



university of
 groningen

Making Connections



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Strategic Plan **University of Groningen**

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Introduction

With a rich heritage and an academic tradition dating back to 1614, the University of Groningen is an academic community with a strong sense of belonging and a culture of innovative education and research. It is an academic community where we are curious, ask questions with an open mind, and engage with each other and with society. It is a community that enables its students to become active, independent, critical and responsible citizens of the world.

Innovation, open-mindedness and especially engagement with and for society are therefore at the heart of our new strategic plan for 2021-2026. They are key to our university's future. This is not only true for Groningen, but is also being explicitly addressed in discussions on the future of universities in Europe.

We all know our society is facing major scientific and societal challenges in the areas of climate resilience, sustainability, social resilience, an ageing population and digital transformation. Challenges in which we, as a broad university, can and must play an important role through our education, research and activities with societal impact.

The University of Groningen believes we can fulfil this role by making and reinforcing connections: connections across disciplines, connections between education, research and societal impact, connections within our academic community, and connections with the region, Europe and the rest of the world. By learning, working and performing research across borders we can tackle today's multi-dimensional challenges.

The four cornerstones of our strategic plan are therefore:

1. to stimulate learning and research in an interdisciplinary setting¹ with and for regional, European and global partners to find sustainable, innovative solutions to the challenges that society faces;
2. to become a more agile and resilient organisation – with shared ownership and mutual responsibility – that enables collaboration;
3. to recognise that academic success is a team effort: we need to recognise, reward, develop and make use of staff and students' talents to achieve excellence in all three areas of education, research and societal impact;
4. to strive for state-of-the-art facilities and state-of-the-art support as important enablers of the processes of education, research and impact.

Our cornerstones rest on the foundation of our strong disciplines in the three clusters – Social Sciences & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Health, which we continue to support. By establishing four Schools as places for interdisciplinary research and education, we will offer



¹ Interdisciplinary here refers to all forms in which co-operation between disciplines can take shape.

our staff and students the opportunity to apply their own disciplinary knowledge across other disciplines to respond to global challenges and to engage with society. We are also involved in the University of the North, a collaboration of knowledge institutes with societal and business partners in the northern Netherlands; it has a focus on the region's challenges and needs. The Schools and the University of the North are the overarching elements of our strategic plan.

Drafting the Strategic Plan has been a rigorous process including consultations with many stakeholders. A similar approach will be taken in implementing the plan, which may well require yearly adjustments to the priorities, goals, and practical aspects. Each year a realistic strategic agenda will be compiled.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of flexibility. Hence, our yearly strategic agenda will allow us to respond to a continuously changing world. During the drafting of the strategic plan for 2021-2026, the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, which led to adapting the plan's content to the lessons, innovations and adjustments emerging from the pandemic and changes in the procedure to finalise the plan. Other unexpected developments, although probably not comparable to COVID-19, will undoubtedly emerge during the span of this strategic plan. These developments may require us to adapt the goals, the way to achieve them, or their implementation. As the agenda will be discussed annually, any necessary changes can be accommodated and will ensure that we maintain realistic targets in realising our plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of those disruptive events that revealed both our strengths and vulnerabilities, while at the same time it accelerated the transformation to remote (on line) education, a direction that was set in motion a few years ago. The pandemic has also emphasised the importance of working across borders and across disciplines to meet such a complex challenge. In the strategic plan we foresaw the importance of interdisciplinary research and education, embodied in the establishment of the Schools and the University of the North. Lessons from the pandemic have guided the finalisation of this strategic plan. The main lessons relate to the concepts of blended learning and working, and to how they can help us to become a future-proof and sustainable university. They will have an impact on staff and students' travel and on the University's workplaces. The pandemic has also shown us that we need to be an agile and resilient organisation with adaptive leadership, trust and data-informed decision-making as key components. For us academics asking questions and dealing with uncertainties are a fact of life. The same holds true for this strategic plan. Do we make the right choices and can we uphold these choices looking at what is currently happening in the world around us? We do not know what the long-term effects of COVID-19 will be on higher education in the Netherlands, and its impact on our economy and the financial consequences for university funding. These may have repercussions for our plan and might force us to make choices. Despite these uncertainties, we feel that with this plan we can preserve our position as an independent institution where curiosity driven and ground-breaking research flourishes, where we strive for staff and students to develop themselves to their full potential, to train new generations of engaged citizens and where both research and education contribute to the sustainability of our society at large. A university that inspires and facilitates its academic community to combine their creativity and innovative strength to the best of their abilities with recognition of each other's talents.



Mission

The University of Groningen (UG) is a broad university where education and research are inextricably linked. UG operates internationally and uses its innovative strength to tackle scientific and societal challenges and to train global citizens. Moreover, the University engages with the local region and makes an active contribution to strengthening and shaping the regional knowledge ecosystem.

Vision

We envision the UG as a close-knit, open academic community that provides opportunities for staff and students to develop themselves to their full potential. Our students, academic and support staff are curious, involved and highly motivated; they show responsibility and are inspired to become the best. Together, they are guided by our core values in generating knowledge to better understand the world around us and to apply this knowledge in a sustainable manner for the benefit of people and society.

Our strong disciplines, which span the entire academic spectrum, form the foundation on which talent and collaboration can thrive. Collaboration takes place between disciplines and between the university and the outside world. Our good connections permit us to forge alliances with partners in the Northern Netherlands and with universities and institutions in many other countries. In doing so, we create added value for the world of today and tomorrow. UG's research and degree programmes are able to attract talented individuals from all over the world to the Northern Netherlands, boosting both the University and the region. Thanks to the diversity of our academic community and the opportunities we can offer to gain international experience, UG students can develop a global perspective and acquire intercultural skills. This enables our students to engage with society and to contribute towards societal challenges later in their professional careers.

Core values

Our core values define the culture of the University of Groningen; they guide how we reach decisions and how our staff, students and stakeholders work together. Our core values encompass academic freedom, integrity, inclusivity, sustainability and openness.

Academic freedom²

Education and research take place in a climate of freedom of opinion and expression. The University of Groningen adheres to UNESCO's definition³: "The right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.

Integrity

Integrity underlies all academic research, organisational processes and conduct at the University of Groningen; integrity and academic freedom go hand in hand. They lie at the heart of our research and teaching activities, at all levels of the organisation, and in our interactions with each other. Integrity translates into honesty, respect, sincerity, openness, transparency and responsibility in everything we do. The UG's Code of Conduct for Academic Integrity and the Dutch Code of Conduct for Academic Integrity serve as our [guidelines](#). We expect our students, staff and management to subscribe to these principles and make a constructive contribution towards maintaining them.



² The UG acts according to in art.1.6 of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW)

³ UNESCO, Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997), Section 27

Inclusivity

Diversity and inclusion are important aspects of academic success, which is why we value the perspectives and contributions of all our staff and students highly. Each individual in our academic community matters, which is why there is a high level of engagement. The University's strategy and policy are broadly supported because we promote constant interaction between staff, students and the consultative participation bodies; everyone feels part of the University. Our language policy contributes towards this.

Sustainability

The University embraces sustainability. We respect the environment by making rational use of natural resources and by taking steps to reduce the ecological footprint of the different processes involved in our research, education and daily operations. We integrate, where possible, sustainable and responsible behaviour consistently in our teaching and research, but also in our daily operations. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals and our own Sustainability Roadmap guide these efforts.

Openness

The University's academic community wants to be known for its open culture. Openness therefore characterises both our education and research. Research results are made available to the scientific community and to society. We also have a transparent administrative culture and use a consultation model for management. Our open culture should make it easier for young researchers to find their place in teaching and academia, and to contribute to society.

