

Speech at the opening ceremony of the academic year on 5 September 2022, Rector Sari Lindblom

Dear members of the University community and friends of the University, honoured guests,
Europe has been in turmoil in recent years.

The 2010s and the beginning of the 2020s have even been called the European decade of crises. After the economic upheavals of the early years of the decade, events such as the refugee crisis, Brexit and the worrying developments in the rule of law in Hungary and Poland put a strain on Europe. Europe's unity has also been threatened by the global coronavirus pandemic and Russia's attack on Ukraine.

Crises always put the core of the community, its values and identity, to the test.

The European identity is founded on a shared set of values and history. Our shared values include both equal human rights and the sovereignty of states. European culture is also characterised by an awareness of history, emphasising the critical reflection of past events. The notion that the world wars of the previous century must not be repeated has been impressed upon our minds.

Understanding our history guides us to work towards building the future. The best way to build the future is first to be aware of its foundations. We need research-based knowledge to arrive at the right solutions. We also need faith in our ability to influence our lives, our environment and our society through action.

Dear members of the University community,

In the middle of uncertainty and transformation, universities hold a key role in evoking hope. For centuries, universities have unwaveringly continued to work for the benefit of societies in the middle of war, political conflict, epidemics and many other crises affecting us. We have at our disposal the power of research-based knowledge, which gives us a role in guiding the future. Our solution is Bildung.

Bildung is both a value and a core duty of our University. As one of our four values, it is our moral conscience that guides us in the right direction and brings us continuity and open-mindedness.

Bildung is about understanding culture and history, and about empathy. To understand and investigate the sustainability of political systems, different cultures or the climate crisis, we need the ability to put ourselves in the position of others.

Bildung as a duty requires active action from us. New research-based knowledge shapes our worldview, which is why Bildung too evolves with the times. Bildung is a pool of knowledge and skills enabling us to act and solve problems.

By educating future makers of change, we are increasing this educational pool. Bildung is about continuous learning and the development of skills throughout life. We offer opportunities for this not only to students completing their first higher education degree and doctoral researchers pursuing an academic career, but also to people updating their skills to meet the needs of a new professional field.

This academic year, we are celebrating the profession of teaching. Teaching based on research is one of the core duties of universities. Right now, we are living in a period of transformation in teaching accelerated by the pandemic. During the year, central pedagogical innovations will be highlighted in a range of events and discussions, contemplating the kinds of teachers and learning practices we need.

The thematic year is also a celebration of teaching. The Teachers' Academy, a network of our top teachers unique to Finland and internationally, is celebrating its 10th anniversary. The network, which boosts the quality of teaching and learning as well as collegial support, is a significant advocate of education. This milestone should be celebrated by the entire community.

Honoured public,

The spark for continuous learning and advanced education stems from curiosity. Curiosity leads us to use space telescopes to seek ever higher-resolution images of the depths of the universe. The same curiosity is helping us develop smart jumpsuits to study the motor development of infants. When our researchers work to improve urban air quality or look for sustainable methods in food production, that is Bildung founded on curiosity.

The inspiration to discover and develop something new is more than momentary insights. In solving global challenges with the help of science and research, we are looking years and decades into the future. The Rule of Law Centre is a cluster of research and action, a result of long-term efforts to change the world. The centre has operated under the auspices of the University's Faculty of Law since 2021.

The Rule of Law Centre makes expertise on the rule of law in Finland available to international operators in need of it. This expertise of ours is built upon Finnish experiences of civil war and Finlandisation, which put our political system to the test. We have learned from these events.

In solving key questions on the equality of individuals before the law, our top-level expertise in this area serves to safeguard democracy globally. The Rule of Law Centre endeavours to extend freedom, stability and prosperity to all in a sustainable manner.

A long-term approach and faith in the future also are needed for tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. Our University aims to be an internationally recognised and attractive multidisciplinary hub of sustainability science by 2030.

We are carrying on the work of our previous Rector Jari Niemelä, who passed away in the summer, in solving sustainability challenges. Later in the autumn, we will focus on the sustainability theme in a memorial seminar for Jari.

