



university of  
 groningen



# Making Connections

Highlights from the Strategic Plan  
2021-2026

## **A new chapter in the story of the UG – since 1614**

**With this Strategic Plan, we add a new chapter to the UG's long and colourful story. This tale begins with the founding of the University in 1614. Back then, our start-up capital was an open and internationally oriented academic community with strong roots in the region. Now, students and scholars from other parts of the world find their way to Groningen and enlarge the international scope of our research and teaching. We remain true to our academic traditions and strive to have everyone bring out the best in themselves. This new chapter in our story emphasizes how we help to solve society's great challenges through connection and cooperation.**



# Content

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>In the centre of society</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Room for every talent</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Teaching and research</b>	<b>16</b>

# Introduction



We hereby proudly present our new Strategic Plan for 2021-2026. Making impact is at its core: impact created by carrying out high-quality research and by providing excellent teaching, but also by recognizing, valuing and helping to develop the talents of our students, lecturers, researchers and staff. As a university,

we want our research and teaching to help society to find answers to the questions and challenges with which it is confronted. In doing so, we want to improve the flexibility and durability of our community. We do so by taking responsibility for the affairs of our University: after all, academic success is a collective achievement.

The title of our Strategic Plan is 'Making Connections', because maintaining existing connections as well as establishing new ones is of utmost importance in an increasingly dynamic and complex world. The coronavirus pandemic has underscored the importance of in-person connections between people, and University life plays an important role in maintaining them.

We want to expand existing connections and stimulate and facilitate the creation of new connections in the areas of research, teaching and societal impact: connections with and between talents, with knowledge partners, societal parties and companies, connections with the region as well as with the wider world and, above all, connections across academic disciplines.



# In the centre of society

Our academic community is a part of society

Our academic community is a part of society. This society faces enormous challenges in relation to issues such as climate change, sustainability, social durability, healthy ageing and digital developments. We consider it our role and responsibility to contribute to solid and structural solutions through scientific research and teaching, and we are convinced that an interdisciplinary approach provides the most valuable contribution. It is therefore to our great advantage that the UG has access to virtually all academic disciplines. We want to make even better use of that advantage with this Strategic Plan.

Making connections is not only initiated internally; it is also facilitated externally. Our 'Making Connections' strategy focuses on improving existing networks and organizing new ones. We would like to position the UG as a hub for academic knowledge and development within these networks. We aim to intensify the connections with other educational institutions, businesses, NGOs, governmental organizations and other relevant partners from both within and beyond national borders.



With the three newly founded Schools, the number of Schools now totals four:

**1. Wubbo Ockels School (New)**  
 Focused on energy

Wubbo Ockels (1946 - 2014),  
 physicist and first Dutchman in space

**2. Jantina Tammes School (New)**  
 Focused on digitization

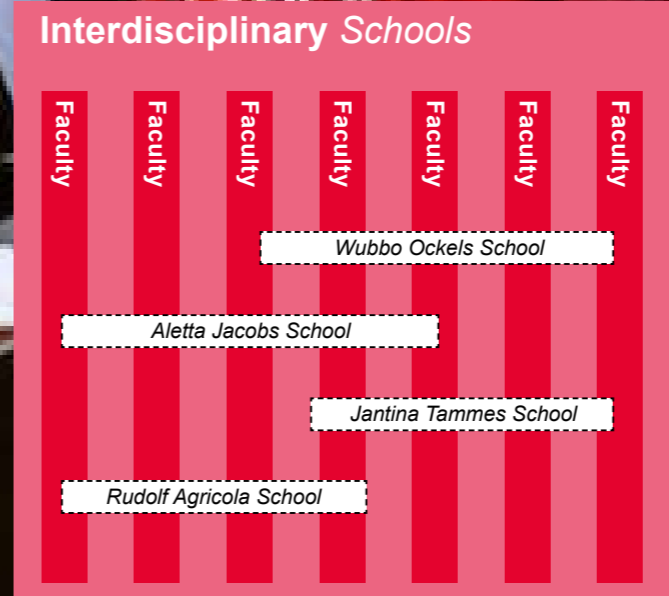
Jantina Tammes (1871 - 1947),  
 first Dutch professor of genetics

**3. Rudolf Agricola School (New)**  
 Focused on sustainable society

Rudolf Agricola (1443 - 1485),  
 founder of humanism

**4. Aletta Jacobs School (since 2018)**  
 Focused on health

Aletta Jacobs (1854 - 1924),  
 first Dutch female student, doctor and feminist



**University of the North**

The UG is the initiator of the University of the North, which is an open network set up by the University and the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG), together with other educational institutes in the Northern Netherlands such as Hanze University of Applied Sciences, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences and Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences. The objective of the University of the North is to improve the broad prosperity of our region through focused cooperation between the various knowledge institutes and with external parties such as government organizations, businesses and social organizations like NGOs.

