

## **Tampere University**

### **Speech by President Mari Walls at the opening of the academic year on 10 September 2019**

*Honoured guests, dear colleagues, alumni and friends of Tampere University. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to celebrate the opening of our University's first academic year!*

The idea to establish a unique new higher education community in Tampere can be traced back to more than five years ago when it was first formulated during discussions involving Kai Öistämö, Tero Ojanperä and Matti Höyssä, who presided over the Boards of the three Tampere-based higher education institutions, and then-Presidents of the institutions Kaija Holli, Markku Kivikoski and Markku Lahtinen. In spring 2014, the three institutions commissioned Stig Gustavson to identify areas where they could establish a leading international reputation and determine the necessary steps to achieve this vision.

The 21 founding members signed the Charter of Tampere University Foundation on 20 April 2017. As set out in the Charter, the old, distinguished University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology were to be merged to create a new university with the legal status of a foundation. The new university was also to become the majority shareholder of Tampere University of Applied Sciences. The agreement whereby the City of Tampere assigned its ownership of Tampere University of Applied Sciences Ltd to Tampere University Foundation was signed on 15 February 2018.

Our new Tampere University started its operations at the beginning of this year. Today marks the 253rd day since the launch of the youngest university in Finland and in Europe.

On this historical day when we celebrate the opening of our new University's first academic year, I want to extend my warmest thanks to all those who have made this day possible. Over the years, the leaders of the three higher education institutions have had to create bold visions and make sometimes difficult decisions. The 21 founding members of Tampere University Foundation have pledged their full support and backing to the new University.

One thing is certain. We would not be here without the strong commitment, creativity and hard work of the members of our diverse community. I especially want to thank all our staff for their ground-breaking work in creating our new University and the student unions – Tamy, TTYU and the new TREY – for their strong and forward-looking contributions.

We would also not be here without the Transitional Board of Tampere University and our current Board. Under the guidance of its Chair, Professor Marja Makarow, the Transitional Board successfully completed the huge undertaking of laying the foundations for the organisational structures that were necessary to launch the new University's operations on 1 January 2019. The work of the Transitional Board was supported by the Boards of the former two universities, chaired by Kari Neilimo and Tero Ojanperä. The first Board of the new Tampere University has been chaired by PhD Ilkka Herlin since December 2018. Our in-depth

collaboration with the City of Tampere, carried out under the supervision of Mayers Anna-Kaisa Ikonen and Lauri Lyly, is also a critically important resource for our University.

*Dear audience,*

Tampere University begins its journey in an era of global turmoil marked not only by climate change and demographic challenges but also by economic and political turbulence and the polarisation of information sharing and attitudes.

This time calls for universities to forge strong new paths for societal renewal. To address great global challenges, we need knowledge that is based on in-depth research, novel combinations of expertise, and broad-ranging collaborations with stakeholders in Finland and across the globe.

The strengths and significant achievements of the former two universities provide a solid foundation for our young University to further increase its impact.

The roots of the former University of Tampere can be traced back to the School of Social Sciences that was established in 1925 and relocated to Tampere in 1960. The former Tampere University of Technology was founded in 1965, initially as a subsidiary of Helsinki University of Technology. It was the vision and support of the City of Tampere, the region's industry and business and other stakeholders that ultimately swayed the decision in favour of Tampere as the location of both universities.

Looking back on the 1960s, we can see how Tampere grew into the dynamic hub it is today: besides the two universities, Tampere saw the establishment of a central hospital, the first indoor ice-hockey arena in Finland, new city districts such as Hervanta, and soon the Särkänniemi Amusement Park along with the iconic Näsinneula Observation Tower. The undercurrent behind the city's urban evolution was the transformation – supported by the two universities – of the formerly industrial Tampere into a knowledge-intensive economy.

Now, half a century later, our new Tampere University and Tampere University of Applied Sciences constitute an exceptionally multidisciplinary community with *technology, health and society* as its areas of priority. The potential to create novel combinations of these areas and achieve breakthroughs by conducting research at the interface between disciplines is our greatest strength. Together, Tampere University and Tampere University of Applied Sciences cover the entire research, development and innovation cycle and all the levels of higher education

The vibrant city of Tampere remains our closest supporter and living lab. New “Nokias” of sustainable development are perhaps now evolving in Hiedanranta where our researchers and students are developing smart solutions for sustainable urban development and circular economy in collaboration with companies, associations and local residents. Our University is helping to create economic vitality and support pioneering developments both at the regional and international levels.

*Dear audience,*

After the merger of the two universities in Tampere, there are altogether 13 universities in Finland. The new Tampere University is among the top two or three of all the universities in Finland, depending on the indicator that one chooses to use. Our total student enrolment accounts for 14% of all university students in Finland, and we employ 12% of all academic teaching and research staff. Our share of the Finnish universities' total funding is also 12%. Last year we had an overall budget of €320 million.

It should be noted that the establishment of the new Tampere University and higher education community has been the most important higher education reform project in Finland since the national university reform in 2010. It is therefore no surprise that the debates about the governance model of Finnish universities have resurfaced as a result of the Tampere3 process.

