



Universität Vechta
University of Vechta

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UDP

University Development Plan 2024-2028

Adopted by the Senate on February 7, 2024

in agreement with the University Executive Board and the University Council



Contents

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Published by: The President of the University of Vechta / Editorial team: University of Vechta, Marketing and Communications, Katharina Genn-Blümlein, Philip Kreimer; Henning Kreuzhecker / Layout and type-setting: Philip Kreimer / Contact and distribution: University of Vechta, Marketing and Communications, Driverstraße 22, 49377 Vechta, info@uni-vechta.de / This document may only be reproduced with the permission of the editorial team. / Images pages 11, 15 Adobe Stock / Image page 37 flatauarchitekten / p.7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 26, 27, 39 University of Vechta/Wollstein/bitters.de / Unless stated otherwise, the University of Vechta owns all other image rights / Licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND /

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Profile focus areas and cross-cutting issues **5**
Figure 2: Evolution of student numbers **28**

1. THE UNIVERSITY OF VECHTA: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, SHAPING THE CHANGE

1.1 Designing the school of the future: Teaching-learning research	7
1.2 Boosting competence, increasing social inclusion: profession and inclusivity research	9
1.3 Capturing dimensions and shaping in partnership: transformation research	11

2. THE FOUR CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

2.1 Internationalisation	15
2.2 Digitalisation	16
2.3 Gender and diversity	18
2.4 Sustainability	19

3. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES IN RESEARCH, SUPPORT FOR JUNIOR RESEARCHERS AND TRANSFER

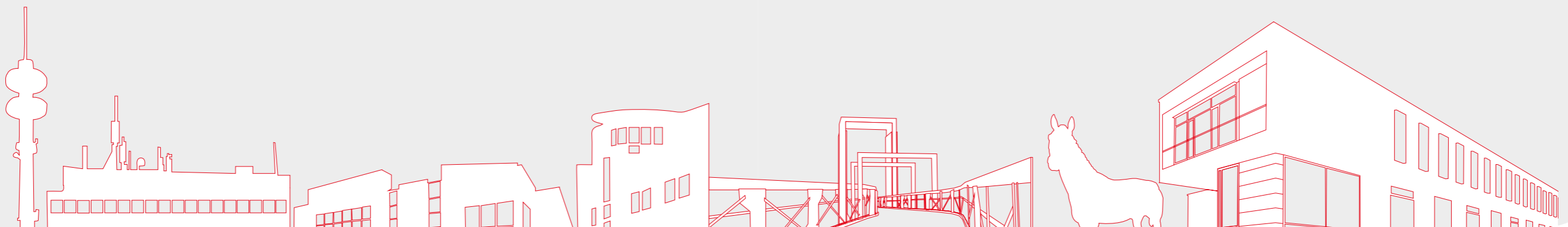
3.1 Research funding	21
3.2 Support for junior researchers	22
3.3 Transfer, start-up consultancy and research alumni/alumnae	24

4. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES IN TEACHING AND STUDIES

4.1 Digitalisation of teaching and studies	27
4.2 Course and degree programme development	28
4.3 Internationalisation of teaching and studies	30
4.4 Widening access and work-study-life issues	31
4.5 Health promotion and student health management	32
4.6 Supporting students through scholarships	33
4.7 Academic continuing education	33

5. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR THE ORGANISATION

5.1 Personnel	35
5.2 Finance and controlling	36
5.3 Infrastructure	37
5.4 Quality development and process management	38
5.5 Communication	38
5.6 Strategy and structure process	39





1. The University of Vechta: looking to the future, shaping the change

University Development Plan 2024-2028

Society and academia face a number of challenges, many of them global in nature. These include climate change, loss of biodiversity, the energy transition, tackling social inequality, digitalisation, promoting democracy and preserving social cohesion. Successful shaping the future means working together by combining the power of politics, society and academia. The complexity of these issues demands successful coordination between a number of different disciplines in order to realise integrated, sustainable solutions. The resulting pressure on both societies and individuals to adapt requires an acceptance of new ways, innovative skills development concepts, and the expertise and will to

shape challenging transformation processes. Universities play an indispensable role in shaping transformation processes, in that they conduct research, train specialists, create networks, foster dialogue across society and, through knowledge transfer initiatives, directly promote transformation. To play its part in this, the University of Vechta needs to be viewed as an attractive place to learn, to conduct research and to work, and it needs to reposition itself for blended forms of teaching and learning, and flexible working arrangements.

