

University and research policy objectives in the elections:

# Research builds the future



PROFESSORILIITTO  
PROFESSORFÖRBUNDET  
FINNISH UNION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS



TIETEENTEKIJÖIDEN LIITTO  
FORSKARFÖRBUNDET  
The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers



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## The university and research sector has three main problems:

**Insufficient public funding, problems and a negative trend in research funding.**

**The university community has fewer opportunities to participate and have an influence.**

**Appreciation of higher education and research is not evident in political decisions.**

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### I Return to growth in funding

- **Index cuts in university funding must be discontinued.**
- **Universities' autonomy must be supported by changing the funding model.**
- **The share of predictable, long-term funding must be increased.**
- **The tendered share of public financing must no longer be increased.**
- **The percentage of research, development and innovation (RDI) funding must be increased to at least 4 per cent of the GDP.**

### Return to growth in funding

The university index was added to the Universities Act in connection with the university reform. Its purpose was to secure funding for universities also in tough economic times. The index has been halved or frozen several times over the past ten years. Right now, it is frozen until 2020. The freezing of the index means that universities will receive up to EUR 40 million less in funding in 2018.

In its background report on university funding, the Economic Policy Council concludes that universities actually receive less basic funding today than in 2002. The same report reveals that cutting the resources of universities is a rare phenomenon in international comparison. Other European countries have responded to the economic recession by ensuring sufficient funding for research, which is an investment in the future. Finland, on the other hand, has cut the funding of research institutions drastically.

Competition dominates the Finnish research funding system, and institutions receive their funding from multiple sources. The fragmented nature of research funding creates



difficulties for research, reducing the amount of basic research, and weakens the competitiveness of the university sector and Finland. The Academy of Finland grants funding only to approximately 10 per cent of applicants. Foundations have gained importance as research funders.

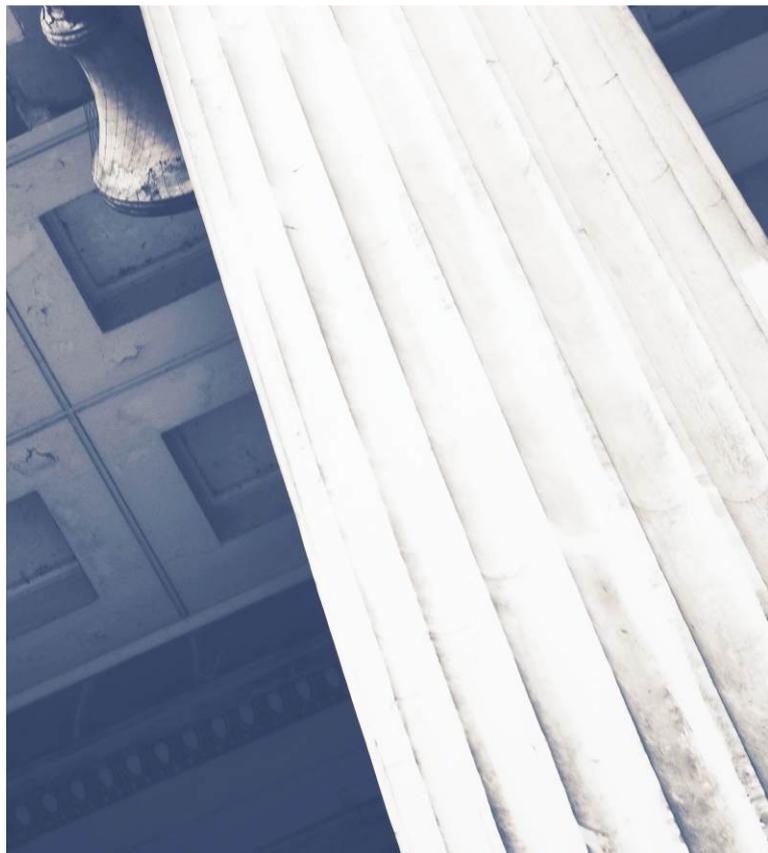
The funding granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture to all Finnish universities is about the same size as the budgets of Stanford University of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The budget of the University of Oxford is only slightly smaller than the total state funding to universities in Finland.