The goal of the 2010 university reform was to bring about a greater degree of financial and administrative autonomy for universities and thereby facilitate the development of the quality and impact of research and education. Universities were separated from the state and became either legal persons under public law or foundation universities under private law. Universities and higher education institutions were merged in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, Turku and Eastern Finland. Now that we have been developing the new Tampere University and our higher education community, we have been able to learn from the experiences of others. I believe the key to a successful university merger is to build a culture of trust and openness and foster a strong sense a community and inclusion to create a positive campus atmosphere, encourage creativity and scientific courage and enhance our University's success.

Having a predictable research and innovation policy – and subsequent budget predictability – that extends beyond a single parliamentary term is the most important operational requirement for universities. The vision 2030 for higher education and research drawn up by the Ministry of Education and Culture is a prominent part of the programme of Prime Minister Antti Rinne's Government, which holds promise of greater financial stability for universities. An increase in the level of core funding will pave the way for the renewal of universities and the strengthening of expertise. For universities to maintain their potential for renewal, it is essential that the pledges included in Government Programme are translated into concrete financing decisions in next year's government budget.

Besides a stable level of core funding, supplementary external funding is becoming increasingly important for universities. Supplementary funding accounts for approximately 40% of our total budget in 2019. I am confident that interesting and pioneering high-quality research that advances the frontiers of science will continue to receive funding. We will invest increasing time and effort to helping our researchers secure international research grants.

Finland's population is equivalent to 0.1% of the total world population and our Gross National Product accounts for 1% of the global GNP. Increasing our international attractiveness is vital for the success of Finnish universities and our entire society. Universities can increase their

international attractiveness and drawing power, for example, by developing their language policy, promoting a sense of community and building increasingly stronger links between education, research and working life. In addition, the permit processes of international staff and students and the integration of foreign professionals and their family members into Finnish society and labour market must be improved. It has been a great pleasure to learn more about the projects that support the achievement of these goals, such as the Hidden Gems programme that promotes employment opportunities for the spouses of our international researchers.

*Dear audience,*

The new Tampere University and higher education community have been evolving in step with the construction of the local tramway network – as has been clearly seen by our people who have been frequently travelling between the Hervanta, Kauppi and city centre campuses on Tampere3 business in the past few years. The tramway will be completed with minute attention to detail before launch, whereas for us it is full steam ahead with research, teaching and learning while we continue developing our new University.

What can help us get through the construction phase of both the tramway and our new University is having something to look forward to, whether a smoother commute or a more high-impact University and an inspirational vision of research that brings social and economic value and helps us change the world. I want to again extend my heartfelt thanks to all the members of our university community who have worked so hard and tolerated much uncertainty throughout this process.

Our culture and higher education community will continue to evolve through interactions on our campuses and in Tampere, the surrounding region and the world beyond.

In the past spring, we have been working together to formulate our community-wide values – *openly, courageously, critically and responsibly* and by fostering and nurturing *diversity, erudition and learner-centredness*. The Board of our University is set to confirm our shared values in a few weeks' time.

This autumn we will be refining our University's strategy in collaboration with our community members and stakeholders. In addition to impact, a strong international dimension, ambitious research and teaching, strong links with working life, industry and business, and the synergy benefits of our higher education community, I would like our strategy to highlight the wellbeing and evolving competencies of our staff and the important role of students as part of our community.

Dialogue and constructive criticism are essential for developing and continuously improving our work community. Satisfied, competent and motivated people are our greatest asset.

*Dear audience,*

During the Welcome Week I had the pleasure of meeting the 3,800 new degree and exchange students who joined our University this autumn. Their excitement and curiosity was both tangible and contagious.

I encourage all students to dream and be curious, have the courage to ask questions and challenge the status quo, acquire a unique set of skills and seek international exposure. Remember that the world is open and that the University offers you an excellent stepping-stone to studying abroad or pursuing an academic career. For those who are older but have an equal thirst for learning, we want to be a friendly companion for continuous learning. Our doors are open to all learners.

Our graduates – our alumni – make sure our University's impact is felt far and wide. They transfer the knowledge and expertise generated by our University to benefit society. I welcome alumni of all ages to join us in developing our university community and creating new and mutually beneficial networks and collaboration models. You are all highly respected lifelong members of our community.

The two former universities provided Tampere University with a valuable dowry: their close ties with a broad range of stakeholders and collaborative partners. We are committed to strengthening and fostering these relationships and forging new ones. We want to be an approachable partner that brings added value to our collaborators.

I want to conclude by saying that *we are the University*: you and me, all our researchers whether they receive a grant or are employed as professors, lecturers or teachers, all our staff whether they are performing expert or administrative functions, our students, our emeritus faculty and all of you, our dear friends, who are with us today. Our University would not be a university without the contribution, presence, interest and commitment of everyone here.

Our strong legacy obligates us to look forward to a future where the union of scientific knowledge, education and collaboration is an unrivalled force for progress. *Impact through Integration - Human Potential Unlimited!*

I wish the entire University community a successful academic year!