

# Theses on sustainable development and responsibility

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# INTRODUCTION

**AS A RESULT OF ITS OWN ACTIONS**, humanity is facing enormous challenges. Declining biodiversity, increasing inequality and climate change are global changes that require action both locally and worldwide.

Universities<sup>1</sup> play a key role in combatting and solving climate change and other crises, creating the required expertise and fostering a safe and stable society. They produce new knowledge and educate future experts and informed citizens. In addition, universities have the responsibility to act as pioneers and role models not only through social interaction but also through their own responsible practices.

*The large scale and urgency of the global challenges ahead of us emphasise the importance of cooperation – what is required is a shared mindset and national and international cooperation.*

In February 2019, Universities Finland UNIFI set up a national working group on sustainable development and responsibility to enhance the universities' sustainability work. The group brings together 14 universities<sup>2</sup> and the National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) to define the universities' shared principles, objectives and forms of operation for the promotion of sustainable development and responsibility during 2019 and 2020. The setting of the objectives is governed by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Society's Commitment (Sitoumus2050) and the Paris Agreement, among others.

To share the best practices and experiences, the working group organised a boot camp on sustainable development and responsibility in Santahamina in autumn 2019. As a result of the boot camp, a joint pledge was made to set ambitious shared objectives that will drive changes and have a global impact.

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<sup>1</sup> In the theses, universities also refers to the National Defence University.

<sup>2</sup> The following universities and higher education institutions are members of UNIFI's working group on sustainable development and responsibility: Åbo Akademi University, University of Vaasa, University of Turku, Tampere University, University of the Arts Helsinki, Hanken School of Economics, University of Oulu, National Defence University, Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT, University of Lapland, University of Jyväskylä, University of Eastern Finland, University of Helsinki, Aalto University. Read more (in Finnish): [unifi.fi/toiminta/verkostot/](https://unifi.fi/toiminta/verkostot/)



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This pledge has now materialised as the universities' shared theses on sustainable development and responsibility, presented in this document. More than 400 members of the university community participated in formulating the theses and commenting on them in the UNIFIkeke seminar on sustainable development in September 2020.

**A thesis means a statement presented as a topic for a debate or discussion.**

We therefore hope that the 12 theses presented here will prompt a discussion that will result in a shared mindset for the university community. In addition, concrete actions are required.

The time for rhetoric is over. We need to move from words to action.

## **Vision: Finnish universities together – A larger actor in the field of sustainable development and responsibility than their size would merit**

**IN 2030**, Finnish universities' work on responsibility and sustainable development has been integrated into all their activities, carbon neutrality has been achieved, and universities act as trailblazers of sustainable development and responsibility in Finland and across the world. Universities are pioneers and produce effective solutions in cooperation with society and their partners. Sustainable development is a cross-cutting theme in the strategies of all Finnish universities. The perspectives of sustainable development and responsibility have been integrated into the teaching content and the objectives for research impact. Measures and indicators have been defined for their promotion and sufficient resources have been allocated for this work. In a global society, decision-making is based on the best possible open science.

