Open outlook,
open attitude,
open science

Improving the world sustainably together

2020-2025 Strategic Plan
Preace: Open to feedback

1. Challenges facing Utrecht University
   • Global developments
   • Developments in higher education
   • Developments in the Netherlands

2. Utrecht University in 2020
   • Continuous improvement
   • Transcending borders
   • Future-proof education
   • Close-knit community
   • Sustainable development
   • Transition to open science

3. An open and resilient academic community
   • University community for everyone
   • Leadership and good employment practices
   • Sustainable development within the University
   • Open to change and innovation

4. Outstanding education
   • Utrecht education
   • Lecturers
   • Concern for student well-being
   • Lifelong learning
   • Social responsibility and entrepreneurship

5. Frontier research
   • Multidisciplinary collaboration
   • Opportunities for independent research
   • Open science trailblazer
   • The development of young researchers
   • A strong research infrastructure

Subsequent version to also include:
6. Faculty of Science
7. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
8. Faculty of Humanities
9. University College Utrecht
10. Faculty of Medicine
11. Faculty of Geosciences
12. Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance
13. Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Note to reader: In this plan, the term ‘multidisciplinary’ is used in its wider sense and is intended to refer to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary activities as well. Such activities involve collaboration between academic and non-academic staff from various disciplines aimed at addressing concrete, complex problems.
Open to feedback

You are about to read a draft of Utrecht University's Strategic Plan for the coming four years. To be clear: this document is a work in progress. This is also not the definitive version of the preface. This is a working paper intended for discussion. We are eager to hear your thoughts on the analysis of the environment we have created with a substantial number of students, colleagues and external parties, as well as on our proposed course of action.

This document was drafted during the period in which the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. Whereas we were first still able to meet in person at the University to discuss matters in working groups or at a 24-hour conference, from mid-March on we were suddenly obliged to exchange ideas solely online. The manner in which we have done so together clearly demonstrates the resilience of our organisation. We, the Executive Board and the deans, are touched by the incredible energy, expertise and commitment shown by our lecturers, researchers, colleagues from the support services and students during this crisis. Yet we are concerned about the increased workload and decreased opportunities for personal contact.

The COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching implications. This naturally also raises a question as to how the crisis will, and should, impact our strategic decisions. In countless talks, we have come to the conclusion that the COVID-19 crisis confirms that our mission and vision are rock solid. Utrecht University (UU) is working to create a better world. It is precisely by cooperating in the areas of education and research across the borders of disciplines and countries that we can contribute to an adequate global response to COVID-19 and work towards the necessary long-term societal reset – rather than a mere resumption.

With regard to how we put our mission into practice, we must of course make continuous adjustments in response to the changing circumstances – and that includes COVID-19. In recent months, we have analysed and elaborated this strategy based on the preliminary work carried out by the theme groups. We have established five pillars, which are set out on the following pages. The common theme is that we are fully committed to openness. While that openness has always been part of our institution's DNA, it is now more important than ever to see it come to fruition. Open Science! In other words, science that is practised based on a comprehensive vision regarding the relationship with society and with the developments taking place around us. This vision must permeate every aspect of our education. It should also determine how we conduct our research and how we handle the results. ‘Openness’ is also a keyword with regard to our efforts to enhance the diversity of people of perspectives in our community and the manner in which we want to collaborate, communicate and transform our academic culture. We are currently facing a climate of excessive competition. We choose to focus on teamwork in which each individual can contribute and flourish in their own way.

In the following chapters, our strategy will be translated into concrete aims with regard to education, research and operational management. The definitive version of this plan will include an elaboration at the faculty level as well. That, too, is currently a work in progress.

We wish to thank each of the students, colleagues and parties outside the UU who have already contributed to these efforts; your time, efforts and ideas are greatly appreciated! For their assistance, provided in addition to their regular work and during a pandemic, we are extremely grateful. We are quite eager to receive your response as well.

Consider us open to accepting feedback!

Executive Board and the deans
Open outlook, open attitude, open science

Mission and vision

Utrecht University is working to create a better world.

Our graduates have the knowledge and skills to make a substantial contribution to society. Our research is ground-breaking and focused on resolving major international issues. Our culture of openness and collaboration enables innovation, new insights and social impact. The core values of ambition, inspiration, commitment and independence form the basis of our university community.

Utrecht University is a comprehensive, internationally oriented university. Our staff conducts high-quality research. The University has strong ties to the surrounding environment, and with the city of Utrecht in particular. The roots of our University extend deep into the past.

