



# The strategy of the Finnish Virtual University 2005–2010

## I. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE FINNISH VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

Core activities of the Finnish Virtual University (FVU) include the development of education and educational support across university boundaries, the production of shared electronic services, and the provision of support for a networked mode of academic work. These activities can be on a national scale, or network-based partnerships among universities, or local activities in individual member universities. The end-users of the services, operating models and products produced by the FVU include the students, teachers and other staff of the 21 FVU member universities. Universities can make use of FVU services by adapting them to their internal operating modes and environments.

### The targets set in this FVU strategy are to:

1. Facilitate flexible studies and develop electronic service access for this purpose
2. Promote the shared use of online education and educational materials
3. Extensively adopt jointly produced ICT training and support services
4. Integrate the FVU operations into the European Higher Education Area and other international co-operation
5. Ensure that the FVU organisation, operating modes, decision making and financing models fit the needs of the network

## 2. THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT OF THE FINNISH VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

The Finnish Virtual University (FVU) was launched as a development project, in line with **the Education, Training and Research in the Information Society. A National strategy for 2000–2004**. According to the strategy: "A multidisciplinary virtual university will be established to produce and transmit high-quality educational services and enable network-oriented research".

The **FVU Consortium Agreement** (Jan. 18, 2001) describes ways to meet the goals of the National Strategy and defines the tasks of the FVU as a network organization.

The goals and tasks defined in the FVU Consortium Agreement were specified in the **FVU Strategy for the development phase, 2003–2004**. These long-term aims have

been implemented extensively, but in diverse ways, in the FVU network projects, which are overviewed in the **Report of FVU Activities, 2001–2003**.

The use of electronic information networks in education and research has expanded rapidly. Changes in the operating environment have resulted in new challenges and responsibilities in work related to the information society. The Ministry of Education's **Information Society Programme for Education, Training and Research 2004–2006** defines a number of immediate and partnership-based tasks for the FVU, which are all included in full in the targets of the present FVU strategy. The Bologna Process creates new needs for agreements, definitions and services promoting comparability, transferability and flexible student mobility.

Changes in the operating environment of higher education are evaluated in the document **Education and Research 2003–2008. Development Plan** by the Ministry of Education, taking into account social and cultural changes, population and labour force developments, and regional and international developments. In the field of FVU activities, the projected developments require an intensive development of electronic service access, ICT training services targeting all groups, support services for student mobility, and educational and research quality management systems – in some cases, in partnership with the public administration and the business community.

In accordance with the **National strategy for Education, Training and Research in the Information Society** the universities published their strategies for the educational use of information and communication technologies by the end of 2002. The report **University Strategies for the Educational Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Universities – An Analysis of Future Prospects, Implementation and Monitoring** describes the projected changes from the universities' own perspectives.

The revised Universities Act will enter into force as of August 1, 2005. The Act also sets the regulatory framework for FVU operations.

### 3. VISION 2010

An intensive culture of developing and sharing educational innovations has been established in the university system.

### 4. OPERATING IDEA

The FVU is a network organisation for collaboration among Finnish universities. The task of the FVU is to support flexible studies, to promote the extensive sharing of educational material, and to produce and administer research-based services for students and teachers. The FVU promotes the development of shared university infrastructure and provides an extensive communications and action network for the development of national and international co-operation.

### 5. VALUES

The FVU operations are guided by the following five basic values:

- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Ethical conduct
- ▶ Student-centeredness
- ▶ Equity
- ▶ Quality

## 6. VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY PARTIES AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

The national FVU parties include the FVU Consortium, the FVU Steering Group, The FVU Service Unit, the FVU Forum and the FVU Issue Groups. FVU networks are **FVU parties involving a number of different universities** jointly producing education and educational support services. FVU liaisons and staff at university educational technology centres (or other support units providing ICT services) are **local FVU parties**.

### The FVU Consortium

The FVU Consortium bases its work on the founding agreement of the Consortium. The Consortium members include the 21 Finnish universities and the Ministry of Education. The Consortium draws up the national priorities for the FVU operations and oversees the realisation of the Consortium's aims. The Consortium makes the decisions on allocating FVU resources on a national basis. The Consortium is convened once or twice a year.

### The FVU Steering Group

The FVU Steering Group manages the national FVU operations according to the policies drawn up by the Consortium. The Steering Group is assembled approximately 10 times a year.

### The FVU Service Unit

The FVU Service Unit (formerly, Development Unit) co-ordinates the implementation of the national FVU projects together with the universities and other stakeholders. The Service Unit produces and administers the nation-wide FVU services (e.g., the Flexible Study Rights online service, JOOPAS).