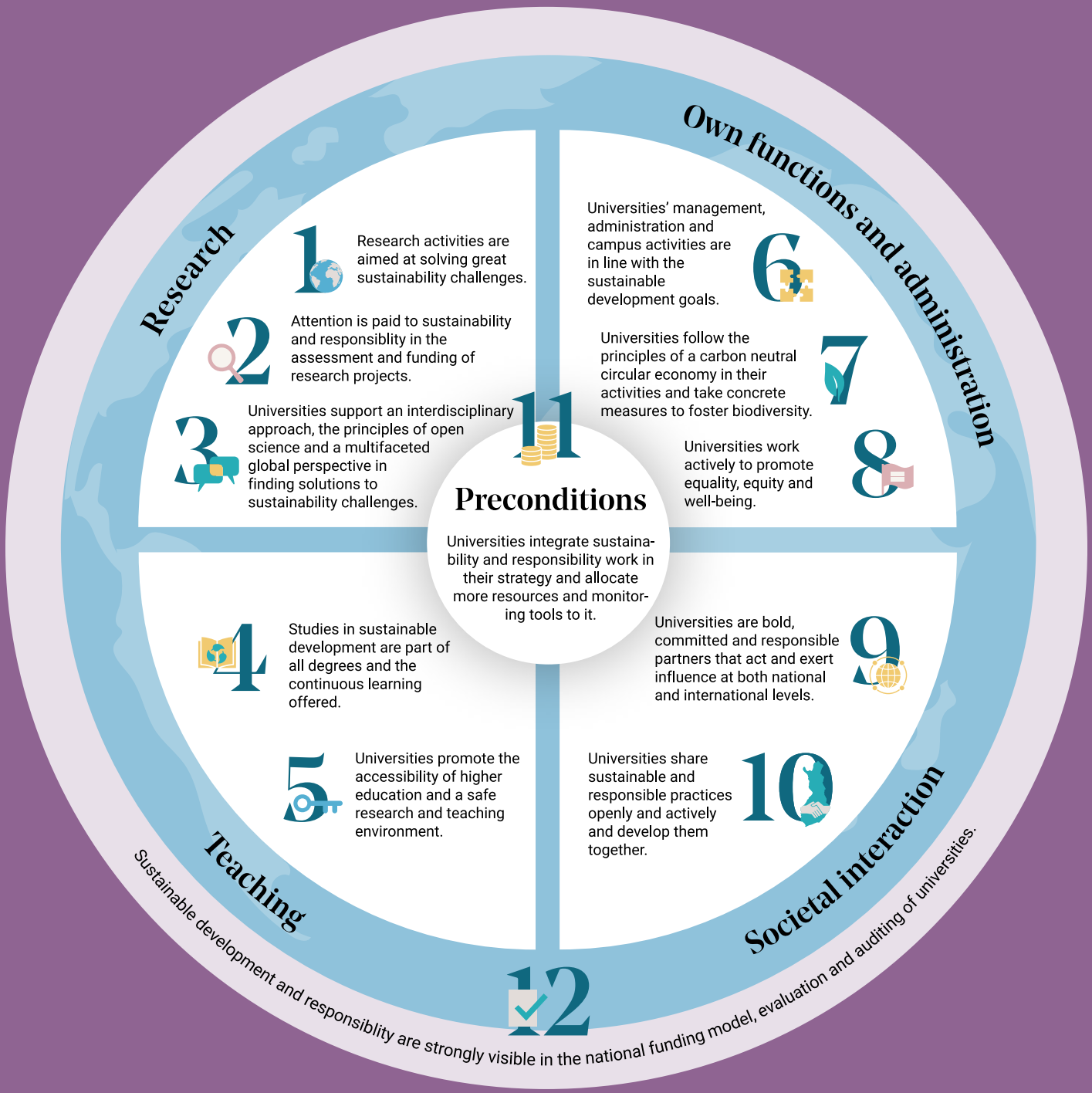
# THE THESES

**UNIFI'S THESES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY** are 12 in total and they have been divided under five different themes. In addition to the universities' basic tasks (research, teaching and societal interaction), the theses cover (campus) activities and the preconditions for the universities' operation more widely. The nature of the preconditions for operation is such that they create the framework for the other theses.

Theses 1-11 have been intended as drivers of the activities especially for the universities themselves. Thesis 12, on the other hand, challenges universities to operate more sustainably and responsibly by focusing on the parties influencing them (e.g. providers of funding) and the national evaluation models.

Examples of necessary, concrete measures have been compiled under each thesis. The lists of examples are not exhaustive. Instead, they introduce the key measures that universities must take without delay. It is likely that the universities will rely on their strengths and special features and implement the measures in a different order. This makes mutual encouragement and different profiles as pioneers possible. The effectiveness of the measures, transparency and the sharing of good practices openly are the key.

# UNIFI's theses on sustainable development and responsibility



THESES 1-3

# SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH



## Research activities are aimed at solving great sustainability challenges.

Universities use funding and other incentive mechanisms to direct their research and the recruitment of researchers to solving the great challenges faced by humanity. On the other hand, the question of these great challenges is in itself a subject of research and critical examinations – we do not know what challenges we will face in the future. Curiosity, the autonomy of science and the freedom of research are therefore central values also in sustainability research. Sustainability is seen as a cross-cutting theme that supports the basic task of universities, not as one that will replace it.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities conduct recruitments that promote the themes in sustainability and responsibility (e.g. professorships in sustainability research).
- Universities will enhance the coordination of sustainability research and raise awareness of sustainability research.
- Universities make more concrete investments in sustainability research, for example, through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



## Attention is paid to sustainability and responsibility in the assessment and funding of research projects.

Knowledge and science have not only intrinsic value but also significant societal impacts. Universities analyse the impacts of research openly and critically from the point of view of sustainable development and responsibility. Paying attention to sustainable development is an important skill and operating model for a researcher.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities require that the person drawing up the research plan append an assessment of the project's sustainability and responsibility impacts to the plan. These impacts will be taken into account when the research project is assessed.