Multidisciplinary research at Utrecht University focuses on four themes: Dynamics of Youth, Institutions for Open Societies, Life Sciences and Pathways to Sustainability. We are investing in innovative teaching concepts, which is one of the reasons for the high academic success rate among UU students. Education and research are strongly interconnected. We form a close-knit community and we value connection and inclusiveness. We facilitate our ambitions through an agile, innovative organisation and a healthy financial structure. All these factors provide Utrecht University with a solid foundation for sharing knowledge and working together for a sustainable society, now and in the future.

As a leading knowledge institution, Utrecht University contributes to achieving social objectives. Public values such as equality, diversity, inclusiveness, openness, accessibility and mutual respect form the starting point of our strategy and activities.

In this Strategic Plan, Utrecht University will set out the direction for its ambitions based on five pillars:


2. A future-proof teaching culture that focuses on quality and innovation.

3. A close-knit community with involved students and staff and with scope for development, encounters, knowledge transfer and open debate.

4. A focus on sustainable development: the Sustainable Development Goals will form an integral part of our education, research, and operational management.

5. The transition to open science, in which we will prioritise broader recognition and appreciation of our employees.
The Sustainable Development Goals and Utrecht University

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are seventeen global, sustainable development goals aimed at making the world a better place by 2030. These goals were established by the United Nations, are widely supported and align seamlessly to Utrecht University’s own mission. The SDGs reveal the breadth of the ecological, economic and social challenges we are currently facing. They touch on subjects including biodiversity, climate change, access to clean drinking water, education and gender equality. Utrecht University is helping achieve the SDGs through a broad range of teaching programmes and multidisciplinary research. We are contributing to the SDGs through our operational management as well. Sustainable development is at the heart of everything we do.
1. Challenges facing Utrecht University

Societal developments

We live in a rapidly changing world. Global issues are complex and not limited to specific generations or continents, nor can they be resolved from a single perspective. Thanks to globalisation and digitisation, we operate in a global public space. Local developments can quickly yield effects felt worldwide. Climate change is giving rise to urgent social issues with regard to the energy transition and a healthy urban life. The gap in society, between rich and poor and between people with high and low levels of education, is widening. On average, we live longer lives, which raises issues in relation to care, healthcare and health. Polarisation threatens democracies and institutions and undermines the public discourse. All these challenges call for students and staff who seek out solutions and contribute to the societal discourse, along with graduates who will do the same in the near future. Fundamental research plays a crucial role in this regard.

These days, knowledge – including academic knowledge – is readily available everywhere and at all times. Experts are not the only ones to form an opinion: thanks in part to new media, information has become accessible to everyone and the debates have accelerated and intensified. Many feel that the classic mainstays in the form of social, political and religious communities have been lost, creating a need for new forms of structure. This has entailed a palpable and discernible sense of uncertainty and feelings of insecurity. Science cannot isolate itself or lay claim to unique and universal knowledge, but must enter into an open interaction with the various parties in order to work together on solutions for social issues.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been able to see the interaction between science, policymakers and politicians on an almost daily basis. The transparent nature of science contributed positively to scientific findings, uncertainties and insights being fully taken into account, in addition to political and socioeconomic considerations. It is precisely by forging connections with societal partners around us that we can demonstrate how academics cooperate with one another to develop and introduce their knowledge using transparent methods.

Developments in higher education

Globalisation and digitisation bring international knowledge and education to our doorstep. With the proverbial press of a button, classes taught by lecturers from all corners of the globe are within reach of our students. Digital technologies have yielded new opportunities in academic research. Scientists can share their data with colleagues at other universities by making it open access. The development and transfer of knowledge is no longer the sole province of knowledge institutions.

There is an increasing expectation that universities will conduct research that benefits society as a whole, especially in the case of publicly-funded universities. International efforts are therefore under way to create an open model for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Parties in both the Netherlands and the European Union are investing heavily in open science, which aims to see that research results, regardless of the form of the scientific output, are made freely available to others at the earliest possible stage. Open science touches on the structure of the research and education agenda, the diversity of that agenda and therefore the diversity of our employees. It changes the way we communicate with one another and with society at large.

