



Statement of the Student Union on the balancing of the finances of the University of Turku

The Student Union of the University of Turku is grateful for the opportunity to comment the balancing of the finances of the University of Turku. The statement of the Student Union is divided into two separate parts. The first, public part, takes stances generally on the balancing of the finances, change negotiations and their implementation. The other, non-public part takes stance to the confidential material provided by the university for Faculty Boards, separate institutions and the Student Union.

The Student Union grounds its statement in three issues: the objectives set by the university itself, the objectives set by the Board of the university for the process and the consideration of students' wishes and objectives.

X X X – three crosses as a sign of failure

The Student Union cannot say that any of these issues had succeeded so far in the process - which is, however, still ongoing.

1. Lack of vision and deficient functional justifications

The Student Union has, [from the start of the process](#), acknowledged the need to do something for the deficit of the regular activities of the university, which became chronic after the 2015 educational cuts and the succeeding [adaptation and development activities](#). However, it is evident for the Student Union that the scale and measures of the as such necessary balancing are the university's own choice and there is no sense in doing that by weakening basic functions. Instead, one should improve their operational capability. Functional justifications, however, are nowhere to be seen, and the package sent for statements is very focused on the finances of human resources. The capability of the university has neither been comprehensively, or even narrowly, utilised to construct the package.

The Universities Act mentions the following mission of the university:

1. to promote independent academic research
2. to promote academic and artistic education
3. to provide research-based higher education
4. To educate students to serve their country and humanity at large (together with the Student Union, Section 46, Universities Act 558/2009)



5. In carrying out their mission, the universities shall promote lifelong learning, interact with the surrounding society and promote the social impact of university research findings and artistic activities

This is the real mission of the university and the basic funding provided for the university has been freely provided to carry out this mission. Part of the mission has been overshadowed in the process emphasising yield in the financing model of universities. The financing model is only a tool to distribute funds and has never reflected the scope of the mission of the university. The issues that the model is unable to appreciate are threatened to be excluded from university values: especially comprehensive education both within and outside the university.

Finland has universities with narrower focus than the University of Turku, perhaps one with a wider one. Indeed, it is also important to consider what we aim at. The mission of the university starts, inter alia, from the multi-disciplinarity of research and promoting education. The introduction of the strategy states that in realising our mission our strength is the comprehensive multi-disciplinarity.

The Student Union understands that realising the multi-disciplinarity of the university and the disciplinary choices have to be subject to critical review. However, that has not been done but the basis of the analysis has been simplifying cost-return-ratio. In addition, critical analysis has not been conducted on the expansion of the degree programmes and admissions of the last 10 years. The Student Union has criticised their occasional narrowness, economic sustainability and lack of wider goal orientation. Most recently, the Student Union called for the wider goal orientation last autumn and the University Board agreed with the thoughts of the Student Union.

The University Board also took stance on its own to the above-mentioned issues in its task: the purpose was to review functions, giving up of which will not decrease the ability of the university to carry out its basic mission.

2. Management without knowledge

The University Board required the following from the financial balancing project: “the planning activities aim at measures proposed to the Board, prepared in the organisation of the university **in an open and comprehensive manner** and with the necessary change negotiations. At the moment, the only issues that is about to be realised is the “necessary change negotiations”.

The Student Union understands that one should aim at keeping the change situation short. However, in a community where the core of all



activities

is the critical analysis of knowledge, a change that concerns all cannot be managed in silence as a project of a small group. The Strategy of the University of Turku also recognises this:

At the University of Turku, management is based on knowledge and open interaction. Management is a service task for us: high-quality superior work supports the performance of the community and its individuals in an optimal manner.

The Student Union has heard an unfortunate number of stories of how that service task has been realised. Measures have not been searched together, but they were head for the first time in the media or when they were on the negotiations table. And this only applies to the internal communication of the work community. The student community has been even less aware and involved in the process. The first information and discussion event directed at students is organised after the end of the circulation for comment of the faculties and three months after the start of the process.

The event and the circulation for comment only arrived after the University Board repeated their task: "It is important in the preparation that the university community is optimally involved and informed, contributing to the preparation of the balancing programme". Unfortunately, the task has been realised in the worst possible manner.

The Student Union criticises the schedule decided by management for the circulation for comment of the Faculty Boards, separate institutions and the Student Union. A little more than a week was a ridiculous schedule for consulting a wide community. After that, it became clear that there was never an intention to realise the consultation of the community widely. Change negotiations were decided to continue and the material for comment was declared non-public – there was no completed proposal for comment and one could not discuss the material with the community.