At the University of Vechta, we place questions about the future of society at the heart of academic discourse

across all of the different stages of human life. From education studies and early years education, to teacher training, to social and human services and gerontology. The University with its mission statement 'Responsibility is Key' has designated the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) framework as core points of reference for research and teaching. Through responsible research and teaching, the University aims to promote sustainable solutions to contemporary social challenges which are in harmony with the needs of society.

more of a priority. This appeal is a crucial factor in remaining competitive nationally. It is the University's view that a primary objective in this area is to create an organisational structure which helps realise an attractive, resilient campus, to develop degree programmes that are closely aligned with vocational needs and, as the largest education provider in the region, to actively attract students to the university town of Vechta. In this respect, the University of Vechta is clearly signalling its future focus by investing in the construction of a modern sports campus with a new double sports hall.

Changes in the environment in which we operate mean that the appeal of the University of Vechta as a place to study and as a collaboration partner has become

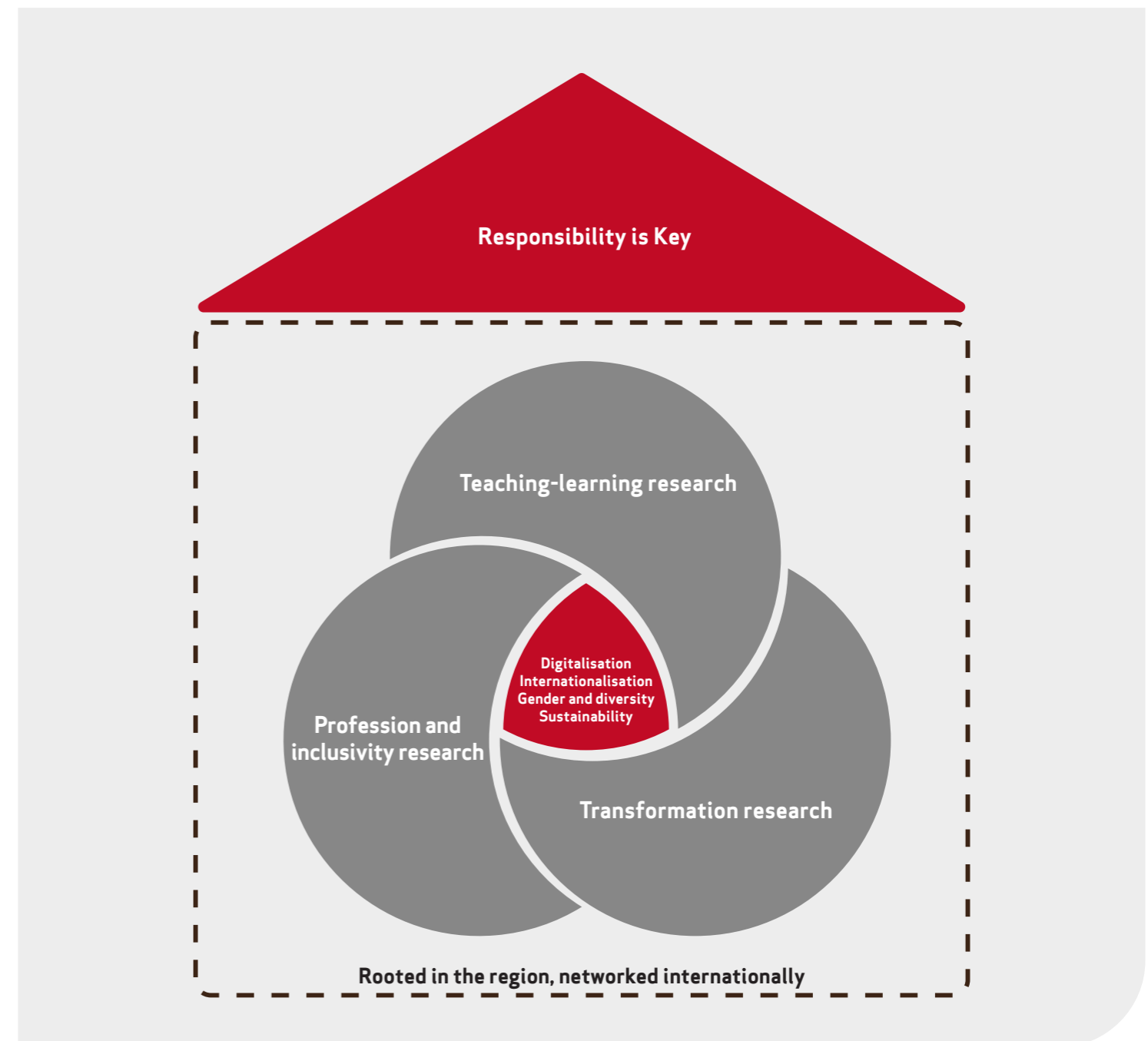


Figure 1: Profile focus areas and cross-cutting issues

Looking to the future, shaping the change – this is what the University of Vechta aspires to in sending its graduates out into the world. They are provided with the skills needed to function as primary, and lower secondary school (*Hauptschule and Realschule*) teachers, for the social and human services sector, for business ethics, for transformation management in rural areas, for cultural and education studies, and for the social sciences. The University actively discharges its responsibility as an educational institution and consequently a provider of essential services, and through its profile embraces the challenge of contributing to the shaping of a social, sustainable, democratic society that is fit for the future.