As a result of digitisation and automation, the primary focus of university education is shifting from the transfer of knowledge to the application of knowledge and the development of skills. Knowledge, work and the job market are changing. This requires professionals that are willing to accept responsibility for their own development and are able to continue that development throughout their lives in order to remain deployable and relevant in the job market. Professionals must be able to assess the value of knowledge obtained from various sources of information. Students – the professionals of tomorrow – must develop personal skills such as self-reflection and creativity during their degree programmes. To an increasing extent, students will no longer be able to finish their academic track without interruption and combine their
studies with work or other activities. All these aspects call for custom solutions and other – flexible – teaching methods.

Traditional curricula are undergoing changes, stemming not only from how the education is being provided but as a result of external developments as well. New parties, both public and private, are emerging to take responsibility for portions of the curricula and develop a global range of education options for professionals.

Universities are becoming more dependent on technology companies for their teaching and research infrastructure. At the same time, teaching and research are themselves increasingly shifting towards the private sector. In order to preserve the academic quality of data in this new landscape, collaboration with Dutch and European institutions in areas such as infrastructure is necessary and must be conducted in keeping with public values.

International collaboration is crucial to the quality of universities and is actively promoted by the European Union. Despite the public debate on the anglicisation of higher education, the number of degree programmes being taught in English at the Dutch universities has greatly expanded in previous years. All over the world, the international mobility of students and staff has grown in recent decades. Students from all over the world study in Utrecht and international staff are part of our university community. Their knowledge and cultural background enrich our education and research and their different perspectives add value to the academic debate.

Due in part to the influx of international students, the student population in Dutch higher education is becoming more diverse. Diversity of the student population has increased in terms of previous education and with regard to cultural, religious and socio-economic background. In combination with the limited quantity of available student housing and the pressure to succeed, more students are experiencing mental health issues. These developments call for a more individualised approach to the guidance, support and reception offered to students.

**Political developments in higher education in the Netherlands**

Viewed in an international context, Dutch universities perform quite well. The universities contribute strongly to the Netherlands’ position as a knowledge economy and its economy in general. This is resulting in a large influx of (and increase in) Dutch and international students in academic education.

Investments in the system are needed, yet currently seem to be limited to science and technology and to come at the expense of funding for other fields of study. All disciplines, however, are indispensable to any society that wishes to progress: both technological development and cultural preservation, scientific discoveries as well as knowledge on behavioural change, and both fundamental and more applied research. A forward-looking society stands to benefit precisely from a multidisciplinary approach to societal challenges, which calls for investment in all disciplines.

In recent years, research funding in the Netherlands and the European Union has shifted from free and independent research to more demand-driven, affiliated research. In the case of affiliated research, companies or civic society organisations have a hand in determining the focus of the research. Immense competitive pressure exists in the research world as well, with only a small portion of applications being approved for funding. This competition contributes to an increased workload among researchers. Economic developments are having a detrimental effect on work pressure and the well-being of students and PhD candidates as well.

Universities and government bodies need one another in order to reduce the pressure in higher education and research and to maintain our global position as a competitive knowledge economy. Greater cooperation and less unnecessary competition have been established as priority areas for the coming period on the Strategic Agenda of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. To achieve those ends, the incentives for competition must be mitigated. This, in turn, will require that institutions – in mutual
consultation – choose aspects with which to differentiate themselves while also identifying those areas in which they wish to cooperate.

All in all, it means that the university, when defining its ambitions, will need to take into account the extent to which those ambitions are feasible in terms of people and resources.
2. Utrecht University in 2020

Continuous improvement

In this Strategic Plan, Utrecht University sets out its course for the coming years. Ambitions for the future are inextricably linked with our starting position. For this reason, it is useful to consider our position as a university, as well as what we have achieved in recent years, from the perspective of current developments in society.

Utrecht University offers outstanding education and research. We are in the vanguard in terms of education and in 2018, we successfully completed the Institutional Quality Assurance Audit for the second time. The external assessment panel stated that Utrecht University is characterised by a culture of quality that works systematically to improve both the education and the infrastructure that supports that teaching. Powerful education is fuelled by leading research that sets the tone for others. A large number of UU research groups are among the best in the world in their respective fields. The University participates in national and international consortia that conduct thematic and topical research into complex societal themes. Education, research and operational management all benefit from a culture that focuses on quality, innovation and continuous improvement.

Transcending borders

As a society, we are facing global and complex challenges. Answers to these challenges can only be found by bringing together different perspectives and through intensive cooperation between different disciplines. To that end, we have invested in four major multidisciplinary strategic research themes: Institutions for Open Societies, Dynamics of Youth, Pathways to Sustainability and Life Sciences. Excellent disciplinary research provides the basis for these four strategic themes. In coming years, thanks to the bond between research and teaching, the chosen profile will become more evident in our education. Based on the themes, our researchers will naturally collaborate with partners in government, the business community, civic society organisations and the entire knowledge sector.