### FVU Issue Groups

As part of the implementation of this strategy, Issue Groups will be established to draw up plans for jointly implemented development projects. The experts for these preparatory groups will be invited from among university stakeholders connected to FVU activities. As a rule, one group will be established for each strategic goal.

### FVU Forum

The FVU Forum consists of the FVU liaisons, the co-ordinators of the Issue Groups and the staff of the FVU Service Unit. The Forum deals with initiatives put forth by the Issue Groups and prioritises goals. The FVU Forum evaluates the progress in terms of each strategic goal and the realisation of the strategy in its entirety every six months, and proposes specifications to the 12-month implementation plan. The Forum reports on its monitoring and planning to the FVU Steering Group and to the universities.

### University stakeholder groups connected to FVU activities

The university stakeholder groups connected to FVU activities include university staff who participate in activities promoting FVU goals alongside their other core activities. The formats for co-operating with these stakeholders are selected on a case-by-case basis. These stakeholders include students, teachers, university administration, the Council of University Rectors, university IT units and libraries, and FinELib.

### Other FVU activity stakeholders

Other stakeholders of FVU activities include, e.g., CSC – The Finnish IT Centre for Science, the Virtual Polytechnic and commercial software suppliers. The co-operation is usually based on service or project contracts, which define product-specific or project-specific responsibilities and invoicing principles.

## Service networks involved in FVU activities

Service networks involved in FVU activities are typically joint multi-university networks which develop national services related to FVU activities.

## Academic discipline networks

National FVU activities can support the activities of academic discipline networks. The academic discipline networks are a central customer group for national FVU activities. The academic discipline networks also make their own contributions to meeting the FVU goals.

## 7. STRATEGIC GOALS AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS, 2005–2010

The strategy term 2005-2010 is the institutionalisation stage of the FVU. The goals of the strategy term are derived from the documents guiding the information society development in education and research, presented in section 2, and from the development goals specified during the strategy process.

The following five strategic goals have been defined for FVU operations.

### I. Facilitating flexible studies and developing electronic service access for this purpose

During the strategy term, student mobility between universities will grow, and a major share of the university teaching will be accessible through the national Flexible Study Rights Agreement (JOO-agreement). This will offer students a broader choice of study alternatives. Projects co-ordinated on a nation-wide level will develop and provide member universities with high-quality student administration services and versatile electronic access services to facilitate student mobility.

#### Critical success factors related to this goal, and the time-table, actors and monitoring procedures for their realisation

The co-ordination, integration and upgrading to a national scale of ongoing separate definition and development projects (with LiTu<sup>1</sup>, specifications for Finnish higher education information<sup>2</sup> and HAKA<sup>3</sup> as priorities).

**Time-table:** key decisions in 2005 (upgrading to a national scale of LiTu 1.0 and 2.0, joining the HAKA Federation, decision on the FVU Online Student Services<sup>4</sup>), completion of higher education information specifications.

**Responsible parties:** Ministry of Education (co-ordination through funding); universities (joining the HAKA Federation); universities (integrating LiTu and HAKA; adoption of specifications); FVU Service Unit/universities (definition of specifications for education information).

**Monitoring:** target realised (yes/no), monitoring at the end of 2006, 2008, 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> LiTu is an ongoing project developing an information system to support student mobility in 2004–2006.

<sup>2</sup> Common specifications of curriculum, course and credit information are a prerequisite for information transfers and information search services between different university study information systems.

<sup>3</sup> The HAKA infrastructure (Federation) is a group of organizations consisting of Finnish universities and polytechnics which cooperate in the area of inter-organizational authentication and authorization.

<sup>4</sup> The FVU Online Student Services project includes a new project on student mobility management (LiHA) and integrates the existing service components into a comprehensive FVU Online Student Services.

Availability of an extensive, comprehensive and high-quality nation-wide provision of (online) education, which accommodates the needs of different student groups.

**Time-table:** 2005: specifications for education information completed, 2006– search services and electronic study guides.

**Responsible parties:** FVU Service Unit (specifications), universities responsible for providing education and development of academic and student services.

**Monitoring:** specifications for education information available (yes/no), educational provision (amount per discipline, the relevant Issue Group defines specific measure).

Networked co-operation among Academic and Student Services expands from the Flexible Study Rights (JOO) agreement to other forms of electronic service access. The co-operation involves all universities, and it is expanded nationally and internationally where necessary.

**Time-table:** by the end of 2006, determination of needs to expand co-operation.

**Responsible parties:** the relevant Issue Group; FVU Service Unit; potential other partners (e.g., polytechnics, international networks).

**Monitoring:** Number of partners involved in co-operation along the lines of the Flexible Study Rights (JOO) agreement, functionality of the existing agreements (determined using surveys), extent of co-operative areas (number, scope).