The European University Association classifies the Finnish university sector as a "declining system under pressure" (EUA Public Funding Observatory 2017). Usually, this class includes countries in East-Central Europe and Southern Europe.

Researchers know best what to study, which is why politicians should not be given more power to guide research choices by means of discretionary funding. Strategic funding of the universities must become more transparent.

According to the vision for higher education and research in 2030 by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), the universities' national funding model will be amended before the next funding period. The national funding model allocates the public funding to the universities by using a variety of criteria. So far, the funding model has been renewed piecemeal, changing the percentages of different funding elements. The funding model needs to be simplified: it is far too fragmented at the moment. Meanwhile, the autonomy of universities must be strengthened. Universities could be allowed to select the assessment criteria that are most appropriate for their operations. The current model fails to account for the differences between universities and their strategic focus areas.

The vision for higher education and research in 2030 and the vision and road map of the Research and Innovation Council both want to increase the share of research, development and innovation (RDI) funding to 4 per cent of GDP by 2030. This is an ambitious goal because the current percentage (in 2017) is 2.7%. Achieving the goal requires notable increases in R&D funding, both in the public and private sectors.



The EU's new Research and Innovation (R&I) Framework Programme (FP9) is currently under preparation. The funding within the programme is immensely important also for Finnish universities and research institutions. The amount of framework programme funding should be doubled to EUR 160 billion. This view was presented by, for example, Universities Finland UNIFI and the EUA.

Finland will hold the EU presidency from July to December in 2019. The presidency will be prepared in the troika, giving Finland an excellent opportunity and position to influence the discussion on funding and development. Finland must strive to put research and education funding high on the priority list of the EU's framework.

The upper limit of the tax-deduction of donations from communities and enterprises must be increased from EUR 250,000 to EUR 1 million. This would encourage more donations to universities and research institutions.



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## II We are the university – the university community makes the profit, we must respect our experts

- **Universities must improve their working conditions by increasing the share of permanent employment and reducing temporary jobs.**
- **The preconditions for research must be secured: research period systems must be supported with long-term funding.**
- **The university community must be given more opportunities to participate and have an influence by making amendments to the Universities Act.**
- **We must win back respect for expertise. Too many researchers have already left Finland.**
- **The application for Finnish and European research funding must be made more simple, and sufficient administrative resources must be allocated to support the application process.**
- **The copyright of researchers must be protected.**

### We are the university – the university community makes the profit

Some 70 per cent of the teaching and research staff at universities have temporary contracts. This percentage is far too high, and it does not even include doctoral students. The work carried out by university staff, namely research and teaching, is permanent by its nature, but the employment relationships are temporary. Consecutive temporary employment contracts are common, although they are illegal. The Employment Contracts Act should be amended.

Career paths in research are extremely fragmented. In order to retain the attractiveness of working at a university, careers must be made more predictable. Tenure tracks have not been helpful in this respect. Research is a long-term endeavour. Applying for funding from fragmented sources is time-consuming, leaving less time for actual research duties and degrading the quality of research. The application processes for both Finnish and European research funding must be simplified, and the applicants require more support.

The new Universities Act has been assessed twice (in 2012 and 2016). Both of the assessments concluded that the university community has fewer opportunities to participate and have an influence after the amendment. The Universities Act must be reformed. For example, the role of collegiate bodies and academic boards must be strengthened. University staff must be genuinely listened to in order to promote a sense of community.

The preparation of the new University of Tampere revealed that the relationship between the Universities Act and the universities' regulations are subject to interpretations. The Universities Act must specify clearly where any disputes are to be settled. The autonomy of universities under the Constitution of Finland must be respected. Violating the act should not go unpunished.



Furthermore, the assessments of the Universities Act clearly show that university staff have difficulties coping at work. The drastic cuts in basic funding had an immense effect on the number of teaching and research staff: the number of jobs has decreased by more than one thousand since 2010. The number of salaried staff at universities decreased by 9.4 per cent from October 2013 to September 2017. The number of teaching and research staff decreased by 4.2 per cent and other staff by up to 17.2 per cent over the same period. The workload of the remaining staff is unreasonable.

Teaching and research staff have less and less time for research. In order to achieve high-quality research, researchers need dedicated research periods that are free from administrative and teaching duties. Few Finnish universities are using the research period system at the moment.