Collaboration across borders is also the principle underlying the alliance we have entered into with the Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research and University Medical Center Utrecht. By taking advantage of the complementary strengths of our four institutions, we intend to strengthen and innovate teaching and research through concrete projects in the coming period as well. For students, numerous options for charting a broad personal development pathway are emerging.

We are increasingly cooperating at the national level as well, to ensure that the Dutch universities are able to effectively and efficiently realise their public values and shared social mandate for the benefit of the Netherlands. Nationwide coordination with regard to major infrastructural facilities has become the order of the day.

We are an internationally oriented university. An international environment promotes a stimulating academic and intellectual climate, an open attitude among staff and students and the expansion of scientific knowledge; it also improves students’ qualifications for a globalising job market. In the years ahead, Utrecht University intends to once again take great strides in the area of internationalisation: we want to make more effective use of our international networks and partnerships and are working towards a ‘warm welcome’ and the proper embedding of our international students and employees.

Future-proof education

Cross-discipline mobility is a key pillar of our teaching model. We offer our students freedom of choice so that they can, on the one hand, develop a broad knowledge base and on the other, effectively prepare
themselves for the job market, where there is a demand for professionals who possess both specialised knowledge and a broad skill set. The University will take additional steps to promote students’ mobility between disciplines, faculties and collaborative partners.

We have a reputation to uphold with regard to educational innovation and the professionalisation of lecturers. In recent years, our efforts have included the introduction of blended learning via the Educate-it programme. By establishing the Centre for Academic Teaching, we have brought together all initiatives in the areas of sharing knowledge and lecturer professionalisation. Utrecht University has a long tradition of placing value on education. In the coming period, explicit attention will similarly be devoted to the importance of education in the evaluation and development of academics.

The job market is undergoing enormous transitions at the moment. Because knowledge is increasing and changing so rapidly, alumni will need to pursue continuous professional development after graduation. Together with stakeholders, Utrecht University is investing heavily in the development of a flexible curriculum for professionals in different phases of their life and career.

Close-knit community

For students and employees to be able to perform to the best of their ability in their work and studies, it is essential that they feel at home at our University. We are a close-knit academic community in which people are involved with one another and where space exists for sharing knowledge and open debate. We feel it is vital that the University is accessible and inclusive, that students and employees are considerate of one another and feel they are part of a community in which social, study and sports-related associations are mutually complementary. The well-being of students and employees is of vital importance. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the workload of our students and employees. Managing workload is a complex undertaking that requires a cohesive package of activities. For this reason, we will continue to invest in supervision and support, personal development and leadership. We plan to continue prioritising this topic and expect, through additional attention and appreciation for collaboration and team achievements, to contribute effectively to a healthy work and study climate.

Sustainable development

Based on our social mandate as a public institution, we wish to contribute to the creation of a better world and intend to continue doing so in the years ahead. In the recent period, we have made major strides in our efforts to realise sustainable operations, geared toward curtailing CO₂ emissions, reducing energy consumption, deploying sustainable alternatives and raising awareness among students and staff.

Unlike in previous years, in the coming years we will make use of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a helpful instrument as we seek to identify challenges and potential solutions.

Our education and research contribute to enhanced knowledge in connection with all seventeen SDGs. Learning to examine, think about and connect topics differently is a contribution that is (at minimum) every bit as important. The SDG perspective is an excellent match for multidisciplinary education and research and cross-border collaboration.

The regional ecosystem is vital to the University’s development, and in return, the University makes a substantial contribution to sustainable development in the region. The city of Utrecht and the Utrecht region serve as a testing ground for education and research. Alongside our partners, University Medical Center Utrecht and HU University of Applied Sciences, we are continuing to work on the further development of Utrecht Science Park, while also contributing to the challenges facing society, such as in the fields of primary and secondary education, with regard to the development of the city of Utrecht and in connection with a joint approach to biodiversity recovery.
Transition to Open Science

In order to accelerate and improve the realisation of research results and their societal impact, in 2017 we decided to make the transition to open science. By doing so, we hope to fundamentally alter the practice of education and research in the coming years. Open science means practising science based on a comprehensive vision regarding the relationship with society and with the developments taking place around us. Regardless of the form of the scientific output, research results are made freely available to others at the earliest possible stage. Open science touches on the structure of the research and education agenda, the diversity of that agenda and therefore the diversity of our employees. It changes the way we communicate with one another and with society at large. Open science emphasises 'team science' and affects our dealings with one another as colleagues. We strive to reduce individual competition and achieve an open academic culture. Providing all university employees optimum support in their work and careers will require adjustments to the evaluation system: a new framework for ‘Recognition and Appreciation’.
3. An open and resilient academic community

