

University of Tartu rector's programme 2023

Jaak Vilo

The University of Tartu must develop as a strong European university, which carries in its core values the role of a promoter of the positive continuous development of the Estonian language and culture, and of the Estonian state in general. The university's staff and students learn the world's best scientific knowledge and methods, create new knowledge and acquire skills. The university's main outputs are knowledgeable, entrepreneurial, highly educated people and pushing the boundaries of knowledge in all the disciplines it covers. Through the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to create new knowledge, the university and its alumni contribute to the development of the whole of the Estonian state in the service of businesses, the economy and the public sector.

The University of Tartu is governed by its councils and the academic senate, seeking solutions that are as consensual as possible. The rector's role is to uphold and communicate the university's core values, ensure good internal organisation of work, and support its development in all necessary aspects. The rector is guided by the mission, values and vision of the University of Tartu¹ and by the decisions of the governing bodies.

To fulfil its role, the university is actively working to engage talented people and create good opportunities for effective and efficient work. To increase the impact of its results, the university introduces its achievements in Estonia and abroad.

The University of Tartu is a fast-growing, open and diverse progressive university that respects values and traditions. By its 400th anniversary, the university must reach an even stronger position, which must be supported by creating and implementing a corresponding strategic plan. The new strategic planning period should also start early to bring together goals, objectives and plans from the bottom up, highlighting the specificities, strengths and directions of the different institutes. In addition to empowering the disciplines, it should help to coordinate cooperation and increase coherence.

As a rector, I plan to be guided by the following values.

Society expects results from universities and wants to see their impact. The rector represents the university to the public in presenting and explaining the university's objectives and results. To do this, the rector must be personally visible. The rector supports the formulation of new major objectives, ensuring the involvement of all the necessary competences. Ambitious tasks will enable the state and businesses to better understand and support the objectives.

Strong basic specialisations of both basic and applied research and their collaboration with others are needed. A strong, diverse research and cross-disciplinary collaboration based on best competences will ensure performance. Within the University of Tartu, we must be guided by objectives that support development and develop a work environment and processes that enable performance.

¹ <https://ut.ee/en/values-and-responsibility>

I value quality and the productive work of all people, which must be recognised and rewarded. Quality is also strongly linked to the second component of performance – efficiency. The university's performance can be improved and enhanced by smooth work processes and an environment that values both quality and the volume of high-quality outputs.

Data- and fact-based management and decision-making are essential. Quality data and analysis must be accessible to all. Today, it is possible to implement new and better tools for that, empower staff and achieve performance gains.

The University of Tartu's strength must continue to be the very high quality of teaching and research and its identity. As important as the quality-based image of the University of Tartu as a whole is, identity and development are also important in the faculties and academic units (institutes), sub-units (chairs, departments) and research groups. Valuing each other and fostering cooperation also helps to achieve better mutual understanding. The identity of the University of Tartu, of Tartu and of Estonia must be valued and strengthened beyond the university so that Estonia could be as equal a partner as possible among other countries.

We must encourage mutually beneficial cooperation within and between units, with external partners from the public and private sectors and from other countries – both at the level of individual research groups and projects and at the level of large international agreements, programmes and networks. The university could be a better leader in setting such larger objectives.

I value both tradition and continuous development. What is needed now is to initiate activities and practices that would contribute to greater coherence, communication and cooperation, but would also ensure pride and mutually supportive dignity across different layers of identity.

Students and studies

The university's main output is the people we educate for the development of society and the university. Our students deserve the best teaching to help them become productive professionals in all their chosen disciplines. The time use of both students and teaching staff must be valued, the best possible resources must be used, and up-to-date and scientifically sound information must be taught. In addition to knowledge, society expects the development of the necessary skills. To this end, the university must teach the skills needed for creating and applying new knowledge. There must be a significant increase in interest in master's and doctoral studies, in ambition to become a top-level specialist, and in the courage to take on management responsibilities.

