

Martin Meyer, Vice-rector of University of Vaasa
Opening Ceremony of the Academic Year 2021–2022
6.9.2021

Thank you it's a great pleasure to take part in this opening and commencement ceremony.

There is good reason to start the new academic year with optimism.

As we have heard, the university will begin this year as one of the world's top 500 institutions. You will have heard the news about the Times Higher Education University World Rankings last week and earlier today.

It is great to join a university that has achieved to be on the global map! This accomplishment is due to the hard work of colleagues across the entire university - jointly with our students and stakeholders. Once more, congratulations to all! Let us mark and celebrate this achievement.

The detailed results show that we produce high-quality, internationally recognised work. Our research papers are highly cited and the result of a high degree of international collaboration.

Indeed, I was delighted to see that our university is rated top three in Finland for international outlook. International outlook is more than just a category in a ranking - it is what we do and live. We do not only work in international networks, welcome and engage with visiting international professors, we are also proud to see our own researchers take up visiting positions in highly regarded, accredited international universities. Going forward, we will reinforce and further develop this culture of international and indeed global engagement.

Internationalisation will be a part of everything we do. We will celebrate and recognise international achievements - whether this is being appointed to a visiting position overseas, being part of the successful international research proposal, attracting international top researchers to Vaasa, as delegates of the conferences we organize, as distinguished visitors, or indeed as newly won faculty; this also includes engaging in successful international collaboration on teaching and education in a broader sense, be it in dual degrees or seeing our students participate and succeed in international challenges and competitions, or through us innovating global learning opportunities in the digital space.

As so often with things they start at home - internationalisation is no exception here.

We have learned today about the need to attract more international students to supply highly qualified graduates to the Finnish labour market. We have also learned that for universities to continue operations to the degree and extend as we are used to today, we will by 2030 need to have at least 30% of our students join us from outside Finland. We as a university have a proud tradition of being open and welcoming to international exchange students, and we currently have six international Masters programmes, many of which are internationally accredited. All of this indicates the high quality of education we offer.

While we will continue to welcome international exchange students in the future and our exchange students will continue to make a real difference to our programmes, irrespective of challenges brought upon us by events, such as Covid, our focus will change. We now will work proactively to increase the number of students completing Masters and in the not-too-distant future also international undergraduate programs with a viewpoint of developing graduates highly qualified to meet the needs of the Finnish labour market. This is a tremendous challenge - it is also an exciting one as we will be able to demonstrate to a wider audience how good we are.

We will have conversations fairly soon about how to accomplish this new ambition. After all 2030, is almost around the corner and only eight academic years away! This will mean developing further existing programmes, developing also new curriculum, it will also mean new and different types of partnerships, and embracing new and different ways of doing things. It is therefore good to see 'courage' is one of our common values.

While there is no time to idle, we are not rushing into action either. This university will develop and implement well considered plans that are to be informed by international benchmarks, our current and future accreditation efforts, and above all by conversations and engagement with staff, students and our stakeholders in our ecosystem.

We have a great base to build on - with our existing accredited flagship programs and other exciting English language offerings. Internationalisation is not only for the benefits of newly recruited international students and faculty; it is also an opportunity to enhance and further develop the work and learning experience for all our students and staff - Finnish as well as international.

An increase in international research and collaborative international provision will allow all of us to develop more ways of collaborating - more ways to broaden our horizon for the benefit of our community as well as ourselves as individual members.

Community is one of the university's three values alongside courage and responsibility. We can be proud of this value of living it every day. As the panel discussion has shown, this cannot be taken for granted and integrating international experts and students remains a challenge. As always, challenges are best mastered if everyone engages in good faith and a positive spirit with an open mind. I'm convinced we are well prepared for this challenge, perhaps more so than others. Not only is this

university more international in outlook than other Finnish institutions, so is its city more diverse and international than many others in the country.

In fact, both university and city and our region have an opportunity to embrace the changes ahead and stand out even more going forward. Drawing on our region that really acts as one big living lab, we as a small and specialized university are in a position to truly integrate business and technology to power innovation for a better, more sustainable future.

I really look forward to working together on this. Let me wish you all a good start to this academic year.