(Een open en veerkrachtige academische gemeenschap)

University community for everyone

It seems so natural for Utrecht University to be a close-knit academic community in which people are involved with one another and where space exists for sharing knowledge and open debate. Yet it does not happen by itself: it requires attention and effort from all of us, each and every day. We want the community to remain this way and will therefore, in the coming period, invest in an environment in which everyone feels welcome and that they are a part of the community. Our organisation values the contributions of all students, employees and alumni, regardless of their position, gender, ethnicity, culture or deployability. Making the most of diverse qualities calls for inclusive leadership and a socially safe environment. The results in education, research and operational management are achieved due to teamwork, in which all the talents and qualities of every employee are valued. Through sincere appreciation, we can embed respect and trust more deeply in our organisation. It impacts the way we communicate and interact with one another and with the outside world. International students and employees should feel at home and feel welcome at our University, while alumni should similarly feel they are a permanent part of our community. To effectively support the formation of the university community, we will continue to invest in a stimulating working environment and a lively and accessible campus. A more hybrid form of working will take shape, from home and on campus. This will also require experimentation with new methods of working and cooperation.

Concrete lines of action

- We will explicitly strengthen the connecting and collaborating functions in our buildings and experiment with working methods. This will necessitate major adjustments to the Strategic Accommodation Plan.
- We will continue the 'Diversity and inclusion' task force and maintain our focus on this theme through actions including the promotion of integration in training programmes, inclusive curricula and the improvement of recruitment and selection, as well as the accessibility of our buildings.
- In early 2022, a new University-wide framework for the 'Recognition and Appreciation' of employees will be introduced. We will use team science to reduce the workload of individual employees, and lessen the pressure within teams by not evaluating every team on every single aspect. By 2025, it will be matter of course for employees choose a variety of career paths in order to specialise in different areas: education, research, knowledge transfer and/or leadership.
- We will improve our activities with regard to the guidance and practical support of international students and employees; this will naturally include a warm welcome for all.
- Utrecht University will provide high-quality and comprehensive support to students, staff, alumni and external parties. Cooperation between the various support departments and between University and faculty services will be a natural part of these efforts.

Leadership and good employment practices

Utrecht University aims to maintain a culture of openness and cooperation, one in which establishing connections both internally and externally comes naturally, and in which employees collaborate comprehensively, transcending disciplines and/or departments. Only strong leadership at all levels will make this culture possible; leadership that focuses on trust, bottom-up cooperation and acting in the best interest of the entire University. To that end, leadership development is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation. A leadership profile that devotes attention to personal, organisational and strategic leadership has been developed to support this.

Utrecht University employees are open to feedback and change and wish to continue to develop throughout life. Managers provide employees with latitude for development and encourage efforts in that area. The University encourages all staff members to develop personal leadership competences and to learn from each other at work. Leadership plays a role in all kinds of issues, whether major or minor, from the way we
communicate with each other at the University to constructively flagging issues that can be improved and being mindful of others.

We are investing in the well-being of all students and employees. We understand that combating workload is a complex undertaking. Everyone need not do the same, nor do so equally intensively. When new initiatives arise, we will carefully assess the added value and decide whether this will replace existing work or if we can postpone certain other matters.

**Concrete lines of action**

- With regard to leadership development, the focus for the coming period will be on agreeing realistic working methods, on establishing clear team goals, on student and employee well-being and on social safety.
- We will increase the diversity in development pathways for employees and encourage continuous development, sustainable employability and mobility. We will strengthen the range of development opportunities available to all our employees, aimed at aspects including leadership competences, cooperating effectively and giving and receiving feedback.
- We will enhance the autonomy and ownership of employees and ensure the preconditions needed to achieve a proper work-life balance. We will sharpen our focus, in part by explicitly identifying what we will no longer be doing.

**Sustainable development within the University**

In an explicit effort to help create a better world and a sustainable society and to contribute specifically to the SDGs, we want to connect knowledge on sustainability (gained through education and research) to our operational management, while also making use of our own operations and campus by providing an environment for academic research.