For the 2024-2028 University Development Plan, the University will focus its research activities in three profile focus areas which reflect our research strengths – teaching-learning research, profession and inclusivity research, and transformation research (see figure 1). This conscious interlinking of research focus areas enables us to take a versatile, in-depth approach to tackling research topics and enables a holistic perspective using innovative approaches. This in turn enables us to better meet the requirements imposed by the complex world we live in today. Social, educational and societal processes will be studied through interdisciplinary collaboration. Research will address social inclusivity across all the different stages of human life, the shaping of sustainable transformation processes and teaching and learning in a heterogeneous, digital world. The aim is to empower people to participate in society to the maximum possible extent. The previous University Development Plan defined agriculture and food, and cultural studies as profile focus areas. In this plan, these focus areas are primarily integrated into the transformation research and profession and inclusivity research profile focus areas.

For nearly 200 years, teacher training at the University of Vechta and its predecessor institutions has been a byword for quality and a central pillar of teacher training in Lower Saxony. In the profile focus area of teaching-learning research, research will be carried out into the school of the future, and a close look will be taken at educational and interaction processes, and classroom teaching.

The profile focus area of profession and inclusivity research combines research on inclusion, professionalisation processes, occupations and professions. It covers social inclusion through different life stages, social justice and the development of an inclusive society. Interdisciplinary teams at the University of Vechta employ advanced research methods to conduct research on social innovations.

The transformation research profile focus area will involve research into processes of transformation towards a more sustainable society. With a focus on the Agenda 2030 sustainability goals, transformation research at Vechta will focus in particular on transformation processes in rural areas and education for sustainable development. Together with regional partners, the University will develop solution and action concepts for sustainable, socially viable development of the region and beyond.

By closely intermeshing research, teaching and transfer in these areas, the University of Vechta will contribute to empowering future generations to tackle complex tasks against a backdrop of major social challenges. Our significant long-standing expertise in teaching-learning research can be used to translate skills shortages identified through profession and inclusivity research and transformation research into educational concepts for young people. With our interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approach to transformation research and specific focus on the needs of rural areas in a globalised world, this is an area where the University of Vechta boasts a unique selling point.

The cross-cutting issues of digitalisation, internationalisation, gender and diversity, and sustainability cut across both the three profile focus areas and the University as a whole (see section 2).

1.1 Designing the school of the future: Teaching-learning research

With our strong focus on teacher training, teaching-learning research is a core profile focus area for the University of Vechta. Designing the school of the future is an education policy challenge. The University is determined to make a contribution to meeting this challenge and to ensure that students are adequately prepared for this future. The teaching-learning research profile focus area combines the subject matter of academic and subject didactic disciplines and education studies and educational psychology with education, learning, school and classroom teaching research. In addition, the University also looks at structural topics such as school development, alternative routes of entry to the profession, and a teacher training system in which prospective teachers are divided into primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school levels (*Stufenlehramt*). The University is actively involved in shaping these topics in alignment with the State University Development Plan (*Landeshochschulplanung*).

In a diverse society and diverse school environment, teaching-learning research makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to analysing and improving schools. Insights are gained into the educational processes and progress of children and adolescents and into the organisational prerequisites for these processes and progress. Priorities within this profile focus area include fundamental questions about child and

adolescent learning processes, innovative teaching concepts, teaching methods and teaching materials, and issues relating to the professionalisation of teaching and interactions between teachers and the student body.

Conscious of social tensions around heterogeneity and inclusion, researchers at the University are developing groundbreaking perspectives for the development of an inclusive school system. Over the next few years, the Education, Upbringing, Society: Vechta Institute for Inclusion (BERGVINK) research institute will take the lead role in researching the topic and mission of inclusion, with a particular focus on inclusion in schools.

The teaching-learning research perspectives listed below link to and intersect with the profession and inclusivity research profile focus area in a variety of ways. Through the measures described, each of these perspectives generates important ideas and inspirations for the University and delivers significant research-based insights for designing the inclusive school of the future.