Guiding principles:

- Connect: by working together, we establish links between education and research, between disciplines, between our University and society, and between our region and the world;
- Excel: we set ourselves ambitious targets based on the talent of every student, researcher, lecturer and staff member;
- Trust: we trust that all our staff and students adhere to our core values and we structure our leadership, collaborations and dialogues on this;
- Welcome: the University of Groningen is an academic community where everyone feels welcome. Our students feel at home here and our staff feel valued.

a close-knit, open academic community



Strategic Aims

Education, research and societal impact are essential for realising our mission and vision. Education and research have always been the University of Groningen's raison d'être. Societal impact, although an inherent part of education and research, has been explicitly added to these strategic aims in the last decade. To achieve our aims, UG invests in its human capital by offering broad opportunities for personal development.

Education

Context

The University of Groningen builds on a long tradition of high quality, in-depth, research-driven education that enables our students to develop and use their talents optimally. Within our academic community, we educate our students to become globally engaged citizens, who are in a position to solve the contemporary challenges of science and society in a sustainable and optimal way. These challenges, combined with rising student numbers and the increasing diversity of our student body require continuous, evidence-based improvements and innovation of our teaching strategies, educational forms and learning environment.

Students learn best when they process new information in such a way that it makes sense to them, when their learning is contextualised. Education and research are strongly intertwined over the full breadth of academic disciplines. These disciplines form the basis of our educational programmes. The problems of regional, national and global society call for a sharper focus on interdisciplinarity in education that builds on our traditional disciplinary foundation within the three clusters of Social Sciences & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Health. To better understand the world and face up to its challenges, we are increasingly required to employ cross-disciplinary tools.

To optimise our teaching activities we are now blending our on-campus and online educational methods and tools, although face-to-face, on site education will remain a cornerstone of our education. Combining our vibrant campus life with online and blended learning creates opportunities for meaningful social interaction between students and teachers. Digital technologies and the integration of various forms of online education in our teaching increases possibilities for the personalisation and flexibility of education, which also facilitates life-long learning.

In recent years, successful pilots have been set up for innovative educational concepts as part of an ambitious renewal of the education system. We have pioneered pilots like the international classroom and active and collaborative learning concepts, learning communities, the flipped classroom, and the use of various e-learning tools. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of e-learning and will help to accelerate further development and consolidation during the five-year period of this strategic plan.



Vision

Student success (the personal and social maturation of the student's performance) and study success (effectively helping as many students as possible to obtain their degree) remain the main focus of our education system. We offer high-quality academic programmes in an inspiring community in which we connect our research with our teaching. We support our students to reach their full potential as academically-trained experts; they gain the knowledge and skills to cross the borders of traditional disciplines and to contribute to solving complex scientific and societal problems in collaboration with others.

To achieve this vision we focus on establishing strong links between students and staff, between education and research, and between teaching and relevant societal issues. We do this in both national and international environments. Learning is a collaborative process that takes place in a social context: our students learn from experienced teachers – and from each other – in a close-knit academic community. We use the curiosity, diversity, backgrounds and talents of both students and teachers to acquire and generate new knowledge. In this interactive environment, students have control over their study experience. They are challenged to continuously develop and improve their knowledge and talents. We facilitate this process by making the content, type and pace of our education adjustable to the needs of our students. Well-trained teachers are key to this process and they play a crucial role in engaging the students.

The didactical methods that support this vision centre around three concepts: contextualised learning, active and collaborative learning, and blended learning. We contextualise the learning activities by focusing our teaching of foundational academic knowledge and skills on applications within specific academic or societal contexts. This enables students to discover meaningful relationships between abstract ideas and practical applications in the real world. Our teaching activities promote active participation and collaboration in order to stimulate and facilitate our students to generate, exchange and integrate knowledge. We prepare students to become active members of the academic community and we blend our on-campus and online teaching activities to optimise their learning environment.

Aim

We aim to impart to our students the values, knowledge and skills that they need to become globally engaged citizens, able to address the contemporary challenges of science and society. To accomplish this, we teach them in an environment that focuses on personal development and ambition and that fosters their curiosity, creativity, flexibility, a critical mind, collaboration and an entrepreneurial spirit. This environment is inspired by leading researchers, highly-motivated teachers, and academic and societal issues in regional, national and international contexts. Success starts well before students enter our institution, which is why we start fostering academic and scientific sensitivity and literacy in primary and secondary schools. Our efforts continue after graduation in the ways we empower our graduates to adopt life-long development.



To achieve our aim we will:

- strengthen the innovation potential of our education and place strong emphasis on the relevance of recognising and rewarding good teaching and on further development of the Teaching Academy Groningen;
- exchange, generate, and integrate knowledge in an innovative, close-knit academic community, where interdisciplinarity builds on a strong disciplinary foundation and the community's diversity helps to develop the full potential of our students;
- increase the focus on the interdisciplinarity of our academic community to enable students and staff to collaborate with and learn from people from different backgrounds, to position them optimally to solve the contemporary challenges of science and society;
- continue investing in developing our close-knit learning communities of students and teachers, which activates and engages students, and is the prerequisite for open dialogue, critical thinking and debate;
- impart to students the necessary skills, competences, attitudes and knowledge that they will need to compete successfully in the global labour market, as well as empower graduates and professionals to adopt life-long learning and enhance their employability.

Strategy

1. Disciplinary and interdisciplinarity

We have a strong disciplinary foundation and an increased focus on interdisciplinarity. Early on, our students are brought into contact with leading international scholars and scientists and exposed to high-level research. Our student education culminates in research projects that are supervised on an individual basis and assessed by academic staff. In various learning communities, students and teachers create an educational and social environment that stimulates in-depth learning and the acquisition of academic skills and integrity. Building on the strong disciplinary foundation, the experience gained in our Honours College and University College, we will further expand our interdisciplinary education programmes. This will lead to various new interdisciplinary minors that tie in with the societal themes of the four Schools. Students' options to choose modules from different programmes will increase because obstacles to selecting modules from different faculties will be minimised, and transitions between programmes at university-, master- and bachelor levels, and at the applied universities, will be made easier.

2. Blended learning

To further intensify our close learning communities we will incorporate more ways of blended learning. We will work on evidence-based integration of online and on site activities, resulting in more focused offline interaction between students and staff. Our academic staff will be professionally supported and trained to improve these interactions. Innovating our assessment methods is paramount to providing a blended learning environment. The Teaching Academy Groningen will foster research into educational development and innovation, and facilitate support and professionalisation of teachers.



3. International focus

To prepare our students optimally for entering and navigating the global labour market, we will embed employability in the educational process. We will expand the involvement of our alumni in the educational process and in the academic community. Our students will gain access to a global experience, whether this is by studying abroad, online exposure, or through interaction in UG's increasingly diverse and high-quality international classroom. To ensure that every student can benefit optimally from their global experience, we will pay specific attention how to optimise inclusion of the student for the different arrangements.

4. Life-long development

In order to facilitate life-long learning, the goals, content, valuation and certification of educational components will be made more transparent. This enables us to reward micro-credentials to our students, thereby making the building blocks of our programmes visible. Programmes will also become more flexible and thus more accessible and attractive to new student groups at different stages in their lives. We will seek institutional accreditation for this development and will pilot it in the European University Network, ENLIGHT.

to become globally engaged citizens



To achieve this aim we will:

- stimulate and support top disciplinary and interdisciplinary research in our university;
- reward research in all its forms, taking contributions to interdisciplinary research, societal impact, team spirit and the team itself, and Open Science into account;
- create a research environment that optimally supports the daily research practice, and open science.

Strategy

1. Stimulate and support top research

The most important factors for achieving and maintaining a world-famous reputation are our researchers, together with their support teams. To stimulate the best possible research at our university we will enhance the support of our research talent. A dedicated one-stop support structure will be created, where researchers can find tailor-made advice and help on developing their competences. Our attention to stimulating young talent with the Rosalind Franklin programme, tenure track- and PhD programmes will remain a key feature of this approach. Special attention will be paid to scouting for potential research talents in our university and guiding them towards becoming leading researchers.