Students can fully commit to their studies only if their basic living needs are met. The university must contribute in at least three ways: support young people with lower incomes and fewer opportunities, support active young people with excellent academic performance, and involve students as early as possible in the university's research, teaching and development activities. Ensuring good work equipment for all and developing a high-quality dormitory programme will contribute to equity. In addition, universities, together with the state, need to find a way to create a fair and dignified loan system that would make it possible to avoid the need to work while studying. Personal altruism should be nurtured in young people today to encourage them to give back to the university in the future. We need to be bolder in increasing donations to

support students. Students receiving support should be prepared to support others in the future, thanks to the economic capacity they have acquired through their education.

Continuing education and lifelong learning are for professionals in their field who want to update their knowledge, acquire new skills or a new complementary specialisation. High-quality programmes, continuing education, micro-credential programmes, teacher training and entrepreneurship education must be worthy of a research university in their content and format and be of a consistently high standard. We need businesses and the state to contribute also financially to support demand so that quality content can be offered. These activities must be backed by sufficient additional funding so as not to undermine core higher education or hold back research.

Career model

The university brings together very different disciplines, institutes and people. The recently launched career model that allows for promotion and provides stability is essential for the university. The current system needs to be further developed to allow for additional flexibility to take account of the exceptional contribution of individuals and the specificities of research fields, as well as the larger strategic objectives of the units. The role of postdoctoral research needs to be clarified, both inside and outside the UT. Alongside promotion, questions about the possibility of downward or lateral mobility have also arisen. Solutions can be sought through wider consensus and agreements. Salary security is a major concern in a university that is too project-oriented. Units can contribute to remuneration policy supporting development and job security.

Major development directions for the rector over the next five years

As the new rector of the university, I value the plans made so far at the organisational level and will stand for their implementation.

I want to supplement administrative management with research management committed to higher scientific ambitions. This means, for example, formulating university-initiated missions, developing scientific advisory boards, and increasing ambition across the university. On 24 March, *Postimees* published my article on calling for greater ambition at the university. Such programmes should make it easier to attract additional external funding.

The prestige of doctoral studies must be enhanced, together with improving their content. The somewhat inadequate image of the objectives of doctoral studies we can see now is dangerous because it does not consider all the needs of society and the university. There is also a growing need for professionals with research experience and capacity outside the university. Doctoral studies need to be developed in a data- and purpose-driven way, incl. to attract more Estonians to research in both academic and non-academic spheres.

There is a need to ensure sufficient training for teachers, doctors and other essential professions needed by the state and businesses. In doing so, we must also honestly calculate and justify the resources needed and balance the different objectives. The prestige of master's studies needs to be strengthened in all faculties.

Financial support for students must enable them to devote themselves to their studies full-time, and this will certainly require the development of a loan system. Stipend and support measures must be developed to take needs, performance and activity into account and support involvement in university work. The university should attract talent from outside Tartu and develop high-quality student residences.

The university thrives thanks to talented, hard-working people. The continuous renewal of the university also requires constant engagement and development of young, ambitious students and research teams. Disciplines are in different situations: currently, the average length of service in one institute can be twice as long as in another.

Ensuring diversified funding, including attracting additional private funding, is necessary for the university's development. The support of companies by paying the tuition fees of their staff and by direct donations and grants to the university must be made easier, cheaper and more prestigious.

We need to develop grant-writing capacity further, helping researchers to apply for funding and coordinate their efforts. Intellectual property protection, including patenting, should also be strengthened. There is a need for meaningful communication with businesses and to facilitate strategic and mutually beneficial cooperation agreements: businesses expect the university to have ambitious objectives and are ready to support high-impact activities.

The marketing, visibility and communication of all disciplines, both in Estonia and abroad, need to be improved. Partners and support units need to deliver substantial value and create new opportunities, be motivated by the principal activities of the university, and improve and increase collaboration.

The university itself needs to run smoothly and efficiently, and support units can contribute to increasing the efficiency of academic work. The work environment and the tools must be suitable, we do not need unnecessary solutions. If IT solutions are needed, they must also be well thought out and help our work, not hinder it.