This cooperation also contributes to the development of lifelong learning through new teaching and research programmes. Together, the partners in the University of the North want to increase the impact of teaching and education in the northern region.

## Cooperation with external parties

The UG closely cooperates with partners in the region. This cooperation has brought forth the first hybrid research group of the Netherlands, which focuses on green chemistry and bio-plastics. Katja Loos and her department are involved with the project on behalf of the UG. She is working together with colleagues from the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences and with companies such as Chemport Europe in Emmen and Delfzijl. Together, they are making a concerted effort towards developing a circular plastic chain. In order to be able to educate students on the subject, steps are being taken to embed the project within teaching curricula. The goal is to establish a continuous learning pathway from vocational education (MBO) to university of applied sciences (HBO) and university education.





# Room for every talent

In this Strategic Plan, we would like to place special emphasis on academic, personal and career-oriented development. We strive for top-quality teaching in order to educate our students to be independent, critical thinkers and responsible world citizens. The development of intercultural skills is an important instrument in achieving this. We are embracing the national Recognition and Rewards programme to benefit our staff. This programme stimulates a broader approach to the individual development of our talented academic and support staff. We are developing differentiated career paths for research, teaching, leadership and/or societal

impact with our staff based on their personal qualities.

In order to provide each talent at the UG with the space for continued development, we will expand the possibilities for personal guidance and development. We will regularly review progress together with the individual in question. Regular monitoring of the wellbeing of our students and staff is an integral part of our policy. We will pay particular attention to workload in this process because a healthy work environment and a healthy balance between work and private life are essential to achieving good results.

We strive for top-quality teaching for our students

## Teaching Academy Groningen

The founding of the Teaching Academy Groningen (TAG) demonstrates the great value that the UG attaches to teaching quality and innovation. TAG is a multidisciplinary academic network of professionals who actively engage in dialogue about teaching and carry out research on educational innovation. They organize workshops and meetings, such as the Education Festival. TAG develops so-called platforms of practice, where teaching professionals can meet, inspire and cooperate with one another.



We are also actively focusing on existing and new communities such as *the Young Academy Groningen (YAG)*, *Teaching Academy Groningen (TAG)* and *YoungRUG*. These are networks of young researchers, lecturers and staff, respectively: they help and support each other in finding new solutions to academic and societal challenges.

### Inclusive and involved

The UG highly values diversity, inclusivity, integrity, sustainability and social and personal safety. We are in the process of appointing an independent UG Ombudsperson, who will attend to matters relating to inclusivity.

All talented individuals within our academic community – students, lecturers, researchers and staff – are encouraged to be actively involved in our community. They can play active roles by, for example, taking part in student councils, consultative participation councils and other advisory bodies. In this way, we continue to work on the success and future of our University together.

### Connected to the world

Over the course of centuries, the UG has developed itself into a successful university. The world is our playground. An international focus and experience abroad increase the employability of our students and staff. That is why we continue to encourage activities abroad, and why we maintain good relations with universities and institutions in countries that are relevant to our degree programmes and our research.

## The world is our playground

### New European network: ENLIGHT

We have combined our strengths and knowledge with those of eight other European universities in a new European academic network: ENLIGHT (*European university network to promote equitable quality of life, sustainability and global engagement through higher education transformation*). ENLIGHT aims to contribute to the transition of higher education in Europe, and educate students to be engaged citizens with state-of-the-art knowledge, skills and innovative power in order to tackle important societal transitions on a global scale. International cooperation and exchange are of great importance in achieving this.

UG students are automatically granted access to the best course units, lecturers and professors of the eight other European universities, which are located in France, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Estonia, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. This means that they can take course units at any of these universities. For lecturers and researchers, ENLIGHT facilitates international exchange. Among other things, this allows for focused efforts towards understanding and solving societal challenges together.



# Teaching and research

Performing excellent research and providing first-rate teaching continue to be of great importance to the UG. We are always on the lookout for opportunities to deepen and broaden our knowledge. Interdisciplinary degree programmes increase the breadth and scope of our teaching. This provides students with more options, and allows them to follow interdisciplinary Minors from different

faculties, which fits in well with the broad scope of societal issues. In the coming years, we will continue to work with the academic community to develop new concepts. We will familiarize students with the latest insights within their research field and encourage them to come up with new ideas.