We will continue to build on existing strategies and ongoing initiatives and wish, as a university, to make a real difference in coming years in connection to this theme. The goals we are committed to include becoming climate neutral and successfully increasing local biodiversity by 2030.

To that end, in the period ahead we intend to link our teaching, research and operational management activities to the SDGs more directly, and to base our thinking more strongly on global development issues; our campus will serve as a testing ground for these efforts. During the previous period, we took the first steps toward adjusting the curriculum based on the SDGs and we are now continuing those efforts. Through our operational management, we are able to contribute to over half of the SDGs, from the ‘Climate Action’ theme to the ‘Gender Equality’ theme. Yet a major challenge remains in areas including the reduction of CO₂ emissions.

**Concrete lines of action**

- We will tangibly embed the Sustainable Development Goals in our teaching.
- We will create sustainability-related testing grounds on our own campus, in which we will bring together teaching, research and operational management. We will maximise our social impact by making use of renewable energy and setting up Living Labs aimed at new climate technology.
- We are explicitly seeking partnerships in the region to achieve our aim of promoting equal opportunities; we view education as a means of achieving this end.
- In connection with the Sustainability programme, we are developing a strategy aimed at increasing biodiversity and further reducing CO₂ emissions. We are using our monitor to track the results and are comparing these to the key performance indicators.

**Open to change and innovation**

Utrecht University wishes to strengthen and accelerate innovative power and the capacity for change. During the COVID-19 crisis, we have seen and experienced how many changes and innovations have been
implemented in a short span of time. The urgency and necessity were clear to all. We wish to hold on to that drive for change. Groups with a diverse composition will assemble quickly, conduct effective consultation and rapidly deliver high-quality results. The capacity for change will be successful due to the shared sense of urgency in connection with the common purpose, on the one hand, but also (and particularly) due to the integration of disciplines and working methods, and creating synergy across the various disciplines. We intend to decrease the ‘distance’ between disciplines by working with the various disciplines and divisions to take a more comprehensive approach to the numerous issues we currently face.

Digitisation offers many opportunities to innovate and improve services. Together with automation, it also offers possibilities to improve, streamline, standardise and accelerate administrative processes in the field of education, human resources and finance. This will entail significant IT investments.

**Concrete lines of action**
- A domain plan will be drafted for each support domain which will inform the development of quality, professionalism and working methods within that domain. Integrality with other domains will be a key priority for these plans.
- We will be launching a programme aimed at efficient and future-proof business administration for the education, HR, finance and facilities domains.
4. Outstanding education

(Uitmuntend onderwijs)

Utrecht education

In a society with a wealth of opinions and information, there is a growing demand for individuals with analytical thinking skills and the ability to connect different perspectives. This requires not only specialist knowledge, but also skills such as the capacity to critically evaluate insights and look beyond borders. To familiarise students with these qualities, Utrecht University will take the following step in the development of the Utrecht teaching model in the coming period. The guiding principle is to enable students to gain experience in different disciplines and to complete as much of the specialisation phase as possible outside their own programme. Students can further expand their individual curricula by filling their free elective space with courses at the strategic alliance partners, Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research and University Medical Center Utrecht.

We want to align our teaching activities with our research profile to a far greater extent than is currently the case. We also want the strategic themes to be clearly reflected in our Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes, as well as in our educational activities aimed at professionals. Every student will become acquainted with research from the very start of their Bachelor phase.

Concrete lines of action

- We will develop a core curriculum across UU, including multidisciplinary Bachelor’s programmes, under the joint responsibility of the faculties.
- To allow the development of multidisciplinary education, we plan to thoroughly evaluate the range of disciplinary electives currently on offer in the Bachelor phase.
- We will align our Master’s programmes more effectively with the UU research profile, with the degree programmes clearly reflecting the strategic themes.
- We will work with our alliance partners Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research and University Medical Center Utrecht to further coordinate the curriculum and increase the shared programmes, including challenge-based ones.
- Together with European partners, we will develop an international degree programme under the CHARM-EU flag.

Lecturers

Lecturers play a crucial role in education. The 2018 Institutional Quality Assurance Audit revealed that Utrecht University is characterised by a culture of pursuing quality that includes continuous efforts to improve teaching. In order to provide high-quality teaching, offering adequate support to lecturers is essential – certainly in periods when lecturers are increasingly experiencing an excessive workload. This is why we plan to invest in support for lecturers and make educational performance our central focus in the coming period. The Centre of Academic Teaching, which was established in the previous planning period, will be the central portal for lecturer support.