- Universities recognise sustainability, openness and societal interaction as merits that advance the researcher's career.
- Universities commit themselves to observing the recommendation *Good practice in researcher evaluation* published by the Committee for Public Information and the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies and to the international DORA declaration.



## **Universities support an interdisciplinary approach, the principles of open science and a multifaceted global perspective in finding solutions to sustainability challenges.**

Universities encourage interdisciplinary cooperation in responding to the sustainability challenges. This requires critical examination of the existing structures of the fields of science, the administrative structures and incentives and an understanding of the strengths of the different fields both within and between universities. To improve the public debate and to create new multidisciplinary projects, it is important to clarify the profiles and the support and to emphasise their importance.

The policies outlined in open science for their part advance sustainable development and responsibility. Universities support the principles of open science in solving the sustainability challenges.

The university community also knows its global responsibility and promotes sustainability and fairness in the world.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities create incentives and structures for an interdisciplinary approach and for crossing the boundaries between faculties and fields of science in both research and teaching.
- Universities commit themselves to the Declaration for Open Science and Research 2020–2025 and promote openness as a fundamental value in all activities of the research community.
- At universities, the principles of openness do not apply only to research but also to the open operating culture, which includes the openness of the principles of evaluation and career development.
- Universities integrate responsibility, especially global responsibility and global knowledge, better into the education for sustainable development, research and their own operation. Universities develop global partnerships, perspectives and expertise by supporting the mobility of students and researchers.

THESES 4-5

# TEACHING PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



## **Studies in sustainable development are part of all degrees and the continuous learning offered.**

All specialists who have graduated from universities understand their responsibility in promoting and developing sustainability. They are provided with the skills and knowledge required for this and the abilities and motivation to take their knowledge into practice. Universities develop and provide services in continuous learning on the themes of sustainable development and responsibility.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- The studies of all students at Finnish universities include a basic course on sustainability and responsibility.
- The learning outcomes of degrees include understanding and implementing global responsibility and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the field of study. Sustainable development is a natural and cross-cutting part of the learning goals of each degree programme also from the point of view of the field of study concerned. Universities identify the key content and learning goals related to sustainability and responsibility in the different degree programmes.
- Universities dismantle obstacles and develop cross-cutting structures to enable multidisciplinary degree programmes.
- The achievement of the learning outcomes of sustainable development and responsibility is monitored as part of feedback, graduation and career follow-up surveys.
- The key capabilities related to sustainable development and responsibility (e.g. critical and ethical thinking, cooperation and interaction skills, change management and identification of one's own expertise) are paid attention to as part of the teaching of academic expert skills.
- In line with the principles of continuous learning, universities develop and provide sustainability education to support equity and active citizenship. Universities draw up a national strategy and implementation plan on education for sustainability.



## Universities promote the accessibility of higher education and a safe research and teaching environment.

The task of education is to open opportunities to everyone. The opportunity to acquire a higher education degree must not depend on the individual's socio-economic position or cultural background. Universities take care of the equal accessibility of academic education both globally and nationally. Universities ensure that research and teaching can take place in safe conditions without a threat of violence and persecution.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Education leading to a degree must be free. Universities respect the UN's principle of leaving no one behind by fostering free higher education and diverse routes to tertiary education.
- Universities take concrete actions to promote the availability and accessibility of education. Special attention is paid to the accessibility of digital information regarding the needs of special groups.
- To strengthen cultural sustainability, universities provide instruction and opportunities to conduct research in the national languages of Finland.
- Universities ensure that their international staff and students can fully participate in the development and activities of the university community. Universities take diverse measures to support multilingualism and an understanding of language proficiency and cultures.
- Universities commit themselves to international activities aimed at enabling and protecting academic freedom (e.g. "Scholars at Risk" network)
- Universities support the strengthening of competence in developing countries as well as mutual learning and interaction.