## 2. Promoting the shared use of online education and educational materials

By the end of the strategy term, a significant part of the university educational services, processes and information repositories are available online for shared use. Flexible educational co-operation is based on common procedures for the production, administration, description, requirements definition and quality assessment of educational materials.

### Critical success factors related to this goal, and the time-table, actors and monitoring procedures for their realisation

Common processes for the production and provision of online education, along with quality criteria, are designed and adopted in the member universities. This enables the searching, comparison, evaluation and development of online instruction and educational materials.

#### **Time-table:**

2005: set of quality criteria for material published on the FVU portal completed; description information definitions for course information completed specifications for higher education information completed; common content production management and quality process definition project and FVU Online Student Services project launched.

2006: preparedness for adopting course information specifications for higher education information reached in most universities; eStudy Environment project launched.

2005–2007: The VOPLA project proceeds according to plan: quality management apparatus developed and defined in 2005, testing in 2006 and adoption starting 2007.

**Responsible parties:** FVU Service Unit: specifications for higher education information, quality criteria for material published on the FVU portal, FVU Online Student Services project, eStudy Environment project; relevant Issue Group: common processes definition project; the Vopla project: Vopla quality criteria.

**Monitoring:** Specifications for higher education information: universities commit themselves to production models; Quality criteria for material published on the FVU portal – adopted in FVU portal content production processes; FVU Online Student Services project and eStudy Environment project – realised yes/no: Vopla: quality management apparatus in use among FVU partners.

Organisation and deployment of an identity federation for user authentication and authorization, in response to production needs.

**Time-table:** 2005, universities join the HAKA Federation.

**Responsible parties:** CSC: operator of the federation; FVU partners: fulfilling the responsibilities of service providers; universities: adoption.

**Monitoring:** comprehensiveness of the HAKA Federation (number of members involved), rate of adoption of common user authentication and authorization in shared-use information systems.

Developing producer models for educational materials as part of the educational quality management system: producer models for educational materials have been created and extensively adopted, which support the co-operation among universities. In this context, producer models refer to standardised production processes and the related criteria, support services and operating procedures.

**Time-table:**

2005: survey to identify, document and disseminate good practices. Testing of good practice processes in different universities.

2006: development of a common producer model for educational materials, preparation and adoption of the related support services in universities; Vopla producer model criteria. 2007–2008: Auditing by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.

**Responsible parties:** educational technology centres take main responsibility for local development activities; relevant Issue Group: identification of best practices, development into projects; FVU Development Unit: data collection and administration of university models on the FVU portal.

**Monitoring:** university-specific solutions, auditing by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, identification of best practices: benchmarking by relevant Issue Group.

### 3. Extensive adoption of commonly produced ICT training and support services

ICT training, produced in nation-wide co-operation, reaches all target groups according to their training needs. Nation-wide partnership-based ICT training is used as part of the universities' local support service provision. The availability of counselling services is ensured by co-operative agreements between universities and by using common service models.

#### Critical success factors related to this goal, and the time-table, actors and monitoring procedures for their realisation

The ICT training meets the users' needs and the goals set by the Ministry of Education.

**Time-table:** target time-table set by the Ministry of Education in the Ope.fi teacher training project.

**Responsible parties:** national educational network projects (e.g., TieVie), educational technology centres

**Monitoring:** according to mechanism defined by the Ministry of Education.

Commonly produced ICT support services can be integrated as part of the university support systems.

- ▶ A life cycle model is created, which enables the description of needs assessment, product development, administration organisation, further development and service phase-out.
- ▶ The integration of the life cycle models as part of the university support systems is planned and implemented.

**Time-table:** launching of the definition of the life cycle model in 2005, integration estimated to start in 2007; aim extends throughout the strategy term.

**Responsible parties:** relevant Issue Group responsible for creating the model, each FVU partner adheres to the model.

**Monitoring:** monitoring by FVU Steering Group

#### 4. Integration of FVU operations into the European Higher Education Area and other international co-operation

The FVU Steering Group organises the preparation of a target programme for international co-operation. The target programme defines the marketing plan for the strong points and lead projects of the virtual university, the acquisition of international material, and other forms of international co-operation.

International co-operation will be developed in the following areas:

- ▶ reciprocal transmission of education and educational materials
- ▶ international exchange of virtual university staff
- ▶ project co-operation for the development of education and educational materials
- ▶ flexible student mobility within the European Higher Education Area
- ▶ the role of FVU networks in the implementation of development policy

Primary co-operative partners include the virtual universities and open distance universities in the European Higher Education Area, as well as organisations such as EDEN, EADTU, ICDE, SRI-LoD, UniPID and the UN development organisations.