Moreover, we will continue to strive for a healthy balance between fundamental/curiosity-driven research and applied/strategic research, as we consider applied research needs fundamental research in order to flourish. We will therefore foster curiosity-driven research, both in disciplinary and interdisciplinary settings. Our PhD programme makes a crucial contribution to this balance as PhD students are encouraged to pursue their own original ideas with the help of their supervisors.

We will also use our PhD programme to facilitate and promote interdisciplinary research. With a focus on 'building bridges', we will encourage and enable students to cross disciplinary boundaries, within and between faculties. To further encourage interdisciplinarity, in addition to the four Schools, we will strengthen existing interdisciplinary structures where necessary.

2. Recognition and rewards

Proper recognition and rewards will be given to researchers for their time and efforts to develop and support all aspects of research, including interdisciplinary research, leadership, educating students, and contributing to societal impact and Open Science. This requires updating the evaluation of research output according to modern criteria, taking into account the international Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) that we have endorsed. The new evaluation system will acknowledge that achieving research goals requires teamwork and that both individual performance and the team contribution need to be rewarded. We recognise that in good teams each individual member makes a specific and important contribution. We also consider support staff to be part of a research team. The UG will work on an efficient and straightforward system based on trust in our researchers as the starting point.



3. Daily research practice and support

Open Science and FAIR Data (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability and Reusability) are essential to fostering collaboration within and outside our university. Both will be supported by a research infrastructure that encourages open access publishing and FAIR storage and use of data. The newly established Groningen Digital Competence Center (GDCC) will play a prominent role in this support structure.

Grant application procedures, a prominent part of the modern academic research process, will be updated. The funding support organisation will be further professionalised in close collaboration with the research community, to consolidate and strengthen how many grants we are awarded. We will aim to align our fundamental and applied research interests wherever possible, while safeguarding and promoting our curiosity-driven research and independent and honest research practice. We will thereby broaden the scope of our external funding opportunities for strategic research. In the current climate, we recognise that research with societal relevance holds specific value for funding opportunities. The Schools are one of the instruments to help develop these research lines.

To ensure that daily research practice takes place in an open academic climate and safe-guards public values, we will further embed our positive framework for integrity in research. This framework focuses on (best) practices, behaviour, and initiatives that should be encouraged. The framework contains tangible instruments – codes, regulations and guidelines – for everyone to use (students, researchers, management and support staff). We will develop these to ensure that the practice is closely aligned with the written norms. In the framework, instruments for ensuring integrity are given sufficient institutional support to operate effectively.

All these actions will enable our researchers to develop their talents and fulfil their potential in an environment of trust, in which they feel free to take risks in their research, and have opportunities to collaborate with each other and to support students and younger scholars in their growth.

through strong academic disciplines



Open Science & FAIR Data

Big data, Biobank Champion, Lifelines and the Artificial Coalition are some of the initiatives at the University of Groningen that generate huge amounts of data. They are supported by our large computational infrastructure. To make the data available for education and research collaborations, UG supports the principles of Open Science (OS) and FAIR Data (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). By implementing and practising these principles in our academic community, we are committed to stimulating and facilitating a transparent research and educational environment.

Considering recent developments at a national level and the strong support for open science at the European level, we will formulate and execute a roadmap towards the goals of OS, taking into account disciplinary differences and avoiding “one size fits all” solutions. The roadmap will encompass the priorities defined by the Dutch National Platform Open Science (NPOS):

- Support of bottom-up OS initiatives
- Recognition and rewarding of OS practices
- Open access (OA) publishing
- Adequate storage and, at a later stage, optimal re-use of research data (i.e. FAIR data)

To support bottom-up initiatives we will set up an Open Science centre of expertise and stimulate collaboration between all the parties involved with Open Science. We will also facilitate the Open Science Community Groningen as a hub of OS advocacy. Recognition of OS practices will become an integral part of HR evaluation policies and our research institutes will be supplied with templates and best practice examples in OS for self-evaluation.

Open Access publishing will be further encouraged by improving the support and financial infrastructure for making open access publishing simpler and more feasible in every discipline. In addition, we will optimise our research data management policies and facilities for the storage and reuse of data according to the FAIR principles. This will unlock the full potential of our research data for use by the academic community and aid the researcher where possible. The storage and reuse of data will be supported by the GDCC, which will also offer best practices, support and IT infrastructure in the areas of Research Data Management, data science, software and OS for researchers and support staff.



Societal impact

Context

The University is part of society. We create and share knowledge through our education and research, we work with and for external partners and we launch new activities and initiatives. This is how we contribute to society, and it is a contribution that society expects of us. Society currently faces major challenges in areas such as climate, sustainability, social resilience, an ageing population and digital transformation. Consequently, our contribution to the solutions required is even more important. We can only achieve this if we provide our staff and students with the best possible support for all forms of societal impact. Such a strong emphasis on societal impact requires professional and comprehensive support, with an explicit focus on outreach and public engagement.

Vision

The University of Groningen regards societal impact as one of its primary responsibilities. The implementation and translation of education and research activities for and in society, wherever possible, is a cornerstone of the academic system. This interaction with society – public engagement – enriches both education and research. To this end, we utilise the entire knowledge chain, from knowledge co-creation and knowledge sharing, to knowledge use and economic value creation in conjunction with various teaching activities. Collaboration across disciplines and with and for external partners plays a key role in this. Processes for teaching, research and societal impact are therefore closely intertwined, which enables staff and students to develop the knowledge, competences and entrepreneurial spirit that is required to meet society's needs.

Aim

In order to realise our responsibility towards society, we are intensifying our contribution to the resolution of societal issues, in particular those in the Northern Netherlands, through our education and research. To this end, we will disseminate our knowledge more actively, we will provide staff and students with better support when converting this knowledge into products, processes, services and new business activities, and, in co-operation with social partners, we will identify relevant teaching and research topics.

In this respect, the sustainable creation of value, generating knowledge, and transferring it to society using the Sustainable Development Goals as guidance are our top priorities.

We will achieve this aim by:

- Creating a professional impact organisation that supports students and academics, and interfaces with the University of the North to establish partnerships, generate societal impact, and conduct outreach and public engagement activities.
- Teaching students the necessary knowledge and skills and how to apply them in societal contexts such as projects, work placements, challenges and start-ups, both during and after their studies.
- Explicitly recognising and rewarding (interdisciplinary) co-operation with external partners and the generation of societal impact.
- Playing a proactive role in realising societal impact by drawing upon the wealth of knowledge and expertise at our University, with the four Schools and the University of the North as spearheads.



Strategy

1 Professional support organisation

To provide the best possible support to all our staff and students in their socially oriented activities, the current support infrastructure for knowledge transfer, knowledge valorisation and engagement will be restructured and further professionalised. A budget and staff will be allocated for this purpose. In addition to providing direct support to staff working on societal impact, this infrastructure will also be geared towards acquiring more external research funding and intensifying the identification and marketing of our intellectual property through licences and start-ups for the entire University. One of the most important aspects of this support organisation will be the sharing of knowledge and involvement, in other words, outreach and public engagement, including citizen science projects and the University Museum.

2. Training students and graduates

We have developed a three-pronged approach to improve our students' drive to serve society and the mindset and skills they will need to achieve that effectively: degree programmes will offer more courses that are devoted to the theme of entrepreneurship; the four Schools will be instrumental in teaching students to collaborate across disciplines to tackle societal challenges, and we will engage students in solving societal issues through field labs, projects and work placements. We will also continue to stimulate entrepreneurial activities for and by students (like Start-up City and WIJS, Wijkinzet door Jongeren en Studenten) thereby stimulating social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility. In addition, we will continue to share the most up-to-date knowledge and research results with professionals from society and the business community through life-long development programmes.