THESES 6-8

# UNIVERSITIES' OWN FUNCTIONS AND ADMINISTRATION CREATE A RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD



## Universities' management, administration and campus activities are in line with the sustainable development goals.

Sustainable development and responsibility are integrated into all activities of the universities. In addition to the strategic outlines, clear implementation plans, responsible parties, indicators and monitoring are also needed. The management, staff, students and student unions are engaged in universities' sustainability and responsibility work by involving the different actors in the drawing up of sustainability assessments, plans, objectives and criteria.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities submit an annual report on their situation and how they have achieved their sustainable development and responsibility objectives.
- Universities integrate sustainable thinking into all of their activities: management and remuneration systems, work plans, recruitment criteria, agreements and the development of staff competence are based on the principles of sustainable development and responsibility.
- Universities commit themselves to inspiring and encouraging their students and staff to promote sustainable development and responsibility and to familiarising them with the principles of these. This work will already start during orientation to studies or work. A national "tool kit" is created to help universities improve the competence of their teaching staff.
- Universities act responsibly in their investment activities, respecting international norms and human rights. Universities and their partners commit themselves to the UN's Principles for Responsible Investment (UN PRI), in which the points of view related to the environment, society and good governance are taken into account. Universities set clear and measurable objectives for the carbon intensity of their investments and with a reasonable transition period emphasise in their investment portfolio companies that are implementing the

transition to carbon neutrality. Universities give up any conflicting ownerships by applying negative criteria. When choosing new investment targets, they avoid conflicting targets entirely and emphasise positive criteria in their investment activities.

- Universities include the objectives of sustainable development and responsibility in their procurement strategies and also develop their procurement competence in cooperation with each other. The assessment of the responsibility of procurements is improved and the human rights risks and environmental risks caused by the procurements are taken into account in each procurement decision.
- Sustainable development is included in the project models of universities. Project managers are trained to pay attention to the different areas of sustainability and responsibility.



## Universities follow the principles of a carbon neutral circular economy in their activities and take concrete measures to foster biodiversity.

Universities see finding solutions to climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the combined effect of these environmental changes as decisive for the fate of humanity.

The Ministry of Education and Culture requires higher education institutions to become carbon neutral by 2030 and according to the [objective set in the Government Programme](#), Finland will be carbon neutral in 2035 and carbon negative soon after that. Universities will respond to this challenge. They are in a key position determining scientifically reliable calculation and compensation methods and emissions reduction targets, among other things.

Universities work actively to prevent the decline in biodiversity and bring the importance of biodiversity to the societal debate, decision-making and activities.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities will be carbon neutral by 2030 (net emissions) and develop shared principles for calculating the carbon footprint to enable comparison and learning from each other. Many of the universities have already set 2025 as their target.
- Universities draw up concrete, absolute emissions reduction targets, definitions and objectives for the circular economy, and recommendations for the compensations for climate emissions. Compensating is the last resort in striving for carbon neutrality.

- Universities highlight safeguarding biodiversity as a target alongside carbon neutrality. Universities survey the impacts of their activities on biodiversity and develop indicators and calculation and monitoring models for monitoring the state and development of their activities. Universities take measures to safeguard campus nature, biodiversity and viable green networks and to minimise harmful effects on nature.
- The objective of transitioning to a carbon neutral circular economy is paid attention to and made visible in new procurements and investments and in the planning of campus activities. Universities encourage sharing and shared use. Universities also encourage reasonable consumption.
- Universities develop innovative solutions for carbon sequestration on campuses, increase the utilisation rate of the infrastructures they manage, engage their staff, invest in sustainable travel for example by updating their travel instructions, and intensify their contacts with the campus restaurants and other actors to secure a more sustainable future.



## Universities work actively to promote equality, equity and well-being.

Systematic work must be done continuously to promote equality, equity, diversity and accessibility. Universities commit themselves to a debate, education, practices and activities aimed at preventing subconscious prejudices and discrimination.