Values:

- **Research and its quality, substantial competence, impact**
- **Morale and efficiency, professionalism, results**
- **Communal pride, valuing, dignity, equity**

Performance

- Research and innovation
- Diversified funding
- Explaining impact to public
- UT as a pioneer in society!**

Sustainable quality research

- Young researchers
- Talent recruitment
- 100% commitment
- Diversity of disciplines

Students' focus on studies

- **High-quality teaching and volume of studies**
- **Tools, environment, support**
- **Loan system, student residences**
- Empathy and commitment

Communication with the public

- Research – **all disciplines**
- Emphasis on the **UT's impact**
- Valued partner oriented to cooperation
- Dignity, honesty, pride

Data-based approach

- Facts, source data
- Interpretations
- Development needs
- Action

Tools and work environments

- Smooth and functioning
- Everyone's contribution and well-being
- Communication
- Efficiency

Serving the society

- Doctors, teachers, etc.
- Needs of businesses and the state
- Important research areas
- All disciplines **the best in Estonia**

Figure. Brief summary of governance objectives as rector in 2023-2028

24 March 2023

My articles on higher education and research (in Estonian)

Jackpoti tõenäosuse kasvatamine (2005, Eesti Päevaleht)

<https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/51019924/jaak-vilo-jackpoti-toenaosuse-kasvatamine>

Tiiptasemel tööjõu puudus ei lahene lisapanusteta (2006, Saldo)

https://sise.etis.ee/File/DownloadPublic/7080d51b-0e0b-4318-a9c3-1a72365f7066?type=&name=Fail_2006_03_Saldo_vilo.pdf

Kiireim tee infoühiskonda (2006, EAS: Hea Eesti Idee)

<https://www.etis.ee/Portal/Publications/Display/f5ba9223-e187-4db8-9526-cd4b346e9cc0>

Jaak Vilo: riskime kõrghariduse väljasuretamisega (2011, Postimees)

<https://arvamus.postimees.ee/388575/jaak-vilo-riskime-korghariduse-valjasuretamisega>

Kuidas on arenenud ja peaks arenema Tartu Ülikool? Vastab Jaak Vilo (2012, Postimees)

<https://tartu.postimees.ee/831096/kuidas-on-arenenud-ja-peak-arenema-tartu-ulikool-vastab-jaak-vilo>

Jaak Vilo: tasuta ei võrdu odav (2013, Postimees)

<https://arvamus.postimees.ee/2578292/jaak-vilo-tasuta-ei-vordu-odav>

Nutikas jätkusuutlik Eesti (2014, Riigikogu Toimetised)

<https://rito.riigikogu.ee/eelmised-numbrid/nr-29/nutikas-jatkusuutlik-eesti/>

Jaak Vilo: kas haridus on kallis? Proovige harimatust (2018, Postimees)

<https://arvamus.postimees.ee/4435825/jaak-vilo-kas-haridus-on-kallis-proovige-harimatust>

Excel on abivahend, mitte otsustaja (2018, UT ajakiri)

<https://www.ajakiri.ut.ee/artikkel/2698>

Jaak Vilo: Eesti tuleviku määravad teaduse ja kõrghariduse valikud (2019, Postimees)

<https://arvamus.postimees.ee/6508290/jaak-vilo-eesti-tuleviku-maaravad-teaduse-ja-korghariduse-valikud>

Jaak Vilo: välistudengid – tulu või kulu (2020, Postimees)

<https://tartu.postimees.ee/7122288/jaak-vilo-valistudengid-tulu-voi-kulu>

Jaak Vilo: Eesti ambitsioon doktoriõppe edendamisel peab kasvama (2021, ERR)

<https://www.err.ee/1608421589/jaak-vilo-eesti-ambitsioon-doktoriooppe-edendamisel-peab-kasvama>

Teadusrahastus uute reformide ootel (2021, Sirp)

<https://www.sirp.ee/s1-artiklid/c21-teadus/teadusrahastus-uute-reformide-ootel/>

Eesti teaduse seisust (2022, ETAg-i aastaraamat)

https://www.etag.ee/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Eesti_teadus_2022.pdf

Milleks doktorantuur, kui vaja on vaid „tavalisi töötajaid“? (2022, Riigikogu Toimetised)

<https://rito.riigikogu.ee/nr-46/milleks-doktorantuur-kui-vaja-on-vaid-tavalisi-tootajaid/>