Education as an activity is also about public engagement. It is about highlighting your research in public discussion, collaborating with policymakers and promoting science and research. Many

of our researchers have made themselves continuously available to provide citizens and decision-makers with background information on the pandemic, Brexit and the war in Ukraine. This important work can be seen every day in the media. It also lays the groundwork for societal decision-makers to carry out their task using research-based knowledge.

Dear listeners,

Bildung is the only renewable resource that is entirely in our hands. If we nurture it with determination, it will thrive. We must safeguard high-quality research and education based on it.

Finland needs more highly educated talent. The number of student places in higher education institutions especially in the Uusimaa region must be increased, and the necessary funds must be allocated. Improving competence levels requires the long-term strengthening of educational resources. We need a systematic approach and a long-term funding programme to raise the rate of higher education graduates to above 50% among younger age groups. In this way, we will ensure Finland's competitiveness and success in the future.

Reliable university funding ensures the freedom and impact of research and strengthens the autonomy of universities. If the Finnish funding base can be secured for the long term, we will also be an attractive target for international research funding. In these times, the university index is particularly important to us, and it must be preserved.

Domestic resources must be allocated sensibly to ensure our success in European funding schemes and our ability to attract international talent. Allocating funds for science and research on the basis of quality is a purposeful way of supporting strong units in their competition in international fields of research. The goals of science and research policy must also be reflected in Finland's increasingly active participation in the drafting of the European Union's research policy, and the development of the EU's research and education areas.

Nurturing Bildung can generate social and economic benefits. University-based business incubators, the commercialisation of research-based innovations, and collaboration with businesses constitute an important link to making the full potential of highly educated specialists available to society. By investing in them, we can serve as boosters of novel innovations and research-based business activities, introducing expertise in commercialisation, innovation and entrepreneurship in entirely new fields.

Dear friends of the University,

A predictable and long-term approach to science and education policy guarantees our ability to bear responsibility for the development of European competence.

The European Union is founded on the establishment of peace and cooperation, and collaboration among European universities has long been intensifying. The University of Helsinki is a proud member of the Una Europa university alliance, which aims to develop a

common European university of the future. Una Europa comprises eleven leading European universities with half a million students and nearly a hundred thousand staff.

The study opportunities offered by Una Europa online make the latest research-based knowledge available to millions. When we seek solutions to challenges together, we are not against each other: we are building a shared future. Collaboration is a world-changing force, and Bildung speaks for peace.

The will to collaborate across boundaries stems from us. This spring, Russia's attack on Ukraine deeply affected many members of our community. The occasion elicited a tremendous willingness to help, and we quickly launched a fundraising campaign to support Ukrainian researchers and students. The proceeds have made it possible, among other things, to grant scholarships to students, enabling them to continue their studies at the University of Helsinki after the disruption in their home country.

The premise of the ongoing campaign is to nurture the academic freedom of our international scholarly community and to safeguard research, teaching and studying threatened by war. So far, we have received €64,000 in donations from the University community as well as from foundations, businesses and friends of the University. It is wonderful to see how our supporters share our belief in the possibility of changing the world. "With the power of knowledge – for the world", our University's vision, is being realised through joint action. We are building bridges with the help of education.

Distinguished guests,

In recent years, life has become more uncertain. While humanity is living in decisive moments with regard to climate change, war is being waged close by, and we have also been tested by a global pandemic. The effects are evident both on the societal level and in the lives of individuals.

Now more than ever, we need wisdom of the heart. To this end, Bildung is both capital and action that all of us can take to benefit the world. The University and all of us working and studying here can instill hope for the future and reduce uncertainty by providing research-based answers and applying them in our own daily actions.

The University of Helsinki has more than 40,000 students and staff members, in addition to which our alumni community encompasses over 200,000 members. Together, we are a tremendous force making a difference for Bildung.

I wish all members of our University community enthusiasm, hope and moments of insight in the coming academic year.

I wish you a great new academic year!