



Summary of Rector Mikael Lindfelt's address at the opening ceremony of Åbo Akademi University on 7 September 2023.



Aboa – Quo Vadis?

There are many different ways to perceive the current state of Åbo Akademi University. A recent report published by Koulutuksen Tutkimuslaitos (KTL) this summer provides a kind of picture. The report carried out a so-called stress test for Finland's universities, focusing on the changes that have occurred between 2019 and 2022/2023 with regard to some key indicators in the organisation.

The stress test includes 7 different indicators. In the "number of applicants" category, we are the best in Finland. Our increase from 2019 to 2023 was an astonishing 56% and the number of enrolled students has increased by 10%. In terms of the number of degrees awarded, we are in 9th place. The report also shows that the costs of our operations have increased by 7%. For example, it costs EUR 660 to produce a credit at ÅA, a sum that places us in fourth place, while costs per employee are highest at ÅA among all universities. Thus, Åbo Akademi University faces a real challenge.

All organisations have a fundamental issue that must constantly be revisited: What are we doing, and what are expected to do? What is our mission? What are we expected to do? Questions that are often heard and discussed are: Where is ÅA headed? And why are so many changes made at ÅA? Considering different options is crucial when determining your direction. As rector, I would be more than happy to enable the best research possible, the most attractive programmes, the best databases, and the most important devices.

It is the duty of the university management to ensure that we have the best possible conditions. Unfortunately, all these conditions cost a great deal of money, and a significant part of the dilemma lies in that the majority of this money is not derived from the quality of our output, but the degree to which we produce enough of what our sponsors demand. The task of Åbo Akademi University is to enable the highest possible quality of education and research for Finland's Swedish and bilingual context, but we do not receive funds for being a Swedish-speaking institution or for being the world's best universities on Biskopsgatan or in Academill.

The national funding model for universities since 2021 is currently being evaluated, and a possible new model to be applied from 2025 onwards as a measure of our activities is being developed. A major national parliamentary initiative to develop the country's research, development, and innovation culture will also be launched shortly. The consensus is broad: Finland needs to invest in research and development. Are we prepared at ÅA to meet this opportunity and challenge, and contribute to the projected vision?

Quo Vadis, where are we going? For me, it is clear to answer the question by referring to the documents whose sole purpose is to answer that very question: our strategy and our annual Plan of Action, which are de facto the basis on which we in the ÅA management

build our plans. In the coming year we will revise our strategy from two main aspects: an evaluation of the impact of the outside world and in the light of our economic situation.

We need to invest where we need to improve in order to have the necessary conditions, dare to abandon things that do not contribute to improvement and react to internal as well as external changes. An important theme for me this academic year is to develop a monitoring and quality culture in our activities, to create even more conditions for our researchers and teachers and to develop cooperation with our external partners, in the university world, politics, administration, in business and cultural life and with our alumni and the foundations that show their goodwill towards our activities.

Welcome to a new academic year, welcome to participate in the work of developing the future direction of Åbo Akademi University!