Sustainable operating models require sustainable conditions. By reducing temporary employment relationships, universities create better preconditions for performing its work and basic tasks.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities identify and remove practices and structures that produce and maintain inequality. Universities develop clear methods and objectives for eradicating racism, discrimination, bullying and harassment from the university community and pay special attention to the verbalisation and documentation of all discrimination.
- Universities promote their staff's and the entire community's awareness of and knowledge about equity, inclusion and work against racism so that every member of the community can and has the courage to intervene if problems occur. Each member of the university community is encouraged to build a safer space and an inclusive community for everyone through their own actions.
- Universities ensure opportunities to participate and equal daily working and studying conditions for all their members. Universities pay more attention to different life situations by enabling flexible ways to study and participate, for

example, to people with chronic diseases, learning difficulties and families and for students with a single-parent background.

- Universities participate in the societal debate actively. Together and separately, they present comments that support equality and equity.
- Universities promote research on equality and equity.

THESES 9-10

# SOCIETAL IMPACT AND COOPERATION AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE



## **Universities are bold, committed and responsible partners that act and exert influence at both national and international levels.**

Universities participate boldly and openly in the societal debate on sustainable development and make their expertise available to networks and other partners. They work actively in national and international cooperation networks that produce an understanding of and solutions for how to create and maintain a sustainable and responsible society.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities strengthen science communication on sustainable development and responsibility, participate in the societal debate and require systemic changes. Science communication is improved actively to ensure it will also reach the parties outside the science community.
- Universities encourage their students and staff to participate in the societal interaction and multidisciplinary cooperation of their field.
- Universities promote the adoption of innovations made by research in society, for example, through entrepreneurship or collaboration with companies. Innovations based on new scientific knowledge and their commercialisation are implemented according to the principles of sustainable development.
- Universities strengthen the knowledge base of decision-making by creating new science advice concepts between universities and decision-makers and supporting the existing ones. Universities strengthen their regional cooperation on sustainability with cities and municipalities.
- Universities build mutual long-term partnerships with actors in developing countries, promoting cooperation particularly in the fields of research and education.
- Universities require that their partners act responsibly and respect human rights. Sustainable development and responsibility are adopted as one of the assessment criteria for universities' cooperation and activities.





## Universities share sustainable and responsible practices openly and actively and develop them together.

Universities' work on sustainable development requires cooperation at the national level. Universities support each other in the sustainability and responsibility work and share the best operating models with each other. Sustainability and responsibility work is developed in line with the university's special features.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities commit themselves to organising an annual joint seminar on sustainable development and responsibility. In the seminar, they share good practices, commit themselves to the objectives set for the following 12 months and draft joint statements and openings for discussion (e.g. updating the Theses on sustainable development).
- Universities enhance and provide resources for the work of national sustainability networks in order to make it possible to openly share successes, challenges and operating practices.
- Universities create joint courses, resource banks, cooperation forums and networks of experts that will enable the sharing of good practices, competence and ideas, and promote closer cooperation. Universities increase their mutual sharing of information on existing courses and degree programmes related to sustainable development.
- UNIFI and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences Arene work together to promote sustainable development and responsibility. The forum for sustainable development in higher education in Finland (Keke-foorumi) serves as a communication channel for universities and universities of applied sciences.

THESES 11-12

# THE PRECONDITIONS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ARE CREATED IN COOPERATION



## Universities integrate sustainability and responsibility work in their strategy and allocate more resources and monitoring tools to it.

The sustainability change at universities requires direct financial investments in the structures, services and personnel. Universities allocate more resources to the work and modify existing activities and practices from the point of view of sustainability and responsibility.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities appoint a person in their organisation to be responsible for the coordination, monitoring and development of sustainability and responsibility work, and for national and international cooperation.
- Universities designate competent personnel, resources and strategic funding to the development of sustainability research, education for sustainability and other related activities, and to the promotion of equality and equity.
- Universities take care of their staff's sustainability and responsibility training and competence. Universities develop peer learning and mentoring concepts to accelerate the sustainability change.
- Universities create internal incentives for the promotion of sustainable development and responsibility in research, teaching, administration and societal interaction.
- Universities involve students and student unions actively in the activities related to sustainability and responsibility.



## **Sustainable development and responsibility are strongly visible in the national funding model, evaluation and auditing of universities.**

The government of Finland must require that public organisations implement sustainable development as part of their management system. It must also make the monitoring indicators part of the preconditions for universities' funding.