Concrete lines of action

- In cooperation with faculty partners, we will optimise educational innovation, lecturer development and research into our teaching at the Centre of Academic Teaching.
- We will deploy learning analytics in order to further improve the quality of teaching, student counselling and guidance, and teaching materials. We are developing University guidelines that set out how and for what purpose the data can be used and within which ethical frameworks.

Concern for student well-being
The University supports students in their personal and professional development and ensures they are able to make the most of their individual talents and their degree programme. To that end, a good start, finding the right place and the well-being of students are vitally important. Utrecht University has established a counselling chain from lecturers to student psychologists. Despite this, the perceived workload of students has increased in recent years, with students experiencing a lack of confidence and a growing pressure to succeed. In the coming planning period, we will therefore continue the activities of the Student Welfare Task Force established in 2018.

Student organisations also contribute to the feeling of community and well-being of students, especially in the current era when more of their education is taking place online. The University therefore supports a flourishing community of study associations and other student clubs and associations, while cherishing the warm relations with the student organisations.

UU is committed to organising partnerships with universities of applied sciences in order to realise exchange. It should be possible for students to follow courses at different institutions and transfer any credits they have obtained elsewhere without incurring any unnecessary delays to their studies.

**Concrete lines of action**
- We will continue the Student Welfare Task Force, which monitors and advises the Executive Board concerning measures that could prevent excessive workload.
- We will launch an initiative aimed at further reinforcing and harmonising the counselling chain for students (lecturers, tutors, study advisers, student counsellors and student psychologists, career service and skills lab). The services will remain informal and easy to access.
- Utrecht University will invest in exchange with universities of applied sciences, and with the HU University of Applied Sciences in particular.

**Education for professionals**

In the coming years, Utrecht University intends to continue work on the modularisation of education: evaluation will be more competence-based and more of the teaching will be offered in the form of flexible units. Digital developments and the course offerings of various parties make it possible to assemble an individual curriculum. This gives students greater flexibility to combine their studies with other activities and responsibilities. Modularisation also offers opportunities to facilitate education for professionals.

Graduates will continue to develop themselves, with alumni becoming students for life, Collaboration with alumni, social and strategic partners yields new knowledge. We will nourish these collaborative partnerships with the latest insights and knowledge (and networks) in connection with issues that matter, so that they too can work towards solutions and nourish our University in turn. We wish to provide an innovative and cohesive range of educational options, from Bachelor’s degrees to alumni education.

**Concrete lines of action**
- We will expand the possibilities for flexible education.
- We will develop an attractive range of educational options for professionals, and for our alumni in particular. The education we provide will be connected to the expertise of the faculties (including research expertise) and the strategic themes. The University will support lecturers as they develop new course options.

**Social responsibility and entrepreneurship**

Utrecht University feels a particular responsibility will regard to education in the city and region of Utrecht. Together with the municipality and the educational partners, the University is working on concrete solutions such as fast-track courses, work placements and supervision in schools. In addition, the University wants to spark enthusiasm among students for choosing a career in education. The University wishes to share knowledge and experience with educational partners in the region and thereby contribute to resolving the issue of inequality of opportunity in education.
The University offers students an environment in which they are able to develop their talents to the greatest possible extent, so that, upon graduation, they are able to contribute to resolving the challenges facing society. An entrepreneurial attitude is critical to the realisation of solutions. Initiatives aimed specifically at societal challenges, such as UtrechtInc students, the Utrecht University Social Entrepreneurship Initiative and Dutch Students For Entrepreneurship, contribute to realising this goal.

**Concrete lines of action**
- Together with educational partners in the city and the region of Utrecht, we are developing an initiative aimed at reducing the shortage of teachers, using each other’s knowledge and courses, the exchange of professionals, and at advancing accessibility and equal opportunities.
- We are exploring possibilities for enabling students to gain teaching skills and earn a Student Teaching Qualification during their degree programme.
- We are strengthening the entrepreneurship courses in the existing curriculum.
- We are encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and creativity, along with other related skills, among students and employees.
5. Frontier research  
*(Grensverleggend onderzoek)*

**Multidisciplinary collaboration**

Utrecht University has been investing in the promotion of multidisciplinary research collaboration for many years. Working within the context of the four strategic themes, researchers help find solutions to the problems facing society. The multidisciplinary research in the strategic themes is based on both fundamental and applied research and has a strong disciplinary basis.