Heterogeneity, inclusion and adaptivity

The inclusive school of the future has to be viewed in the context of the increasing diversity of society and therefore of the student body. Inclusivity research is therefore concerned with various professional forms of individualisation and differentiation. For teachers, meeting learners' individual needs and requirements and flexibly adapting the learning environment to suit individual interests, abilities and progress is becoming more and more important. In this light, research that deals with increasing and wide-ranging diversity in a school context is particularly helpful in showing the way forward. This is an area where questions about adaptability, learning difficulties, language ability and multilingualism, categorisation and stereotyping, the context of migration and flight, and collaboration in multi-profession teams and for full day schooling (German schools have traditionally been morning only) also play an important role. By hosting diverse learning groups, primary schools in particular, but secondary schools too, offer many research perspectives. The focus is on promoting child and adolescent learning and development processes, perspectives and expectations. Research will also address the question of how teachers need to be trained to enable them to design appropriate learning environments and opportunities in schools and in the classroom, and to create conditions conducive to effective learning processes for all students. The University contributes to enabling the realisation and exploitation of potential, in particular potential offered by interdisciplinary approaches in the additional profile focus area of profession and inclusivity research. This applies in particular to the potential offered by digitalisation.

Classroom teaching research

The University is shaping the school of the future both through research into subject didactics and through interdisciplinary research into classroom teaching. This involves exploring subject and general didactic, and educational psychology questions in areas such as subject-specific teaching methods, the design of learning processes, building skills and promoting skills development, the role of teachers, textbook research, digital teaching and learning media, and the opportunities offered by digitalisation in a school context. Firmly rooted in the region, one of the University's particular strengths is researching non-school learning settings in the context of teaching intended to reflect lived experience.

Teaching and learning in a digital world

In recent years, the expectations placed on teachers and requirements profiles for teachers with respect to digital skills have become much more demanding. Against this backdrop, the University is exploring approaches to designing integrative media education provision, how teachers can recognise and use the didactic potential of digital media for lesson planning (including inclusive lesson planning) and school development, and in what contexts it is appropriate to use digital media in practice. Further examples from the teaching and learning research field include the highly topical issues of how to deal with disinformation and of artificial intelligence in an educational context. In this respect collaboration with Medienkompetenzzentrum Vechta (Media Literacy Centre Vechta) is an important point of departure for interdisciplinary research projects.

Education for sustainable development

The school of the future will be a place that views education as a good that empowers mindsets and behaviours that are fit for the future (see also section 1.3). Researching and promoting the acquisition of the skills of tomorrow will help teachers and students to ably participate in current and future processes for shaping society and to be confident in dealing with uncertainty and multiperspectivity. Potential education for sustainable development fields of research which specifically impact on the profile of the University in the rural area are skills models, teaching skills, use of innovative methods, teaching material design, management and institutionalisation, and governance and transfer research.

1.2 Boosting competence, increasing social inclusion: Profession and inclusivity research

Research in the profession and inclusivity research profile focus area is conducted by researchers from a variety of disciplines. The quality of inclusion in a society depends on the professions and their adherents. This profile focus area contributes to extending our understanding of occupations, professions and inclusion. It focuses on empowerment and inclusion at all stages of life and on social justice as a whole. Key players in this field are researchers in subject didactics, education studies, educational psychology, social work, gerontology and social services management.

Profession research

Profession research runs the rule over education and support processes, and over developing greater professionalism during different phases of professional development. It looks at prerequisites for professional conduct (e.g. knowledge, skills, attitude) in different fields of action within society. It also considers perspectives on shaping professional skills and collective professionalisation. Profession research explores and reconstructs the academisation and strategic positioning of professions, and society's perception of their position within the hierarchy of professions. This research can be viewed as a point of departure for pro-

fessionalisation processes in which the core concern is to further develop the profession and raise its training and research profile.

In the social and human services field, for example, profession research looks at how gendered professions replicate and transform as circumstances change. Research into gendered professions looks at the ways in which occupations are traditionally categorised and valued by gender. Studies in this area look at the extent to which gender stereotypes and expectations influence admission to, recognition of and career development in specific professions. They also analyse the ways in which such assessments influence society's perceptions of people's professionalism and skills depending on whether these professionals are male or female.

With respect to teaching, profession research focuses in particular on school type-specific requirements for pedagogical teacher conduct. Vechta researchers are exploring issues around prerequisites for, and the development, modelling, measurement and impact of teacher's professional skills and how these requirements can be taken into account during teacher training. The main focus is on key social developments, such as digitalisation, making inclusion a reality in a multilingual immigration society, and education for sustainable development. Research is also being con-



ducted on how specific elements of the teaching training degree programme, such as planning and reflecting on lessons, and enquiry-based learning, contribute to developing students' skills during practice phases. Future profession research will undertake a more detailed examination of areas such as continuous learning by working professionals (see section 4.7).