### THE FOLLOWING CONCRETE MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN:

- Universities must report on the responsibility and sustainability of their activities to the Ministry of Education and Culture as part of other reporting on their strategy.
- The effectiveness of the sustainable development and responsibility in Finnish universities must be evaluated as part of the auditing conducted by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC).
- A performance-based funding and monitoring model must be developed for universities to support the interdisciplinary approach and the promotion of sustainable development and responsibility through research, teaching, societal interaction and the universities' own functions.

# CONCLUSION: PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THESES

Bringing the above-mentioned theses into the societal debate and introducing them into practice requires cooperation between the entire academic community. Now is the perfect time for universities to set their strategic sustainability goals high and ensure sufficient resources and competence for the implementation of their strategies.

**Universities have not only a huge opportunity but also an obligation to lead the change in our society.**

The cross-cutting nature and diversity of the sustainability goals offer each member of the university community a number of opportunities to engage in active influencing, debate and taking action. A multi-voiced and participatory dialogue is the first step to introducing these theses into practice.

We expect the theses to widely lay the basis for the debate in the rectorates, boards and management teams of universities, in faculty, research and education committees, occupational safety committees, student unions and property companies as well as for discussions with other key partners.

You can be the one to start the discussion in your community. Start by sharing your favourite thesis, development proposal or a good example of how the theses can be promoted under the hashtag **#UnifiKekeTeesit** in the social media.

**Together we will be a larger actor and influencer in sustainable development than our size would merit.**

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND USEFUL SOURCES

UN and the SDGs: [un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/](https://un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/)

Paris climate agreement: [Paris Agreement](#)

Climate change, IPCC report (link in Finnish): [ilmatieteenlaitos.fi/ipcc-ilmastopaneeli](https://ilmatieteenlaitos.fi/ipcc-ilmastopaneeli)

Finnish Climate Change Panel: [ilmastopaneeli.fi](https://ilmastopaneeli.fi)

Biodiversity: IPBES [ipbes.net](https://ipbes.net)

Nature Panel, or the Finnish national IPBES panel: <https://luontopaneeli.fi/en-US>

Expert Panel for Sustainable Development: <https://www.kestavyyspaneeli.fi/en/>

Finland and sustainable development: [kestavakehitys.fi](https://kestavakehitys.fi) and [sitoumus2050.fi](https://sitoumus2050.fi)

Government's roadmap to carbon neutral Finland by 2035: [https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/10616/hallitus-laati-tiekartan-hiilineutraaliin-suomeen-edellakavijyys-ilmastotoimissa-luo-mahdollisuuksia-koko-suomeen?languageId=en\\_US](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/10616/hallitus-laati-tiekartan-hiilineutraaliin-suomeen-edellakavijyys-ilmastotoimissa-luo-mahdollisuuksia-koko-suomeen?languageId=en_US)

Ministry of Education and Culture and sustainable development (link in Finnish): [minedu.fi/kestava-kehitys](https://minedu.fi/kestava-kehitys)

The SDG Accord of the university and college sector : [sdgaccord.org](https://sdgaccord.org), the Climate Letter: [sdgaccord.org/climateletter](https://sdgaccord.org/climateletter)

Nordic Sustainable Campus Network NSCN: [nordicsustainablecampusnetwork.wordpress.com](https://nordicsustainablecampusnetwork.wordpress.com)

The Climate Framework for Swedish higher education institutions: [kth.se/en/om/miljo-hallbar-utveckling/klimatramverket-1.903489](https://kth.se/en/om/miljo-hallbar-utveckling/klimatramverket-1.903489)

The Ilmastorintama community of different occupational groups for the promotion of systemic solutions: [ilmastorintama.fi](https://ilmastorintama.fi)

Forum for sustainable development in higher education in Finland: [bup.fi/forum-for-sdgs-in-finland/](https://bup.fi/forum-for-sdgs-in-finland/)

The Climate University project and digital course material: [blogs.helsinki.fi/climateuniversity/](https://blogs.helsinki.fi/climateuniversity/)

Operating models and material for science education to support the continuous learning of children, young people and teachers: [schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/create-sustainability-together.htm](https://schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/create-sustainability-together.htm)

Open science policies and material: <https://avointiede.fi/en/policies>





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