TYU was shocked by the material it received and requested immediate additional information, as the background material of the statement was of poor quality and did not provide a comprehensive image of the planned actions. The university refused to respond to the Student Union in writing, but the Executive Board of the Student Union was organised a hearing event in six days. We would like to thank the management for the open and honest discussion at the event. However, we consider that entire process very strange, since we mainly asked for the specification of basic information, uniformity and relative figures essential for the entire process in a situation where it was evident that the management had the information we requested and we were already dealing with the information



confidentially. For example, we have still not received information on the faculty-specific amount of planned savings.

Our community needs to conduct wider discussion on knowledge-based management – is it just knowledge for the management or knowledge for the entire community. The university has always been managed by knowledge; accessible knowledge and its justifications lead the decision-making in a scientific community. Unfortunately, one result of our statement was that **the knowledge presented so far cannot serve as the basis of the balancing of the finances of the University of Turku, and decisions should not be made based on them.** Better knowledge can exist somewhere out of reach of the community, but they have not come from the community or shared with the community.

We deem that during the process, the university has over-interpreted the confidentiality of the documents and the preparation of the planned actions, especially in relation to the mission of the process.

3. Ignoring students

“The internal division of funding at the university should be just, target-oriented and long-term. The distribution of resources should not be uniquely based on the financial model utilised by the Ministry of Education and Culture, but internal financing of the university should promote the strategic aims of the University and encourage high-quality education and research.”

“The internal funding of the University should ensure all units the possibility for high-quality activities and their development. Internal funding shall encourage multidisciplinary cooperation. A unit widely providing teaching for other units should be considered in the funding.”

- TYY political agenda

All internal distribution of funds, not only that distributed to the faculties, must be transparent for it to be just and for the community to feel it purposeful.

The university pursues succeeding in the universities' funding model. TYY wishes to remind that the model emphasises education, even though the internal model emphasise research as a scientific university. We contributed to the change negotiations by stating that [students should not become the payers of the financial balancing model](#). The material we have received has not helped us to make the final assessment on the impact on students.



We are still concerned of the students support services, including the services for doctoral researchers. The university seeks in total ca. 5% savings (15 million out of the 300 million annual budget) and it would be detrimental to extend the savings in the average scope into these important services. The educational mission of the university has been considerably increased, while the support for education has been significantly narrowed. Successful education requires expert support both for students and teachers. **We demand that the savings of the support services of education remain below this 5% general savings target!**

Students require that all members of the community have power in matters concerning themselves. This is the cornerstone of student's involvement but also of democracy. Similarly, faculties and their representatives must have a possibility to influence matters that concern themselves. It is one of the cornerstones of psychosocial well-being to feel being able to influence matters that are important and concern oneself. These issues are currently not being realised in the extent deserved by this community.

In addition to degree education, we are also concerned over other education supply of the university. For example, the Centre for Language and Communication Studies should be able to provide a sufficiently wide supply of languages and courses in order to meet the needs of an international multidisciplinary university. In addition to the extensive supply, sufficient resources are necessary for obligatory language teaching, including maintaining its supply.

Other considerations

Due to the short preparation time and insufficient background information, the Student Union was forced to mainly focus on the material sent for comments. The Student Union considers it positive to think about income increase and innovative saving manners. However, it is difficult to consider them when the community has so little information of the overall picture and more specific objectives.

We have a positive approach, for example, towards the measures supporting the sustainable development goals of the university, for example, decreasing the energy costs of the university (energy solutions for premises, such as solar power; renewing/developing equipment into more energy-efficient etc.) and decreasing flights. Often, these sort of savings may require initial investment. The university should have the courage to use its balance for these actions, as long as they genuinely strengthen the balance of the finances of regular



activities in the longer term. It would be even better if they promoted better and more sustainable world globally.

The university also considers income increase through graduation times. The Student Union supports fluent studying, and it is the minimum requirement of the university education to organise it so that graduation in target schedule is possible. However, TYY reminds that a crucial factor slowing down studies is working and insufficient income of students. The university should influence to increase the level of study subsidy if the university wants to promote the fluency of studies.

Increasing the response rate for bachelors' feedback is a good example of an action where developing university practices makes basic functions more effective and improve the financial gain of the university. The Student Union is happy for the preliminary information of the number of responses to the bachelors' feedback of late 2022 – student feedback is the most important tool for developing education.

Turku, 3 February 2023

Akseli Tiitta

Chair of the Executive Board

Student Union of the University of

Turku

Riina Lumme

Secretary General

Student Union of the University of Turku