare structures in faculties and administration **to be ready for FP9** and especially **grand challenges** pillar.

Make small size an asset and **increase bottom-up culture by strengthening agility**. This might mean that decision making in the university should be more agile.

**Leverage Finland's country brand** in building international collaboration.

**Co-create platforms for collaboration and experimentation**. This could make a significant element in the future brand of ÅAU.

Explore and encourage **citizen science and co-creation of knowledge**.

Make success more visible and **be proud** of it more explicitly.

## Experiments for implementation

**Define societal missions** on top of the research focus areas, this will strengthen the focus areas further.

**Inter- and transdisciplinary research programmes** at masters and phd levels.

**Pilot in setting up a small amount of new nodes between departments and faculties**. Setting up nodes provides the structure for productive interactions within the university. This provides access to different types of grants and improves researchers' ability to solve wicked problems and to produce transformative knowledge.

Experiment with **solution-oriented labs and platforms** connected to the focus areas of research.

**Co-create interdisciplinary courses, study packages and courses with stakeholders**. Media and comms skills are essential. Master's and doctoral students should have courses on impact thinking, solution-orientedness and collaboration.

**Ask each faculty to identify opportunities in collaboration with non-academic actors** and across the university. Support the concrete planning of co-creation activities and the impact thinking.

**Create a process and incentives to make sure data and metadata are openly accessible** and re-usable freely by anyone for any kind of purposes.

## Current performance

**Interdisciplinary research** is crucial to solve the wicked problems of our time, but it is not sufficiently being institutionalised in the current ÅAU structures.

ÅAU's **different departments are not communicating with each other**. This means missed opportunities for research and teaching ventures, and strong transdisciplinary research.

The **gap between teaching and research staff** is growing.

**Nordic collaboration** is a strength of ÅAU and its staff has good connections to e.g. industry.

ÅAU is a **small university and therefore approachable for collaboration**.





# Past successes in impact at ÅAU

Åbo Akademi University has a strong and wide network of alumni around the world.

Many of the international applicants to positions at ÅAU are alumni who wish to return.

Strong presence and visibility in media compared to the small size.

CLL has many cooperation projects that support employment of different groups.

Successful projects in Nordic cooperation between professionals.

Employability of ÅAU graduates is high and many find employment internationally.

Personal contact between students and personnel is a strength at a small university.

Cooperation with Wärsilä in creation of an Innovation Centre in Vaasa.

Experience Lab has worked with meetings between the digital world and humans since 80's.

Discipline cooperation with relevant stakeholders: religion studies and the church, education and schools.

Psychology and logopedics have created tests for recognising learning difficulties of Finland-Swedish children.

Aboagora has continued to bring culture and science together since Turku was a European Capital of Culture in 2011.

Small size is an incentive to participate in cooperation and many researchers sit in various boards in order to be more visible.

Research at ÅAU contributed to diminishing of pollution at the Baltic Sea in area comparable to Denmark.

Personnel from ÅAU participates actively in the planning of the national teaching curricula.

Students were included in the planning of digitalisation of teacher education at ÅAU.

A successful trial of patenting a new teaching technique at the Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies.

Team NÅA Business Centre brings Business students från ÅAU and Novia together with local businesses.

The Achipelago Business Development Project was successful cooperation between ÅAU and Södertörn students and businesses in the archipelago.

Strong traditions, e.g. Brahebalen are strengths that bring current students and alumni together.

The autumn bus tour created a strong communal spirit among participants.

Small size has made it easier for people from different disciplines to meet.

By supporting Turku Pride, ÅAU has gained a lot of positive publicity and strengthened its brand through its values.

Researchers have tight connections to other researchers internationally.