The strategic themes are now indispensable to our profile. They provide the starting point for collaboration both within the University and with external partners, such as in our alliance with Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research and University Medical Center Utrecht, and in strategic partnerships with international universities and cooperation with local and national governments, companies and other organisations. We intend to further anchor the strategic themes within our organisation in the coming period. We will use focus areas to continue to foster innovation in the research within the strategic themes.

**Concrete lines of action**

- We will ensure structural funding for the strategic themes. We will also work to further embed the themes in our research policy at the faculty and University-wide levels, such as in the Professor Policy.
- We will further coordinate the research being conducted within the strategic alliance with Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research and University Medical Center Utrecht and bundle the available expertise.
- Together with our international strategic partners, we will be formulating projects regarding specific profile themes which can substantively enhance our research.
- We will be joining a larger number of international networks. For each international network, we will be formulating a multi-year strategy linked to our strategic aims. At the same time, we will be making clear choices for a limited number of strategic partners, with whom we will develop intensive, long-term partnerships.

**Opportunities for independent research**

An effective symbiosis between independent research and programmed research is essential to achieving scientific breakthroughs and addressing societal challenges. The two are mutually complementary and are necessary in order to achieve a maintain a position in the scientific vanguard. This is the basis for attracting talented academics from in the Netherlands and abroad, an inspiring work environment, motivated employees, team science and the development of the strategic themes. It is the same basis that makes the University an attractive collaborative partner and enables it to successfully secure research funding. For special research projects, funding is also sought in cooperation with the so-called U-fonds (and/or alumni).

**Concrete lines of action**

- We provide support to research teams in order to position their funding applications as effectively as possible.
- To maintain a solid share in the external funding of programmed research, we are combining our strengths within the alliance with regard to classical contract funding.

**Trailblazer in open science**

The University wishes to be a trailblazer in the field of open science, with optimum interaction between science and society. Research results will be made freely accessible at the earliest stage possible. This allows valuable knowledge to be shared and used by researchers, politicians, the business community and civic
institutions in our country and elsewhere. Research is the result of teamwork, in which every contribution is seen and valued.

**Concrete lines of action**

- By the end of 2020, every faculty will have an Open Science Team – led by its dean – that will ensure integral implementation of open science in that faculty.
- Every student and scientist will work according to the principles of open science in terms of open access, FAIR Data and Software, public engagement and ‘Recognition and Appreciation’. To that end, we will provide optimum support to students and employees.

**Development of young researchers**

PhD candidates and postdocs are a crucial group within our University community and are vital to the future and innovation of academic research and education. The University sees a role for itself in the professional development of all young researchers, also in light of next steps in their career, whether in or outside the academic community. In addition to academic development, the University is investing in the development of practical and personal skills in preparation for the job market. The well-being of PhD candidates is important both to the candidates themselves and to the University. Utrecht University assumes responsibility for creating a safe working environment for PhD candidates and supporting them in questions of a personal nature.

**Concrete lines of action**

- We effectively prepare young researchers for their continued career by (among other things) helping them gain experience with teaching and research, familiarising them with academic integrity and offering them opportunities to earn qualifications.
- Career Service develops activities specifically aimed at young researchers in order to prepare them for a career outside the university setting.
- Under the auspices of the Graduate Committee, we are optimising the support and guidance for PhD candidates, with special attention paid to their well-being.

**A strong research infrastructure**

Utrecht University connects ecosystems of knowledge and innovation by investing in research infrastructure in connection with the strategic themes. All major university infrastructures are widely accessible and include facilities for multiple disciplines. Where desirable, the university research infrastructure will be part of larger national and international infrastructure, enabling UU to expand access to advanced equipment and datasets for its researchers. To ensure effective investment, we will coordinate with our alliance partners and other parties.

Utrecht University will intensify relationships in the regional knowledge chain to create space for joint innovations, sharing expertise and inspiring one another. Entrepreneurship in research will be encouraged and supported in the broadest sense: entrepreneurship, valorisation and spin-offs. This goes hand in hand with the further development and integration of entrepreneurial education into the curriculum and the more explicit ‘Recognition and Appreciation’ of impact activities.

**Concrete lines of action**

- We will continue the Research IT programme. To the same end, we will be realising a digital infrastructure that provides a safe and secure environment for the data and infrastructure that researchers need to collaborate, including support for research data.
- We will strengthen the entire research innovation chain, from encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship and start-ups to matching business intelligence and business development support.
- We will develop creative workshops and testing grounds as incubators for innovation in collaboration with alliance partners and partners in Utrecht Science Park, the city and the region.