Inclusivity research

Meeting sustainability goals – a major challenge for society today – makes it more important than ever that we pay heed to all of the different dimensions of social innovation. It's not just about making more efficient use of material resources; it's also about issues of intergenerational justice, social inclusion, political and social codetermination, and even provision of essential services. A socially sustainable, future-proof society is built around democratic values, social inclusion, gender equality and respect for diversity. At the University of Vechta, inclusivity research rests on a broad base, which encompasses not just social and human services and teacher training, but also the areas of business, politics and cultural studies.

The discussion and realisation of inclusion to create an inclusive society is at the heart of inclusivity research. Starting from a broad understanding of the concept of inclusion, it explores challenges, barriers to, conditions for and the potential offered by social inclusion. This includes, for example, inclusive school teaching, social entrepreneurship, the future of work, political processes and how housing concepts for older people or people with special needs can promote self-determination and independence. Inclusivity research relies on interdisciplinary collaboration and multi-profession approaches.

The concept of inclusivity explores in the broadest sense the relationship of individuals and society to other people, but also to structural factors such as educational context and digitalisation processes. Core questions in inclusivity research concern how social justice can be realised in society. The concept of inclusivity underpins calls for broad sections of the population to be enabled to enjoy all of the benefits offered by society and to take advantage of the life opportunities created by that society. Inclusivity research at Vechta focuses in particular on school and non-school educational contexts, including education processes and the environment within which education and society operate. This is showcased by the founding of the BERGVINK research institute, a key plank in shaping the

University's profile, and is further highlighted by our ongoing collaboration with regional stakeholders, and partnerships with various educational institutions and non-school learning settings.

Another area where inclusivity plays a significant role is digitality. The focus is not limited to digital inclusivity through the use of digital services to alleviate disability. There is also a strong focus on the development of digital literacy skills for both researchers and students. In Vechta, researchers are looking at what skills and knowledge are needed to actively participate in, design and analyse digitally permeated societies. In addition to an understanding of software and computer code, this includes in particular delving into data structures and algorithmic systems, and analysing their role in human-technology relations. Given the environmental and social limits to growth, business ethics will continue to explore future and sustainability-oriented perspectives on inclusivity in a working world in transition. The imprint of digitalisation in particular means that the new world of work brings considerable challenges in terms of individual autonomy, integrity and the self-image of professions. With this in mind, research will focus in particular on the mechanisms by which social entrepreneurship exerts its effects, resilience in organisational contexts and the intersectional care economy. As a classic political science activity, inclusivity research will be conducted with the agenda of empowering participation in political processes and the concept of democracy. This includes issues relating to the management of the political interests of civil society stakeholders, political parties and trade associations at both national and international levels.

1.3 Capturing dimensions and shaping in partnership: transformation research

The University understands transformation to mean a profound, comprehensive change in domains like the environment, the economy, society, culture or politics. A key area of focus for transformation research in Vechta is studying transformation processes in rural areas. This focus gives the University a unique selling point within the State of Lower Saxony and enables the University to deliver important ideas and inspirations for the sustainable development of rural regions. A further focus is on topics relating to education for sustainable development (ESD). This involves considering complex processes involving a variety of objectives, speeds, spatial characteristics, thematic diversity and interrelationships. This approach takes into account the systemic relationship to socio-technical, socio-ecological and ecological systems, and the challenges posed by a volatile, uncertain, multi-layered, ambiguous world. Capturing the complexity of these transformations requires a multidimensional approach that takes into account the domains of activity and roles performed by a range of protagonists and stakeholders. Critical here is understanding the dependencies and interrelationships between multi-sectoral transformations, sectoral transitions and individual adaptation strategies in terms of individually tailored, collaborative resilience-building strategies.

The University pursues an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to transformation research that requires closely coordinated collaboration. Research

topics at the Vechta Institute of Sustainability Transformation in Rural Areas (VISTRA) include the dynamics and different dimensions of transformation processes. The Institute works closely with relevant organisations from academia, business, society, politics and administration. These include, for example, *Verbund Transformationsforschung agrar Niedersachsen (trafo:agrar)*, within which the University is working with other universities in Lower Saxony, businesses and society to research sustainability-focused transformation projects.

Transformation processes in rural areas

There is an accumulation of different transformation processes in rural areas incorporating spatial, economic, social and cultural dimensions. Climate change and climate change adaptation strategies (mitigation and adaptation policies) affect natural, cultural and intensive agricultural landscapes and associated economic systems. Reconciling the conflicting goals of climate protection, food security and biodiversity protection is a fundamental problem. In keeping with the University's 'Responsibility is Key' mission, this means engaging in an intensive discourse around acceptance of transformation processes (adaptation and adaptability research). A further component of transformation is changing consumer expectations with respect to goods



and services from rural areas. These expectations often have both an economic and an ethical/business ethics component. In rural areas, the impact of digital transformation is particularly potent, as slow internet connections limit access to digital infrastructure, and the demographic structure of rural areas tends to slow adaptation. In rural areas, digital transformation is of seminal significance, as it offers potential solutions to many of the difficulties involved in providing essential services like medical care, access to education (see section 1.1), mobility and social inclusion (see section 1.2) in rural areas. In this respect, digital transformation is of seminal significance.