3. Recognising and rewarding commitment to societal impact

During the development of the new evaluation system for staff performance, both public engagement and outreach will be explicitly included in the assessment and reward process. This reflects the fact that public engagement and outreach are key components of our University's range of tasks and responsibilities.

4. Schools and the Universiteit van het Noorden

The establishment of the four Schools will enable us to further define and regularly update our priorities for societal impact. They will serve as valuable guides for our commitment to society and also act as a breeding ground for some of our activities at the University of the North. The Schools and the University of the North are two major new instruments in our strategy for achieving interdisciplinarity and co-operation with external partners, as explained in more detail below.



Schools and Universiteit van het Noorden – with and for society

The four Schools and the Universiteit van het Noorden are two important new instruments for interacting with and contributing to society. Within and across the Schools, the faculties work together on four major themes relevant to society. These themes also lie at the heart of the University of the North, in which the UG and the universities of applied sciences in the Northern Netherlands connect with societal partners in the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major disrupter, but it has shown the importance of scientific knowledge and collaboration across disciplines to deliver solutions. Other grand challenges such as global warming, ageing societies, and the digital revolution also require this approach. To support society in meeting these challenges, we must prepare our students for the world of tomorrow by educating them to go beyond disciplines, in working together, and acquiring necessary knowledge and skills.

Four Schools

Educating our students in this new broader way of thinking and working is crucial. Our study programmes need to be adapted so that students have the opportunity to learn to work in teams with students from different disciplines, and to apply their skills and knowledge to societal problems. This includes working with public partners. The Schools are where these innovations will take place. Next to education they will also foster research collaborations within and across the Social Sciences & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Health. The Schools will create meeting places for the various academic disciplines to engage in research projects together, to educate, and to facilitate a dialogue with and about society at large. They are being built upon existing focus areas in our University (energy, healthy ageing, sustainable society) and on recent interfaculty partnerships. The Schools are inspired by the Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health in Groningen. They will connect socially relevant research questions to interdisciplinary research and education.

In this current strategic plan, the University of Groningen is considering four Schools. Each will focus on a specific area, related to an international challenge (such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Grand Challenges Europe) as well as regional issues. They will pay special attention to finding sustainable solutions. The four Schools are:

- **Wubbo Ockels School** focusing on the energy transition and climate adaptation for a sustainable planet;
- **Aletta Jacobs School** focusing on healthy ageing and public health working towards a healthy society;
- **Jantina Tammes School** focusing on digital innovation, artificial intelligence, and technological progress for a knowledge-based society;
- **Rudolf Agricola School** focusing on governance, politics and sustainable processes to realise a sustainable society.



The performance and direction of the themes in the Schools will be subject to evaluation every five years and can then be adapted or discontinued based upon the outcomes of the evaluation.

Each School will be structured as a flexible network, open to all who are interested, and characterised by three aspects:

1. The School will co-operate with the outside world, through other knowledge institutes, the business community, and social organisations in the Netherlands and abroad. Our alumni network will play a crucial role here;
2. Interdisciplinary research and learning will be promoted, drawing for teaching on the experience and expertise of the Honours College.
3. Research questions and teaching will be designed and developed within a community of interested academic staff from different faculties. They will take into account the academic challenges, identified developments, known problems, and the demands of society.

Furthermore, the Schools can act as knowledge brokers by sharing knowledge to support informed decision-making in government, politics and business, among other sectors.

In principle, all of the Schools' activities will also generate direct added value for researchers and students. The added value will consist of:

- The emergence of new research partnerships that may lead to innovative questions and breakthroughs for the benefit of academia and society;
- More opportunities for researchers to be visible in society and to interact with it;
- The creation of new channels to get research funded by or via the external partners;
- New content for teaching and new teaching methods for students who are keen to help resolve regional and global challenges;
- Students developing new knowledge and skills by working and learning with people from other disciplines and by interacting with external parties, thereby increasing their employability;
- Extra opportunities for students and researchers to connect with relevant employers (net-working and learning from the outside world).

The Schools will have a physical meeting point and high-quality infrastructure. In principle, they will not have their own support staff, but will be supported by existing facilities, such as the University Office. The Schools' governance structure will be determined later, but will reflect the fact that the Schools must cater to the wishes and needs of the participating faculties and researchers. Collaborations via the Schools will be further promoted by allocating funding for PhD positions and special appointments professors on relevant themes.



Universiteit van het Noorden

The University of Groningen is the initiator and coordinator of the Universiteit van het Noorden (UvhN), an open network of research universities and universities of applied sciences in the Northern Netherlands and Northwest Germany. The network is committed to boosting the overall prosperity of this northern region.

By collaborating intensively with the universities of applied sciences, we can bolster the academic climate of the North. This network will enable us to work together to find better answers to the academic issues relevant to our region. The Regional Innovation Strategy of the Northern Netherlands (RIS3) therefore forms the starting point for the University of the North's activities. This strategy focuses on good health, healthy food, clean water, and sustainable energy use in the broadest sense.

Since we add an extra dimension to the application of academic knowledge and enrich our teaching with the knowledge we acquire, the experiences gained by our staff and students – as a result of working together in this network – will allow them to combine different perspectives and approaches, and integrate these into their teaching and research. Moreover, this network will offer our students opportunities to develop additional skills for their internships in the region and their later careers in society. At the same time, the region will also benefit from our international knowledge, experience and co-operation when tackling regional challenges. For example, we are a partner in the European University Network, ENLIGHT, which focuses, among other things, on improving regional ecosystems.

The UvhN will also help students to switch to a more appropriate study programme and to continue their life-long development.

working together with and for society



Universiteit van het Noorden

The UvhN has the objective to:

- Strengthen the northern innovation ecosystem in a sustainable way;
- Boost the knowledge of companies and social institutions;
- Train sufficiently well-qualified professionals for the region;
- Establish more innovative facilities across the entire region and make better use of them;
- Create more start-ups and scale-ups from our knowledge base;
- Facilitate more innovation through external funding.

The UvhN's activities will contribute to making the Northern Netherlands and Northwest Germany an attractive place to live and work. The region will be transformed into one with a healthy economy, with plenty of employment opportunities requiring different levels of skills and knowledge, from fundamental and highly innovative to applied knowledge. It will be a region with a thriving cultural sector that makes a significant contribution to a good business climate and where the public is aware of the importance of education and research for society and everyday life.

Since the UvhN's activities are partly related to the themes pursued by the four Schools, the Schools will be one of the UG's sources for contributing to UvhN. In addition, all three of our knowledge domains play a role in UvhN. Knowledge acquired through the UvhN can be translated into daily teaching and research practice at the University of Groningen, thereby promoting a healthy and future-proof symbiosis between the University of Groningen and the UvhN.



Internationalisation

Context

As a leading comprehensive research university, the University of Groningen operates in a global context: our researchers compete and co-operate with international colleagues, our graduates pursue careers all over the world, our undergraduate students can gain international experience, we work on global challenges, and we work and learn in a truly international and diverse community. If we want our staff and students to be successful, we must educate and facilitate them to perform well in such an environment. Moreover, to maintain our position as a leading international university, we have to be able to attract international talent to study or work at UG. Both aspects comprise the core of our internationalisation strategy.

Vision

We are a comprehensive research university of international standing, strongly connected to the city of Groningen, our northern region, and the wider world. Our internationalisation efforts focus on improving the quality and impact of our research and education by bringing together perspectives from all over the world, within and between our many academic disciplines. In the next five years, we will focus on maximising the added value of internationalisation: first and foremost, for our students, staff and other stakeholders, and secondly to strengthen our position as a leading university.