## Teaching innovation

One way to innovate our teaching practices is to break down barriers. Not only between disciplines, but also between the University and society. The Societal Challenge Lab of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences is one of the initiatives that puts this into practice.

The Lab was set up by psychologist Nina Hansen and sociologist Liesbet Heyse. The Lab is the faculty's first project-based learning course unit. Students are taught to carry out a systematic problem analysis of a societal problem, to design an evidence-based intervention method in order to improve current practice and to monitor and evaluate their proposal. In the concluding meeting, they present their project proposals to clients and experts from the field.

## We will focus explicitly on the researchers and their teams



## Groundbreaking research

We will continue to conduct groundbreaking fundamental and applied research in our three main areas: Social Sciences & the Humanities, Science & Engineering and Health. We will focus explicitly on the researchers and their teams: because science is

teamwork. We will encourage and facilitate innovative and pioneering top research, both within and outside the researchers' own disciplines.

We will also invest in new facilities that enable research and teaching around complex societal issues. We will do

this by establishing the aforementioned Schools, among other things. This will allow us to broaden our approach, also within our academic community. For example, we will offer our PhD students a tailor-made training programme that also focuses on developing a successful career outside academia.

## Multidisciplinary research

Virtually all disciplines are represented at the UG. For decades, this has created a fertile ground for interdisciplinary cooperation and crossover research. An example of cooperation between divergent disciplines is the research of Marie-José van Tol and Saskia Nijmeijer, both from the Faculty of Medical Sciences/UMCG, and Merel Keijzer from the Faculty of Arts. Saskia Nijmeijer is following an interdisciplinary PhD Fellowship, which was advocated by the Young Academy Groningen.

Together, the researchers are conducting research at the intersection of research into the role of the brain in depression and learning a new language at an older age. This has led to a research project in which language is used as a therapy to promote mental functioning in the elderly: 'Learning to preserve: foreign language training as a cognitive vaccine to prevent old-age disorders'.





## Sustainable ambitions of the UG

Making a social impact also means acting sustainably. We see it as our task to inspire people to treat our planet with care. In doing so, we will take the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations as our guide. The UG wants to set an example in this respect, so we will also look closely at making our own business operations more sustainable. A new Sustainability Roadmap is therefore part of this Strategic Plan. The UG's ambition is to be completely CO2-neutral by 2035.

### Conclusion

We are convinced that with this Strategic Plan, we will contribute to the joint further expansion of our University's strong position as a leading international academic institution. In doing so, we want to continue to stimulate and flourish innovative, pioneering research and world-class teaching.

The coronavirus pandemic has underlined the importance of working

across disciplines. Only through close cooperation can we face the most complex challenges. We also noticed this in the development and completion of this Strategic Plan during the pandemic. Together, we have shown that the UG is a flexible, resilient community with great mutual solidarity. We can all be very proud of that.

The Board of the University  
**Jouke de Vries, Cisca Wijmenga,  
 Hans Biemans.**

## Investing in digital developments

The use of IT is essential for the realization of our sustainable ambitions. The coronavirus pandemic has once again proven how important a good digital infrastructure is for our University. We are taking new steps in this area, such as the digital accessibility of knowledge based on FAIR Data, where FAIR stands for: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable. In the context of Open Science, we are encouraging and facilitating researchers to share the results of their scientific research with society. The UG has rapidly developed into a university in which digital activities have a permanent place.

Our society is changing as a result of the global digital revolution, which is producing new technological applications and inventions at an unprecedented speed. The UG is making an active contribution through research and through the development of new, pioneering technology, for example at the Groningen Cognitive Systems and Materials Research (CogniGron) institute.

We see it as our task to inspire people to treat our planet with care

The horizon for this Strategic Plan is 2026. The story of the UG will continue, of course. Many more chapters will follow – chapters beyond 2026 describing how the UG will strengthen its societal impact in a dynamic, fast-changing society. One thing is certain: these new chapters will also tell the story of an open academic community, in which curiosity and social commitment remain essential values. A multifaceted story in which ‘Making Connections’ remains a central factor.



**This publication outlines the strategic highlights of the planning period 2021-2026.**

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*You can find the complete strategic plan 2021- 2026 on [www.rug.nl/strategicplan](http://www.rug.nl/strategicplan)*



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