Education for sustainable development

Education for sustainable development (ESD) plays a key role in promoting sustainable transformation (see also section 1.1). The aim of ESD is to foster knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower sustainable mindsets and behaviours. The University works to help realise the Agenda 2030 sustainability goals and to mould a sustainable rural society in that it also pursues transformative approaches in teaching. This empowers learners to assess how they can contribute to a sustainability-focused transformation. The aim is to create the ideal conditions for educational processes to form a core element of transformative regional development. This involves examining collaboration between educational institutions, and interactions within and with the region.





2. The four cross-cutting issues

With the University's 'Responsibility is Key' mission, the four cross-cutting issues – internationalisation, digitalisation, gender and diversity, and sustainability – create a framework for university research, teaching, study and organisation. Gender and diversity-sensitive, cosmopolitan and international, geared to digital, sustainable action, they set the tone for how we should live and work together at the University and bring an additional strategic focus to the profile focus areas. The four cross-cutting issues feed into our three profile focus areas, enabling their various specific characteristics to be analysed from a number of additional angles. This concerns in particular:

- a culture of openness and active internationalism on site and in partnership with partners worldwide
- establishing and developing innovative digital organisational concepts, responsible use of digital technology and supporting and promoting the acquisition of digital skills
- fostering diversity and equality of opportunity, and enabling social inclusion
- the University's responsibility for and commitment to environmental, social and economic sustainability, and to social justice.

2.1 Internationalisation

Internationalisation at the University of Vechta is guided by the principle "Rooted in the region, at home in the world". Internationalisation is a key prerequisite for the University's success both nationally and internationally. Recent developments in international mobility and in digitalisation in teaching, research and professional services give rise to new challenges – the solutions to which the University intends to be actively involved in shaping.

For some years, the proportion of students who acquired their university entrance qualifications outside Germany has (with no active recruitment strategy) remained constant. Total student numbers have, however, declined. Over the last six winter semesters, the number of foreign students has averaged roughly 250. The University intends to promote shared courses for both German and international students. This is a significant element of internationalisation. To achieve this goal in accordance with the growth objectives of the State of Lower Saxony, in the medium term the University will endeavour to increase the proportion of international students. Based on our analysis of international student demand for courses, the University will develop a targeted marketing strategy. The aim, however, will not solely be to increase the number of international students. The University will also endeavour to maximise the number of successful graduates.

The university currently has 155 partnerships with international academic institutions. It will aim to transform existing collaborations with selected universities into close partnerships – through, for example, student exchanges, and teaching and research collaborations.

To make the University more globally attractive and competitive and at the same time boost internationalisation at home, a key development goal will be the internationalisation of curricula in all subjects. These efforts will focus in particular on boosting international mobility for all of our designated target groups (students, doctoral candidates, researchers, technical and administrative staff), in particular through virtual collaborations. Continuing digitalisation and the opportunities created by the use of digital instruments, methods and media will give rise to new opportunities for internationalisation. With our international partners, we will strengthen virtual collaborations, taking into account the differing circumstances and requirements of different academic cultures.



2.2 Digitalisation

For the University, digitalisation and digitality are both a challenge and an opportunity. Doing justice to this issue requires more systematic networking between different organisational units within the University. Based on our digitalisation strategy, the University has defined priorities in the areas described below. The University will establish a working group on digitalisation and digitality to pursue ongoing development of cross-cutting issues and advise the University Executive Board.

As a campus university, the University is working to firmly establish innovative digital teaching/learning formats and digitality as a subject for teaching. A particular focus at present lies in strengthening virtual support for autonomous study and giving explicit consideration to lecturer and student heterogeneity. We have tested the use of digital settings for inclusive lesson design and university teaching in our teacher training degree programmes, and made fostering selected digital skills established practice. To boost the degree to which our programmes impart digital skills, we plan to systematically embed these skills in the curricula for both teacher training and non teacher-training degree programmes. As a place of collaboration, Medienkompetenzentrum Vechta (Media Literacy Centre Vechta) supports free-ranging discussion on promoting media education processes. This is where scenarios for future schooling, teaching and media education using, in and via digital technologies are tested, discussed and shaped.

