



Analysis of the implementation of the plans for the Academy of Finland's Profi funding method (12 June 2019)

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1. Summary

The subject of the analysis consisted of the implementation of the plans for the calls for applications Profi 1 – Profi 4 of the Academy of Finland. Profi funding¹ is a competitive funding instrument provided by the Academy of Finland, which is aimed at all scientific and artistic disciplines. The objective of the funding method is to support and speed up the strategic profiling of Finnish universities in order to improve their capacity for enhancing the quality of research.

In examining the results of the analysis of the implementation of the Profi plans, it should be noted that the analysis was performed at an early stage. The implementation of the Profi plans was analysed at a time when, on average, 22% of the funding for Profi calls 1–4 had been realized. The implementation of plans has been affected by the amount of funding granted to the university, which varied between 0% and 100% of the sum applied for during different rounds. While the Profi funding was lower than requested in most cases, universities have taken different approaches to the situation. Within the university, the Profi funding has often been distributed amongst all the profiling areas included in the application, even though the amount of funding granted has been lower than requested. It may be presumed that the remaining period of Profi funding will proceed as planned. Until now, use of the funding has progressed almost fully in accordance with the funding instalments.

The main profiling action taken by universities has been tenure track recruitment, where the realized personnel resources in universities have been allocated to the stages of the tenure track system preceding professorship, excluding the University of Turku and Aalto University. The University of Turku and Aalto University have reported that they have used most of the funding for professors' salaries. Until now, the most significant obstacle to the implementation of plans have been the unforeseen amount of funding and the fact that implementation of recruitment by the beginning of the Profi funding period has been challenging. Other profiling measures have included combining departments and not filling professorships.

With regard to profiling areas, universities have promoted existing high-level fields of research and the implementation of their plans more than emerging and new fields. Profiling has particularly taken place toward larger entities within disciplines, but as of yet, a wider guiding effect on distributing work between universities cannot be shown for the Profi instrument.

Profi's specific effect on quality is hard to evaluate, as research is primarily implemented using other forms of research funding. In addition to tenure track recruitment, interdisciplinary cooperation has particularly been reported as a method for improving the quality of research. The impact assessment should be examined more closely when five years have passed from the Profi funding decision. This would allow us to examine whether a five-year fixed-term Profi funding has resulted in the intended change in the long term.

¹ Further information: <https://www.aka.fi/en/research-and-science-policy/university-profiling/>

2. Conclusions

Plans for the profiling areas have been implemented based on the amount of funding received. To date, Profi funding has been spent practically in full according to the granted amount. In universities, Profi funding has primarily been used for the stage of the tenure track system preceding professorship, except in Aalto University and the University of Turku where most personnel resources have been used on professorships. Profi funding has been allocated to existing high-level research, as emerging fields and new schemes have been limited.

Until now, the most significant obstacle to the implementation of plans has been the unforeseen amount of funding and the fact that implementation of recruitment by the beginning of the Profi funding period has been challenging. The fact that Profi funding is distributed unevenly over the years and that it is not possible to use the funding flexibly between the years has been seen as problematic by universities.

Profi has managed to speed up the profiling of universities according to their strategies. The impact of Profi funding has exceeded its level of funding (50 million euros of the total funding of universities, which is approximately 2 billion euros). The social status of university has improved, particularly as the profile of smaller universities has become more clearly defined. To smaller universities, Profi funding has been more significant than to the larger multidisciplinary universities. Profi has facilitated both the internal and external communication of a university, where the university has clearly defined profiles.

Profi funding has promoted profiling particularly toward larger entities within disciplines. An outline of the primary position and role of profile funding is presented in the figure below. Profiling can be examined within a discipline, within a university, and between universities. Based on the analysed material, the implementation of Profi has been the strongest within disciplines by reducing fragmentation within a field and by reinforcing larger entities as profiling areas. Profi has also promoted multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary cooperation within universities with regard to thematic entities, for example. For its part, Profi has supplemented the funding of competence clusters² that include several universities, but as of yet, a wider guiding effect on the distribution of work between universities cannot be shown. Cooperation and distribution of work between universities is examined from the perspective of university policy.

² See e.g. The Finnish Flagship Programme <https://www.aka.fi/en/research-and-science-policy/flagship-programme/>

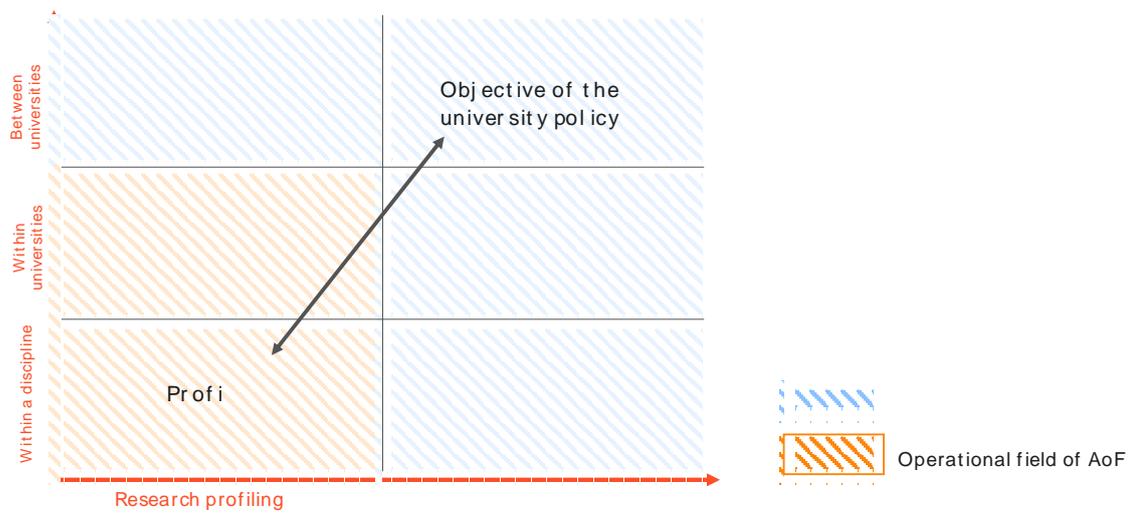


Figure. Position and role of the Prof i funding.