Talents leave Finland to pursue a career in countries that offer better prerequisites for research. There is a growing deficit in the current account of expertise, particularly with regard to those with research training and a third cycle degree. In 2011–2016, 2,151 academic experts left Finland, while 1,175 came to Finland. The number of academic experts leaving Finland increased by 221 from 2011 to 2016. Many of them said that they wanted to work in a country where the atmosphere towards science is more favourable.

Researchers' copyright to their work must be preserved. Universities have introduced a variety of copyright agreement templates. The university can never decide the forum of publication for the researcher, this is one of the fundamental principles of scientific freedom and the rights of researchers. Researchers determine scientific quality.

The upper limit of tax-free scholarships must be increased from EUR 20,416 (2018) to EUR 30,000.

## III Active connection between research, education and society is Finland's strength

- **The high-quality connection between education and research is one of Finland's strengths. A national knowledge strategy is needed to support this.**
- **The government's target is to extend higher education to 50 per cent of the age group. This must not be pursued by compromising the quality of education or allocating fewer resources to education.**
- **The development of universities and universities of applied sciences must be based on current legislation. Universities are responsible for academic research and doctoral education.**
- **The entire educational system and society are responsible for cherishing a favourable atmosphere towards science.**

### Active connection between research, education and society as Finland's strength

A national knowledge strategy is needed in order to create a comprehensive overview of the situation and set objectives that apply to the entire educational system. The strategy must be prepared in parliamentary procedure and in extensive cooperation between different stakeholders.

The connection between research and teaching must be preserved in all universities. Instead of restructuring the university sector, the focus should be on fixing the issues with funding. Structural questions should be left to the autonomous universities to settle.

Finnish universities are not too small. Each of the world's top ten universities has fewer students than the University of Helsinki. Economies of scale do not apply to top universities.



The quality of teaching and research improves when universities compete for the most talented researchers, teachers and students, who come to the universities that provide the best prerequisites.

The target set in the vision for higher education and research in 2030 is to extend higher education to 50 per cent of each age group. Meeting this target requires sufficient resources. In order to attract more students, higher education institutions must offer more places to new students. The institutions have already taken several steps to improve their graduation rates, and any further advances in this area require notable investments in teaching resources. Of course, the number of completed degrees could be increased by teaching less and producing shorter degrees. However, this would have a negative impact on the quality of education and be contrary to the values previously followed in Finnish education policy.

The binary model is still a good foundation for developing the Finnish higher education system. Even members of political parties support the binary model. Universities and universities of applied sciences have their own strengths. There is no need for legislation that covers all higher education instructions. The different degree objectives of universities and universities of applied sciences must be preserved. Cooperation in teaching has been promoted in many ways, and the effects of this must be assessed before making any new legislative amendments.

Doctoral education belongs to universities, as do professorships.

Fortunately, companies have shown increasing interest towards hiring graduates with doctorates, but their expertise is still underused.

The duty of promoting lifelong learning is set out in the Universities Act. Universities already play an important role in promoting continuous learning. Universities need sufficient resources in order to strengthen this work further. In the development of adult education, the focus should shift from supply to demand and on securing the educational opportunities of individuals.

Cooperation between Finnish higher education institutions and businesses is already the most active in the world (An assessment on the cooperation between higher education institutions and working life by the Association of Finnish Independent Education Employers (AFIEE), 2016). The diverse forms of cooperation between Finnish universities and businesses serve as a model for other countries.

Decisions should be based more strongly on research. Researchers take part in public debates in many ways, and they should be respected and rewarded for their work.

It is extremely worrying that many researchers who study socially 'sensitive' topics have become subject to hate speech. According to reports by the Committee for Public Information (TJNK), this has an effect on researchers' willingness to take part in discussions on such topics. Universities and politicians must take a stronger stance to condemn hate speech towards researchers.

Finnish science barometers reveal that Finns have an extremely positive attitude towards science and research. This attitude should be reflected in political decisions.

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## The outcome:

**Finland's status as a country built on knowledge and expertise will improve.**

**University staff will work even more profitably than today in well-being communities.**

**Finnish society will gain international recognition for making decisions that are based on research.**

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