Through participation in joint projects and through the *Hochschule.digital Niedersachsen* initiative (initiative for cooperation between universities in Lower Saxony on digitalisation topics), the University will be actively involved in shaping networking between universities in the areas of teaching and further education. The University will in future aim to make more systematic use of digital media, open educational resources (OER) and artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching. As a socially responsible University, we will promote broad lecturer and student participation. We will develop OER and AI guidelines that take into account both the challenges and the potential of OER and AI for degree programmes, teaching and academic continuing education.

One of our research focuses is on digitality and digitalisation in the context of transformation processes in areas such as education, sustainability, communication and the science system. In recent years, the University has established formats and structures for research information-sharing and networking, such as interdisciplinary colloquia and a StudioLab on digital methods. The University is actively developing these research fields. In particular, we will expand domestic and international research collaborations on digitalisation and digitality in the University's three profile focus areas. We will address cross-cutting topics such as the algorithmicity of everyday culture and its significance for education, business and administration, and social transformation. This will occur through the develop-

ment of new and existing digital tools, infrastructures, methods and data in research and, for example, in educational contexts. Teaching research projects using and about digital technologies will be particularly significant. In addition, to make its research more accessible the University will endeavour to use digital formats to enhance its scientific communication and to establish an open science culture (see section 3.2).

We will also continue to develop our ongoing research information management and research data management activities. This serves two aims. Firstly, to have a central store of information on the University's research activities and results. Secondly, to enable the storage and archiving of actual research data and to link it to research information. We will develop advisory services for the entire research data life cycle. The services we offer in these areas will be geared to the needs of both researchers and professional services staff (see section 3.1).

The computing centre is carrying out demand-led further development of its IT services. The objective is a secure, efficient, high availability IT infrastructure that is able to adapt to new functionality, performance and security challenges as they arise. A strategic driver is the use of open source products and an open science approach. Student administration will be migrated to a new system and linked to the existing teaching and learning management system.

A further objective is the ongoing digitisation and archiving of administrative documentation using a centralised document management system. The University is continuously identifying, digitising and facilitating access to core processes. In partnership with other universities in Lower Saxony, we will introduce a digital travel expense claim system and digital personnel files. Following on from administrative digitalisation, we will in future also digitalise the management of faculty and departmental committees.

To protect the University from cybercriminality, we will introduce a comprehensive IT security management system. This will include both technical measures and measures to raise awareness of security and data protection among University members. We will also support professional services staff in acquiring digital skills. To achieve this, we will develop structured further education provision and raise manager awareness of staff development needs in this area.

We will further strengthen our collaborations with other universities (e.g. *Hochschule.digital Niedersachsen*, LANIT (initiative for cooperation between university computing centres in Lower Saxony on infrastructure)). In addition, we will use state-wide networking and collaborations to expand the degree of digitalisation in core areas of the University's mission.



2.3 Gender and diversity

Gender and diversity research is now an established research field at the University of Vechta. As a cross-cutting issue, interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches will be used to research the origins, propagation and effects of the gender system, including in the context of other inequalities (e.g. immigration, disability). The University of Vechta is developing a concept to ensure that gender and diversity factors are taken into account and to improve the way they are taken into account in research and development in all subject areas. This will be demand-led. By using and networking the University of Vechta's available potential, the University will develop, implement, evaluate and embed structural measures for systematically taking into account any gender-related factors throughout the research process.

Gender and diversity is rooted in the University's overall strategy as a core cross-cutting issue. We see realising equality as enabling every person to be given opportunities and possibilities appropriate to their skills and capabilities. We consider gender equality, equality of opportunity and fairness to be markers of quality, and this is reflected across all areas of the University. The University has developed a diversity strategy and sustainability guidelines for the Shaping Diversity audit by *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft e. V.* These will be further developed in future.



The University is committed to a family-friendly university culture. Long-term participation in the Family-friendly University Audit process ensures that degree programmes, postgraduate study and working conditions at the University will continue to develop to beco-

me even more family-friendly. Through existing and established programmes like the Gender and Diversity Certificate, students are given the knowledge and skills needed to help them understand and internalise diversity and how to approach heterogeneity in an ever more pluralistic society. In this respect the certificate supplements the teaching-learning research (see section 1.1) and profession and inclusivity research (see section 1.2) profile focus areas.

The introduction of equality monitoring provides a foundation for transparent equality reporting and ensures that the University is collecting a full range of equality data. This will enable us to objectively measure the effects of the University's equality work over time, and modify or further develop it where necessary. The University will continue its work to establish a targeted, structured equality monitoring system focused on gender and diversity. We will continuously evaluate and improve the implementation of in-house measures aimed at fostering equality. This process is a key pillar of our equality work. It ensures the quality of that work and is seen as an essential perspective in all areas of the University's mission.

