

Speech at the opening of the 2024–2025 academic year on 3 September 2024 by President Keijo Hämäläinen

Dear audience, staff, students and friends of Tampere University,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the opening of the academic year. It is delightful to see so many members of our university community, along with our collaboration partners and supporters. Together, we are building a brighter future and fostering knowledge.

Dear audience,

Finland has once again been ranked the happiest country in the world, a distinction we should celebrate and appreciate, given the many advantages we enjoy compared to the global population. However, when examining the overall development of our country, several indicators suggest we are not moving in the right direction. The outlook for our national economy, demographic shifts and competition in the global market necessitate innovative thinking and changes, also from our universities. The challenges facing our national economy are reflected in our ability to sustain our welfare state, the deterioration of which is increasingly dividing our values and society. For this reason, we at Tampere University have a responsibility to address these societal challenges through science and education and help to preserve our nation's unity by fostering knowledge.

In the midst of efforts to address the national deficit, the Finnish government has made substantial investments in research and development in line with the Act on Research and Development Funding in 2024–2030, which was passed with broad parliamentary support. Thanks to the robust RDI ecosystem in the Tampere region, these investments will create new opportunities for Tampere University and the region's industry and business to pursue renewal and growth. To meet the demand for specialist expertise, our government has initiated a national doctoral education pilot with a total budget of €255 million, aiming to train 1,000 new doctoral graduates to support RDI activities in industry and business. Tampere University has already welcomed, or will soon welcome, 106 new doctoral students as part of this pilot programme. Through this pilot, Finnish universities are looking to rethink doctoral education across all fields, including those not included in the pilot programme. Earlier in the summer, universities published ambitious national recommendations for reforming doctoral education in Finland. The goals are to make doctoral education more attractive, offer flexible pathways for admission to doctoral programmes, strengthen ties with the professional world, diversify employment opportunities and speed up graduation. We can achieve all these goals without compromising the quality of doctoral education, as long as we remember that the scope and quality of education are not the same thing.

The shifts in global politics and ongoing crises have underscored the crucial need for Europe, including Finland, to ensure the availability of specialist expertise. Universities play an important role in providing this expertise to support and sustain essential societal functions, even as they strive to reform their activities. However, this is challenging within our current, increasingly results-based funding landscape, which tends to favour certain fields of research while neglecting others. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen the core funding allocated to universities as part of our national security of supply.

In the coming years, Europe will invest heavily in semiconductor technology and expertise to improve supply chain resilience and reduce external dependencies. Tampere boasts world-leading expertise in semiconductor technology, both in the private sector and within Tampere University. Tampere is both eager and well-equipped to take the national lead in this field as part of a European network of partners. The €40 million System-in-Package Fabrication (SiPFAB) pilot line, funded by the EU and the Finnish government, provides an excellent foundation for these efforts. Tampere secured this substantial investment as a result of active collaboration among stakeholders across the entire region, showcasing the exceptional strength of our regional ecosystem.

Dear audience,

Many young people and students in Finland are struggling with their well-being. The reasons are complex, despite efforts to find simple answers and universal solutions. While some students are still feeling the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown, the root causes are societal. Mental health issues among students directly impact their academic progress, with health reasons now surpassing working alongside studies as the leading cause of delayed graduation. As a result, we have made accommodating the growing diversity among learners our top priority in the development of education.

Social well-being provides a strong foundation for overall well-being. In our community, interactions between students foster their social well-being, as students support one another. The student union and student associations play a crucial role in promoting these interactions as they provide indispensable support for students' academic and psychological growth. Given this, it seems contradictory to question the tradition of automatically enrolling all students in their student union. This is the only way to reach all students. I hope the rapporteur appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to review this automatic membership arrives at the same obvious conclusion.

Dear audience

Our government has recently initiated a new programme to combat racism in Finland. It is crucial that discussions about racism are not politicized. It is also easy to assume that universities, as international organisations, are free from all forms of racism. However, we must work hard to identify and eliminate any hidden structural racism within our University to create a truly equitable community.

To foster excellence and innovation, we need diversity. Numerous studies show that creativity and innovation thrive in diverse teams. Our demographics also call for a much broader approach to education-based immigration. For this to succeed, it is essential to send a unified message abroad that students and staff are welcome in Finland and encouraged to stay. Unfortunately, recent changes in immigration policy may not fully support this message.

Dear collaboration partners,

In our efforts to develop and renew education, we often focus on the professionals our society needs. However, as Professor Hannu Heikkinen suggested in his column, we should also consider the kind of society our students need. It is important to address the expectations of both parties. A flexible transition from university to the professional world requires effort from both students and employers. In the Tampere region, the dialogue and collaboration between higher education institutions, companies and the public sector are exceptionally strong. The Tampere Chamber of Commerce and Industry plays an important unifying role in this collaboration. The City of Tampere has commendably committed to enhancing the region's attractiveness and retention in line with our strategic collaboration agreement and is effectively advocating for regional interests, which is also vital for our University. Regional collaboration is essential, as we should not only encourage international professionals to study or work in Tampere but also to live here and become active participants in our society.

Dear members of the university community,

After a few turbulent years, we are doing well. Both survey results and the general atmosphere on our campuses demonstrate that we are a united community working together in a spirit of mutual respect. Our University is increasingly portrayed in the media through the impact of our research and education. According to a reputation survey, our collaboration partners have an increased appreciation for our work. Our financial outlook for next year is also significantly better, and our University's profile is closely aligned with the growing public investments in RDI activities. Of course, we still have a way to go to improve our operations, but I am certain we will achieve our goals by working together constructively. We can confidently look forward to a bright future and set our sights even higher.

Dear audience,

We have reason to celebrate in 2025! The roots of Tampere University can be traced back a hundred years, and we will host various events throughout next year to honour our history.

The year 2025 marks the centennial anniversary of the establishment of the Civic College in Helsinki, which signifies the beginning of our education and research in social sciences.

The year 2025 also marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Tampere University of Technology, initially established as a subsidiary of Helsinki University of Technology, which later evolved into a leading university in technology.

In addition, the provision of medical education in Tampere celebrated its 50th anniversary in the year before last.

These roots and traditions paved the way for the multidisciplinary Tampere University, created by the merger between the University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology in 2019. Our University's priority areas of technology, health and society are based on the strengths of our predecessor institutions.

I invite you to join us in celebrating the year 2025! The celebrations will include events and communications for the university community and our partners throughout the year. The highlights will be an annual gala at Tampere Hall and our doctoral conferment ceremony.

I declare the 2024-2025 academic year open at Tampere University.

I wish you a very successful academic year!

Thank you.