Internationally, the UG positions itself as an attractive, diverse and inclusive university, renowned for its excellence in research and education, and for being socially responsible for current and future generations. Intensive collaboration within and between international strategic alliances, and through local representatives where feasible, raises our research and education to a higher level, because it allows us to share and gain knowledge, and to attract talent and funding from around the world. Whether in Groningen, online or abroad, UG students acquire cutting-edge knowledge and develop academic, intercultural and language skills that allow them to contribute to key solutions for global and local challenges.

Strategy

1. To prepare UG students for the world and international society by providing a global experience, whether this is via a study period abroad, online learning, or in UG's increasingly diverse and high-quality international classrooms. To create opportunities for our students to go abroad, we will also work closely with our international representatives and affiliated partners, for example, in Italy (KNIR), Japan (Osaka) and Mexico (UNAM).
2. To engage in Horizon Europe and the Erasmus Programme in research, education, global challenges and innovation, and to further contribute to the European Research Area, and the European Higher Education Area.
3. To contribute substantially and visibly to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in general and in our region specifically.



4. To attract and retain a talented and diverse community of international staff and students by ensuring that we are an attractive, competitive, inclusive and diverse university.
5. To develop strategic alliances with a select group of European and global partners leading to deeper relationships, education and research innovation and initiatives, diversified funding streams, and opportunities for short study/research programmes, double degrees, and collaborations on PhD projects for our students and staff.
6. To better connect our international activities, staff and students within the UG community, local society and industry. To make our international staff and students feel at home and retain their talents for the university and the northern region.
7. To make sustainability an integral part of our internationalisation efforts in education and research, and in promoting societal impact and responsible behaviour.

Geographical focus

In the coming years, we will intensify collaboration with a select group of international partners in our northern region, Europe and the wider world.

Globally, we will intensify our collaboration with selected partners in our Strategic Partnership Framework and aim to connect our interdisciplinary societal themes to concrete collaborations in, for example, PhD projects and summer schools, and by developing innovative ways of gaining international experience. In addition to the regions where we have developed a strong portfolio of partners and activities, we will also diversify to be more active in regions where we see opportunities, such as Africa, South Asia, North America and the United Kingdom. In line with our ambition to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, we will also remain committed to capacity development programmes in the Global South, while at the same time building sustainable relationships based on equality and reciprocity in these countries. Internally, we will achieve synergies by bringing together our education and research across disciplines in our activities in Asia, for example.

Europe will be a strong focus area for UG in the coming years, for example, we will appoint a special envoy for internationalisation and an EU liaison officer. UG will further intensify its European collaboration with the UK (post-Brexit), with the expanding European participation initiatives, with the Horizon Europe programme and continuation of the Erasmus Programme, and with the renewed interest shown in both the European Research Area and European Higher Education Area. As a member of the European University Network, ENLIGHT (with eight renowned universities), we aim to contribute to the fundamental transformation of European higher education and research. ENLIGHT will empower students as globally engaged citizens with state-of-the-art knowledge, skills and innovation potential to tackle major societal transitions. Furthermore, the European University Networks will develop key organisations in stimulating research and innovation in Europe. The UG will align ENLIGHT with other European networks (The Coimbra Group, The Guild) to team up with other long-standing partners to the benefit of student mobility and research networks.



Regionally, as part of the University of the North initiative, we will encourage the further elaboration of networks and collaborations between the Northern Netherlands, Northwest Germany and adjoining regions. Given the commonalities in research interests, there are ample opportunities for us all to strengthen the region's research reputation and to contribute to innovation and societal challenges. International students will be offered better connections to local business and society, which could, for example, lead to internships, projects and jobs with employers in the region. In ENLIGHT we aim to set up a Regional Academy to bring transdisciplinary groups of students and academic staff in contact with companies and business incubators, governmental organisations, and policymakers and citizens. Together, they will work on finding solutions for the complex challenges that emerge locally.

groningen global - connected to the world



Human Capital

The University of Groningen's human capital is the key to its success in education, research and having a societal impact. We strive to be a community in which talent can flourish and be recognised. Our students, PhD candidates and staff are given ample opportunity to train and develop their specific interests and strengths. Moreover, we strive to be a responsible and inspiring employer by providing a safe and sustainable environment for learning and working. These are the core aspects of our human capital agenda.

Students

Context

The UG has cultivated a diverse and highly active student population over many years. Providing our students with the knowledge and skills for them to become successful and responsible participants of wider society is one of our most important goals. We therefore offer a broad range of activities — both intra- and extracurricular — that enable students to learn and grow.

We already start informing and enthusing schoolchildren for academia during their primary and secondary education by offering pre-university courses and events. This is organised in co-operation with our regional network of schools. From a young age, these courses work on developing children's aspirations and managing their expectations, and on their scientific literacy. In this way we can support school children and students in transitioning to the UG, ensuring they can flourish from the start. Subsequently, we prepare students throughout their studies to enter the labour market successfully after graduation. This is done through employability training both in and outside the curricula and by bringing students into contact with alumni, businesses and governmental organisations via our growing regional network and the four Schools. This means students learn the skills necessary for them to contribute to society and for developing their academic field in their career. Our guiding principle is one of life-long learning: being a student is not limited to the boundaries of an academic programme, one is a student for life.

In addition, the UG supports an infrastructure of student organisations, study associations, and student participation that provides students with the opportunity to learn to be self-reliant and become responsible members of the community. Two of the main characteristics of student life are self-governance and self-organisation; these are reflected by a high degree of student participation at all levels, within the university as well as in student life. Student assessors sit on the Board of the University and on Faculty Boards, while students directly influence decision-making through student boards, co-governance bodies, and advisory bodies. The study organisations provide intra- and extracurricular activities that also promote student success. The UG provides financial and other support to the many successful student and study organisations run by students in Groningen and the broader region.

Moreover, we believe that student success goes beyond study success as measured by grades, drop-out rates, and graduations. We support the success of our students by working on a realistic expectation of university education, personal and academic development, leadership skills, and intercultural competences. To make these facilities accessible to all students, the UG pays close attention to its students' mental and physical well-being, social inclusion, and social safety.



Vision

The UG encourages active and successful collaborations between students and staff to foster mutual respect, trust, appreciation, and value for all members of the academic community. The whole community works collectively to achieve the UG's goals. Students should be committed to their studies, involved in the academic community, and should take responsibility for all facets of student life. Students can participate in study associations, student organisations, and at various levels of decision-making, from the University Council to the Faculty Councils and programme committees.

Aim

We aim to facilitate and guide student success by creating an infrastructure for students that allows for individual differentiation, personal and talent development, and participation in all aspects of student life, including sports, culture, and student facilities. We want our students to develop themselves in many different ways; we therefore support student life, monitor and improve student well-being, and create a safe environment. We achieve this by providing individual support and guidance, by strengthening the role of confidential advisors and study advisors, fostering a diverse and inclusive community, and expanding the facilities needed for this service.

Strategy

1. To continue to promote active student life by providing the financial means, support and facilities;
2. To monitor and continuously try to improve the well-being of students based on the findings and by offering personal guidance and making facilities available;
3. To establish an interdisciplinary and sustainable network to facilitate the transfer between primary and secondary education and the UG;
4. To develop an unambiguous alumni strategy based on the student/alumni life cycle.

where talent is valued and recognised



PhD students

Context

The University of Groningen has a large and diverse group of PhD students, who represent a significant part of our research potential. To maintain our reputation, it is essential that we are able to retain these talented, often young, academics. We therefore provide room for innovative research and high-quality, tailor-made PhD programmes in a well-organised and safe environment. To this end, we will continue to pursue and improve our existing policies and maintain our Graduate Schools.

Vision

Our PhD students play a pivotal role in our research. Our PhD programmes offer young, curious and talented researchers from around the world the opportunity to conduct challenging research in an international and interdisciplinary setting. They can perform their research in an organisation that values their talents and cares about their well-being and future career.