##### **Critical success factors related to this goal, and the time-table, actors and monitoring procedures for their realisation**

Identification of the FVU community's spearhead areas and projects for internationalisation.

**Time-table:** review in 2005, planning in 2006, pilot projects in 2006–2007.

**Responsible parties:** relevant Issue Group is in charge of the review

**Monitoring:** review presented in Consortium Assembly in autumn 2005.

Review, prioritisation and decision on participation in activities and projects in the EU area and other international partner organisations.

**Time-table:** review in 2005, planning in 2006, pilot projects in 2006–2007.

**Responsible parties:** relevant Issue Group is in charge of the review

**Monitoring:** review presented in Consortium Assembly in autumn 2005.

A functional model is created for the exchange of education and educational material with main international co-operative partners.

**Time-table:** 2006–2007, project planning, 2007–2008, start of the preparation of the co-operation and of a planned integration into existing EU projects, in 2009–2010, activities according to project plans.

**Responsible parties:** FVU Service Unit as a partner of the international virtual universities, university student administration and international units in the practical implementation.

**Monitoring:** monitoring criteria will be created in connection with the project planning.

The FVU participates actively in developing flexible studies in the European Higher Education Area

**Time-table:** 2006–2007, project planning, 2007–2008, start of the preparation of the co-operation and of a planned integration into existing EU projects, in 2009–2010, activities according to project plans.

**Responsible parties:** student administration and international units in implementation, FVU Service Unit in student mobility between international university networks.

**Monitoring:** monitoring criteria will be created in connection with the project planning.

## 5. The FVU organisation, operating modes, decision making and financing models meet the needs of the network

During the strategy term, the FVU will develop an established format for its activities and gain the financial resources to ensure long-term development work. The FVU services, operating models and products are competitive and they provide genuine support for innovative university operations. A broad network of university partners participates in the development and co-ordination of FVU operations.

### Critical success factors related to this goal, and the time-table, actors and monitoring procedures for their realisation

Functionality and institutionalisation of the administrative and organisational model<sup>1</sup>.

**Time-table:** 2005, specification of the administrative and organisational model, formation of the Issue Groups and the FVU Forum, planning for the institutionalisation of the FVU, decisions about the institutionalisation of different relevant bodies.

**Responsible party:** the FVU Steering Group prepares the administrative and organisational model.

**Monitoring:** the Consortium Assembly will approve the establishment of the Issue Groups and the FVU Forum in its spring 2005 meeting, in the autumn it will decide on the organisations to be institutionalised, and the operating model of the FVU Service Unit will be resolved in 2007, at the earliest.

Resource allocation supporting sustained long-term operations

- ▶ The resources provided to the different parties enable the activities outlined in this strategy.
- ▶ The universities participate in financing the activities.
- ▶ The continuity of basic operations is ensured.

**Time-table:** 2005, membership fee of the FVU Consortium and its continuity established, Ministry of Education sets policy for financial basis after the year 2007.

**Responsible parties:** FVU Consortium, Ministry of Education

**Monitoring:** the adequacy of the resources is compared to the strategic goals, future monitoring is conducted in connection with the performance contract monitoring.

Management by performance contracts is developed to promote network activities and a culture supporting the development and sharing of educational innovations. The universities are able to maintain established network activities on the basis of their basic funding, and networked activities form a part of the performance management system.

**Time-table:** preparation of the above-mentioned item is started during 2005

**Responsible party:** Ministry of Education

**Monitoring:** performance contract consultations and guidelines

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<sup>1</sup> The Information Society Programme for Education, Training and Research 2004–2006 requires that FVU operations in developing networked university activities and providing services gain an established position by the end of 2006.

## 8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The central responsibility for monitoring and evaluation lies with the FVU Steering Group and the FVU Forum. The FVU Forum evaluates the achievement of each strategic goal on a half-yearly basis. On the basis of this evaluation, the Forum proposes specifications to the prevailing operating plan of the budget term, and makes preliminary plans for the operating plan of the next term in each strategic target area. As support in the national-scale and local monitoring, the Forum may use the tool-box for strategy monitoring, evaluation and reporting created in the Strategy Service of the FVU portal. The FVU Forum reports on its monitoring and planning activities to the FVU Steering Group and to the universities.

Parts of the strategy are also evaluated by other parties, such as the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, according to their own criteria.

On the basis of the reporting, the FVU Steering Group monitors the total level of achievement of the strategy and makes the contracts, resource allocation decisions, agreements and recommendations that are required for strategic management.

Initiatives to specify or revise the strategy and the related definition processes will be addressed in the annual assembly of the FVU Consortium.

The criteria for target-by-target monitoring of the strategy – i.e., criteria for critical success factors – are described in section 7.

This strategy was adopted by the FVU Consortium Assembly, March 8, 2005.