Aim

Our goal is to continue to attract the most talented PhD students and to train them to become professionals in their own discipline, preparing them for future positions in academia, industry, education, business or government.

We will achieve this aim by:

- Giving as many talented students as possible the opportunity to pursue a PhD;
- Offering PhD students the opportunity to develop to the best of their ability in their research field, while also providing opportunities to further their teaching, societal impact and/or leadership experience;
- Providing a broad training and support programme through the Graduate Schools.



Strategy

1. Provide opportunities for talented students to pursue a PhD

We recognise and value the innovative contribution of PhD students to our research and we want to give as many talented students as possible from all over the world the opportunity to pursue a PhD. By offering a diverse palette of PhD trajectories and support, the UG creates the conditions for successfully completing a PhD. For instance, PhD students who come to the UG with a small or limited scholarship from their own country, are awarded a supplementary grant to ensure they can arrange good living conditions in Groningen. As a result, more passionate young researchers can write and carry out their own research proposals. The supplementary grants also help ensure the diversity we strive to achieve at UG. In addition, we provide support to employees from our social partners and to external students to conduct research towards a PhD. In the coming years we will continue to investigate how we can further diversify the palette to offer even better chances for talented students to embark on an academic career at UG.

2. Development of PhD students

We want our PhD students to achieve their full potential and the UG provides a wide range of training courses to support this. The students' individual talents and choices serve as the basis for the training programme, with a special focus on preparation for their future career, within or outside academic research. PhD students who are interested in pursuing a career outside academia are explicitly given the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. This means the UG can also help meet society's need for highly educated and versatile knowledge workers.

We also pay particular attention to research into societal themes, interdisciplinary research, and co-operations with social and international partners – all of which are relevant to the development and career of PhD students within and outside the academic world. To stimulate PhD students' development in these particular areas, a significant number of PhD positions are reserved for interdisciplinary projects both within and outside the University of Groningen's four Schools. The UG also offers “sandwich-PhD” positions with social and international partners, where the PhD students perform part of their research at another (non-) academic institution.

3. Support from the Graduate Schools

PhD programmes are organised in a university-wide network of Graduate Schools within the faculties, with the Dean of Graduate Studies playing a coordinating role. PhD students are registered in a Graduate School and in a central university-wide registration system, which yields a comprehensive overview of all the PhD students at UG. The Graduate School is responsible for monitoring the PhD students' work and progress. This organisational structure facilitates the smooth exchange of good practices and the rapid identification of areas for improvement, thereby creating an environment in which PhD students can flourish.

The Graduate Schools will focus on certain areas of improvement in the next five years: for example, the desired learning outcomes of a PhD project and the mental health of students during their PhD period. Doing PhD research is very demanding with high standards to be attained, but it is also often carried out by young people in a vulnerable age group, far away from their home country. By defining feasible learning outcomes for a PhD project, close monitoring of PhD students via the support network, and providing training courses for supervisors, we want to ensure that all PhD students receive sound and proper supervision, alleviating the mental pressure they may experience.



Staff

Context

Our ambitions can only be achieved by the combined efforts of dedicated and talented staff and a supportive and resilient organisation. We therefore need future-proof ways of organising our work and of working together. Community spirit, connections, and leadership based on trust are our guiding principles, which can only blossom in an inclusive work environment: a workplace where everyone – academic and professional support staff – can develop and use their talents and increase their employability. Where there is room for differences in vision, ideas and background but where people find each other in their mutual respect for our organisational values.

Vision

The University of Groningen aims to be a responsible and inspiring employer, which values the individual qualities of its staff and their contributions to the achievements of our University as a whole. As such, we are aware of the importance of team development and the organisational changes needed to become a more flexible and adaptive organisation. The establishment of the four Schools emphasises and stimulates a new collaborative approach in research and teaching, which should challenge and support both our academic and professional support staff to reach outside their own departments and develop networks, communities and new ways of working together.

Aim

Our aim is to create a challenging, sustainable and safe work environment where our staff are recognised for their contributions, have opportunities to develop their own talents, and can invest in their careers and employability. We aim for an environment where our employees feel appreciated and in return appreciate the UG as an employer.

To achieve this we will:

- Develop a clear vision and programme on leadership for a resilient organisation;
- Improve support for academic staff by organising dedicated professional support teams;
- Broaden perspectives on recognition and reward, and possible career paths;
- Strengthen staff employability, and life-long learning and UG communities;
- Safeguard an inclusive and socially safe working environment;
- Strive for a good work-life balance for all staff.



Strategy

1. Leadership and organisation

The increased focus on collaboration within and outside the University, the new ways of organising work and ways of working together, and the “recognition and reward” movement all require the UG to develop a stronger vision on leadership in academia. This corporate leadership vision will lead to a code of conduct for leaders; it will encompass institutional leadership and governance of the faculties, institutes and four Schools, as well as leadership of groups and departments. It will cover not only formal leadership, but also involves expressions of informal leadership. Staff who have informal leadership roles will be encouraged to show and develop their personal leadership and mentoring/coaching skills in order to better guide themselves and others. Investing time and money in leadership development throughout the University and building a strong leadership community will be part of this vision.

We are preparing our organisation for the increased focus on collaboration by investing in the resilience and adaptive capacities of our staff and in the way the organisation is structured. In addition to realising a high quality administrative infrastructure, which should reduce the administrative burden on our staff, we will strive to remove the administrative and practical barriers that prevent collaboration.

The formation of **professional support staff** teams that work closely together across organisational boundaries and departments will be part of the organisation’s restructuring. By combining experts into teams that jointly support the processes and projects related to education, research and societal impact, we will organise a more efficient and one-stop support approach for our staff and students. For support teams to be successful, they will need to pay continuous attention to developing their skills in networking, adaptability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and customer focus.

2. Recognition and reward

The UG is participating in the national programme ‘Room for Talent’ (Ruimte voor ieders talent) together with all the other Dutch universities. The purpose of the programme is to develop a broader vision on academic talent and assessment of an individual’s qualities. It is unrealistic and unnecessary for every academic to excel in each of academia’s key areas (research, education, leadership, societal impact), but we should instead allow for diversity in career paths. We will therefore develop career tracks with differentiated paths in research, education and societal impact. Within the career paths, we will pay specific attention to academic leadership, team collaboration, open science, and cross-disciplinary activities. We will develop the career tracks with clear and up-to-date criteria for every area and give our academic staff guidance and support in their career development. Academics who want to take up more institutional leadership roles will be assessed, encouraged and supported in our leadership community. These changes require a clear organisational vision as well as a cultural change, which will take time to implement. The changes will be guided by a range of pilot projects across the faculties, while we will adapt evaluations and performance reviews of our talented academics to include personal competencies, leadership skills and team performance.



3. Employability, life-long learning and communities

Both academic and support staff need opportunities to develop themselves in order to take up new responsibilities in the changing (academic) environment or in the labour market. We are aware that it is important to prepare postdocs for a diverse range of future jobs, within and outside academia. We will therefore expand the career perspectives training programme for PhD students to include postdocs. The employability and development of support staff will be improved as a result of organisational changes and will be worked out in the next phase of the development of the Corporate Academy.

To help our staff feel at home at different career stages, we will invest in further developing communities for postdocs, tenure track staff, and educational professionals, for example, the Young Academy Groningen (YAG), Young RUG (young support staff), Rosalind Franklin Fellows, and Teaching Academy Groningen (TAG). The support programmes for these communities will be developed together with their members as well as their supervisors.

4. Recruitment and onboarding

In addition to the UG's ability to retain talented academic and professional support staff, attracting them to work at UG is a key human resources issue. The labour market for highly qualified staff is strongly competitive. We will therefore develop new and innovative strategies for attracting, hiring and nurturing talent in all its diversity. Improving our onboarding and embedding strategies, next to our retention strategies, are important steps to help new staff feel welcome and at home.

5. Sustainable and safe work environment

To provide a sustainable and safe working environment, we promote diversity and inclusion, safeguard integrity and social safety, and continuously improve our working conditions.

Diversity and inclusion (D&I)

We will formulate a vision and programme on diversity and inclusion with a broad group of stakeholders, our communities and minority groups within UG. We will ensure that it is based on views and needs widely shared by the whole UG. We will set up a Diversity & Inclusion office under the leadership of a new Chief D&I Officer that will facilitate an organised network to collaborate with faculties and university services. The UG embraces D&I by offering a work environment that fosters respect for diversity in ideas, talent and background. We will ensure that underrepresented voices are heard with a wide range of measures and actions. Mutual differences will be recognised as much as possible and positively interpreted to provide an inclusive organisational culture and a safe workplace. To safeguard D&I and avoid unconscious biases in the workplace, we will also align our institutional procedures and policies to strive towards achieving equality.

Integrity and social safety

Policies and measures for fostering and maintaining integrity are already in place and supported uniformly at the university level as an important first step. Our strategy is to enhance awareness of potential integrity issues and provide staff with the tools, instruments and training to develop a set of standards for acceptable behaviour. Zero tolerance in the field of social safety is being implemented by investing in programmes and training for managers as well as employees. We encourage the reporting and discussion of incidents of unacceptable behaviour and we will introduce a new position of ombudsman in the UG to oversee this.



Sustainable working conditions

We need to pay continuous attention to opportunities for improving the working conditions to guarantee a good working environment. Our buildings and ICT solutions should provide sustainable working conditions. The needs of staff members with disabilities will, where possible, be met by adjusting their tasks and workplace accessibility and equipment. Each member of staff will have different needs for combining their work and private lives during various career phases. We strive to accommodate these needs in our policies.

6. Work-life balance – managing the workload

Our University can only blossom with a dedicated staff. The UG is aware that a manageable workload, people's well-being and work-life balance are key factors in sustaining this dedication. The workload has become increasingly high for all university staff in the Netherlands and it threatens the well-being of many staff. The manageability of workload pressure is a strategic aim for UG. Therefore, UG will incrementally increase workload-reducing funds annually. At the moment the following measures are already being taken:

- We will continue to execute and improve the action plans that were formulated in 2017 together with the local discussion bodies (het Lokaal Overleg), University Council, faculty boards and managements of the various university services. All our action plans are based on the outcomes of employee surveys and financed by the workload means fund. The different actions are being regularly monitored and evaluated as data from new surveys become available. Depending on the evaluation outcomes, the action plans will be adapted and new measures will be taken, where necessary in consultation with the faculty boards and participation bodies;
- In 2021 a university-wide evaluation will be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the actions taken so far and will also cover the additional effects of the COVID-19 measures. This should result in a new action plan for the coming years. A special working group, "Lessen the work, has been set up to advise on improvement measures and best and worst practices;
- During the COVID-19 pandemic we instigated the Education 1 action plan to alleviate the workload of online teaching by appointing embedded experts and teaching assistants. The follow-up plan, Education 2, aims to further decrease the extra workload from online education with direct hands-on support for teachers;
- Other measures that are being continued include the Balans programme and good accessibility to professional help to tackle health and vitality problems. Moreover, as workload is a multi-faceted problem, the measures that we take to ensure a sustainable and safe working environment, to increase career opportunities, and to improve leadership will also support workload reduction.

healthy work-life balance



Governance

Context

The University of Groningen is a community of dedicated professionals and committed students. The success of the university is the shared responsibility of academics, professional staff and students. The UG uses a consultation model to generate a commitment to strategic goals and the related policies. Faculties and university services have a mandate that allows them, within a given framework, to adjust UG strategies and policies to their specific disciplines and situations and thus, to some extent, to set their own agenda.

A sound management information system and a Plan-Do-Check-Act control cycle (PCDA) at all levels (board, faculty, and university services) of the university is used to assess the effectiveness of the plans and the measures implemented. Results are reported and discussed at the administrative meetings between the Board of the University and the faculty boards and managements of the university services. These meetings determine whether the UG continues the measures, modifies or cancels them. Funding is adjusted accordingly. Besides the administrative meetings between the Board of the University and the faculties, policy and strategy on a university level is discussed in the Council of Deans, University Council, Committee for Educational Strategy, and the Management Council.

Vision

The successful, sustainable running of the UG is based upon a continuous process in which management, participation bodies, staff and students discuss the framework and goals of the University. Within this evolving framework, staff and students are given freedom in how they choose to achieve these goals. This process is based on trust, the acknowledgement by all parties of a shared responsibility, and the recognition of the formal roles of each body or individual. As we must be accountable and transparent to society, we monitor the achievement of our goals and their quality. However, we strive to do so with a minimal bureaucracy.

Aim

We aim for the UG to be an agile learning organisation, in which the knowledge, willingness and ability to learn from each other is used at all levels. The UG should be an organisation where everyone can fulfil their role and is equipped to perform as good as possible. A shared vision and responsibility are the basis of this organisation and shared ownership, autonomy and pro-activity are its key characteristics. In this way, we aim to strengthen the success of both the university and the academic community.

The above points will be used to adapt our governance system where necessary, with the objective of increasing the involvement of the academic community in the governance of the University. Our system for participation, discussions and negotiations on UG strategy, policy and decision-making will remain the core of our governance approach. The system's redefinition will, therefore, take place in consultation with the University Council, the faculties and their participation bodies. To maintain and improve our professional management, we will further facilitate staff management training and skills and knowledge exchange between the staff.



To support the governance system, we will develop an integrated, extensive and accurate management information system that will support data-informed decisions on the achievement of our goals and their desired quality. This focus on institutional research will ensure an objective assessment of the primary processes in the UG and enhance our decision-making processes and accountability. It will also help us in our aim to reward good performance and operations, as well as to redefine accountability, thereby decreasing staff workload.

Strategy

To achieve our aims we will:

- Look at the formal roles of staff, students, faculties, management and participation bodies to determine how we can increase their involvement in governance and optimise their autonomy;
- Redefine and optimise our governance structures based on these analyses together with the faculties and the University Council;
- Increase and stimulate collaboration through clustering and links between the three clusters of Social Sciences & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Health and other partners to enhance shared ownership and decision-making on our key processes;
- Stimulate co-operation and pro-activity in the support services by developing a network focusing on processes and clients (professional support teams) to enhance shared ownership and decision-making in order to optimally support academic staff and students;
- Create UG-wide networks for the university's core tasks, to facilitate the development of new and shared perspectives on the university, key expertise, and the exchange of ideas and good practices. These networks will cover the areas of research (YAG), education (TAG), leadership and societal impact;
- Support the shared decision-making processes with an excellent management information system that can translate collected data into measurable goals, with prognoses and analyses of impact. At the same time, this system can be used to decrease the workload caused by the demands of accountability;



Infrastructure

A modern and efficient working and learning infrastructure will be provided in order to stimulate high-quality academic and support activities. The infrastructure's key elements are sustainable operations, up-to-date and where possible leading information technology and fit-for-purpose, high-quality accommodation.

Sustainable and uniform business operations

Context

Business operations should support every member of the academic community in their effort to achieve the goals of the strategic plan. Two of these goals – to contribute to solving the grand challenges of society and the interdisciplinary teaching and research necessary for this – directly affect the way we organise our business operations. If we, as a university, want to contribute to a sustainable society we must behave and act in a sustainable manner not only in education and research but also in our daily operations. We will therefore continue to focus on reducing our carbon footprint (our emissions have already decreased by 50% in the past 5 years). We will also pay special attention to removing unnecessary barriers in our business operations and increasing their efficiency.

Vision

Our business operations are characterised by the promotion and enhancement of sustainable behaviour in all our daily activities. Contributing to a sustainable society is part of our DNA. In our four Schools and the faculties, we study and invent sustainable solutions for research and societal challenges. By creating a dynamic and vital organisation we ensure a sustainable working and study environment for our staff and students. We minimise our environmental footprint by continuously optimising and adjusting our daily operations, and the policies associated with them, where possible. The sustainable behaviour of our staff and students, the sustainable deployment of our staff, and sustainable business operations are key themes in this respect.

Our frequent co-operations across faculties, and between the university and its surroundings, are supported and facilitated by uniform systems and procedures. Efficiency and effectiveness lie at the heart of these systems and procedures, enabling data-driven governance and proper accountability.



Aim and strategy

To achieve our vision we will:

- Implement a new Sustainability Roadmap. The roadmap's objectives will be directly linked with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals; in the business operations the roadmap will focus on a CO₂-neutral university by 2035 and on promoting greater awareness of sustainable behaviour in our staff and students;
- Develop a strategy, in addition to our four Schools, to implement the theme of sustainability more prominently in our education and research;
- Improve uniform business operations by developing and implementing systems and procedures that support interfaculty co-operation in the areas of research, education and services, by strengthening our data collection and its accessibility, and by aligning our administrative processes to obtain optimal accountability and efficiency.

Information technology

Context

Digitisation is rapidly becoming more widespread in all areas of society. This is opening up more opportunities than ever before for education and research in university settings. To achieve our ambitions for education, research and societal impact, as outlined in this plan, the UG needs high-quality, innovative, secure and reliable IT/data services. These include fast and secure connections, powerful and accessible computers, reliable and available large-scale data storage solutions, and an optimal combination of local and cloud applications.

Vision

Our innovative IT solutions, facilities and infrastructure are designed to help our staff and students achieve outstanding results in the areas of research, education and societal impact. Having our own high-performance computing facilities and excellent local support make us attractive to researchers and students alike. It also means that we can improve our business operations and increase the operational reliability of our facilities in response to stricter privacy regulations, the latest geopolitical developments, and increasing cybercrime.



Aim and strategy

To achieve our aims in education, research and societal impact and to safeguard our business operations, in the next few years we will focus on four key areas: blended learning, research data management, Business Intelligence (BI) facilities and general user support.

A flexible and reliable digital learning environment is essential for the development of blended learning (online and on-site). Interdisciplinary teaching, the establishment of the four Schools and co-operation with regional educational institutions require an element of standardisation (including micro-credentials), while leaving plenty of room for creativity. This can also contribute to the development of reliable online testing. In the coming years, efforts will be made to adapt the digital learning environment to respond to these developments, which will also help to reduce lecturers' workload.

With respect to the data used in academic research, the requirements are becoming increasingly strict: Open Science, the reuse of data (FAIR principles), academic integrity, collaboration, and privacy. The publication of research data is also an integral component of recognising and rewarding researchers. With data science techniques increasingly being used in all disciplines. To ensure controlled access to IT/data facilities and the secure sharing of data, the Virtual Research Environment will be expanded and made available to all researchers, thereby reducing their workload.

In terms of the University's business operations, reliable data are becoming increasingly important for formulating policy. To this end, the BI facilities will be expanded and made more widely available in the coming years. This will also ensure greater transparency for society and support administrators in their decision-making processes. In the light of increasingly complex IT/data systems, we will also improve user support for all users, for example, through the self-service portals and the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

sustainable behaviour in all daily activities



Housing

Context

Housing is an important element in the realisation of our strategy. It determines our everyday work and study surroundings, how and where we meet, and the image we present to the outside world. As such, housing directly influences the well-being of our academic community and our success in reaching our goals. As housing is based on longer term planning, we also need to look beyond the scope of this five-year strategic plan and make plans for the future.

Vision

Our housing makes an optimal contribution to the renewal and innovative power of the UG, it stimulates experiences and meetings, and it provides identity and flexibility. The development and management of our housing are supported by a professional organisation that ensures that its operations are run as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Aim and strategy

To facilitate strategic innovation we will provide suitable, high-quality space for the university's traditional activities, namely research, education and business operations. We will do this by realising and maintaining our campuses and research labs, creating flexible and adaptive buildings for blended and small-scale learning, and providing well-equipped flexible workstations and accommodation for business support. Moreover, we will develop shared buildings, mixed spaces, living labs and satellite offices to stimulate the diverse forms of collaboration necessary to realise the four Schools, the University of the North, and blended learning & working environments. As a core value of the UG, sustainability is one of the key criteria for all our developments.

To encourage bonding of the university community, we will design a socially inclusive campus, situated at multiple locations, that has an attractive physical and digital appearance. The campus will contain multi-user spaces that stimulate connections in a pleasant and distinctive form and flexible workplaces. Faculties and services will be involved in the design to ensure their own identity is represented on the campus, within the UG's framework and quality standards.

Housing development is supported by an infrastructure that excels in operational execution, with a focus on effectivity and efficiency. Integral portfolio management and chain processing, with an emphasis on sustainability, ensure effectiveness, while efficiency is achieved by optimising the use of buildings, aiming for flexible & multi-functional spaces and concentration of our real estate. Aim and strategy
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The aim of our housing policy to achieve this vision is three-fold:

- To stimulate strategic innovation;
- To stimulate connection in and with the university community;
- To excel in operational execution.

an attractive physical and digital appearance



Epilogue

In the strategy 'Making Connections', we set out our course for the period 2021-2026. This is a course that gives content and form to the further development of our University, in which creating societal impact runs throughout. Over the next few years, we will work hard on achieving our ambitions and goals together.

If our 'Making Connections' strategy has been successfully implemented by 2026, what do we hope to see? We hope to see that the UG has developed into a stronger community, a community in which every staff member, student and researcher feels at home. A place where everyone can develop their talents to the full, both within and outside the bounds of their individual disciplines. The four new Schools, which are open to anyone who wants to work towards creating a better society, have proved to be a huge incentive for interdisciplinary working. These Schools focus on finding joint solutions to complex problems in the fields of Social Sciences & Humanities, Science & Engineering and Health. Their innovative, cross-disciplinary approach to teaching and research, and the intensive collaboration with stakeholders involved, has generated very impressive results. They are also the driving force behind the University of the North, which is leading to new collaborations in the Northern Netherlands and surrounding countries. The European University Network ENLIGHT is providing new opportunities for innovation in teaching, through virtual exchanges, for example, and the development of micro-credentials for students.

As a result, we have been able to take steps towards improving the way that we carry out our remit as a university: by conducting ground-breaking academic research and providing excellent teaching, we are helping our students to become societally aware global citizens. We have seen that an international perspective is essential in this respect. For this reason, we cherish our strategic partners within and outside Europe.

Making Connections means forging new ties and forming new communities. Removing individual and social barriers to personal development is an essential part of this. This is not as obvious as it may sound, so we are being careful to stress that all members of our academic community must treat each other with respect and integrity, and that nobody may be excluded. A new element is that we will no longer judge staff members purely on the basis of academic output. We will also pay serious attention to aspects such as contributing to impact and working as part of a team.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on our community. We have responded by showing each other that we are resilient and that we can change track swiftly. We moved to online solutions at record speed. This has meant a mid-term change in



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The Strategic Plan was developed after thorough consultations at all levels of the organization:

- discussion tables with students and staff
- meetings with external contacts
- consultations with Deans / Faculty Boards
- discussions with the University Council
- input from the Supervisory Board

Design: Communications Department

Photography: Image Store UG - Angelo Roga, Elmer Spaargaren, Jenne Hoekstra, Jeroen van Kooten, Marcel Spanjer, Peter van der Sijde, Peter Tahl, Silvio Zangerini and Sylvia Germes

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