The foundation for the University's gender equality work is the concept of equality of opportunity, which is enshrined in law. The University Equal Opportunities Officer and faculty officers promote a culture of equality of opportunity, sensitivity to diversity and respect at the University. They work to make appointment and recruitment procedures gender inequality sensitive and offer advice on gender equality and combating discrimination. In collaboration with the relevant coordinating bodies and officers, measures and support services for reconciling work, academic, study, life, family and caring responsibilities, and for health promotion for all University members are being systematically integrated into the structures and culture of the University, and further developed where necessary. We will therefore endeavour to more closely integrate our gender equality activities with our family-friendly university, open university and health management activities. We are also currently working on an inclusion strategy.

2.4 Sustainability

The University's sustainability guidelines ensure that sustainability is firmly embedded in all areas of the University. Since 2015, the Sustainable University Working Group has established processes which have helped realise sustainable development of the University. In addition, membership of the Hoch-N and Teacher Training for Sustainable Development (*LehrerInnenbildung für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung*) networks has boosted our sustainability activities and helped to embed them institutionally. Education for sustainable development (ESD) and support for sustainability skills associated with it are viewed as a cross-cutting task for teaching.



In view of the German Rectors' Conference 'For a Culture of Sustainability' recommendation and the University's own sustainability guidelines, we will continue to develop our teaching and degree programme so that all degree programmes foster sustainability skills. Each semester, the University offers multiple elective, faculty-independent sustainability modules. Similarly, we will improve lecturer ESD skills by continuing to offer the ESD university didactics online training programme. The programme has been running since 2018. In addition, every winter term we hold an ESD action week, during which lecturers are asked to address sustainable development issues in their teaching sessions.

The University supports sustainability-related research, which serves to generate systems, target and transformation knowledge. In addition, the objectives and conduct of research projects are also geared towards aspects of sustainable development. In this context,

supporting junior researchers and providing young academics with the skills they need are of crucial importance.

The University has set itself the goal of making the campus sustainable and creating an environment that fosters sustainable activity. It strives to make its campus operations environmentally friendly, resource efficient, family and gender friendly, inclusive, health-promoting and diverse. In doing so, the University aims to take a whole institution ESD approach which will serve as a model for other institutions, and is an expression of a culture of sustainability and an awareness of the need to behave sustainably. To ensure that these sustainability activities are also visible to those outside the University, we will continue to carry out sustainability reporting. We will also develop guidelines on the use of sustainable modes of transport for business trips.

A far-reaching sustainability process requires the involvement of a wide majority of University employees and students, creating a culture of participation. The University will promote and support sustainability initiatives by University members.

As well as integrating sustainability into its research and teaching, the University will also advance the issue of sustainability in its third mission activities. In this context too, the University will be guided by the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) framework. Through transfer measures, development projects and service learning, in which students take part in academically relevant service activities, the University contributes to realising the sustainable development goals in rural areas. The Centre for Teacher Education (*Zentrum für Lehrer*innenbildung*) also offers training programmes for qualified teachers in this field. The University considers further networking and partnerships with relevant regional and supra-regional organisations to be essential for sustainable development.



3. Development priorities in research, support for junior researchers and transfer

The University pursues the fundamental goal of boosting research, particularly across its profile focus areas. Figures from the German Federal Statistical Office show that third-party income per professorship at the University of Vechta is less than half the average for the same disciplines at other universities. The University will aim to support researchers with their research activities through effective support structures and targeted research funding measures. The objective is to increase the volume of funding for third-party-funded projects, and to raise the profile of our research in academic discourse. Through internal collaboration, we will endeavour to realise stronger open networking both nationally and internationally. A key focus will be on increasing knowledge transfer and on supporting junior researchers.

3.1 Research funding

Research funding will be supported by the Department of Research, Junior Researchers and Transfer and the Committee for Research and Support for Junior Researchers. Based on ongoing analysis of strengths and weaknesses, support structures will undergo continuous improvement geared towards development and performance goals for research, support for junior researchers and knowledge transfer. The advice and information services provided by the Department of Research, Junior Researchers and Transfer, particularly services concerning third-party funding applications, are subject to a continuous evaluation and improvement process. The goal is to improve the quality of advice on funding applications and programmes given to researchers and raise the approval rate. The University will further develop the structure of central University and departmental/faculty research funding and improve coordination between funding programmes. Where duplicate structures exist, this duplication will be remedied by optimising the assignment of tasks within the organisation. In addition, the University will provide advice and training services to raise researcher awareness of gender-related factors in their research projects. In keeping with the logic of interlinked profile focus areas and cross-cutting issues, we will also expand information-sharing and networking formats with the aim of promoting interdisciplinary collaboration.

Research projects at the University are financially supported by the Committee for Research and Support for Junior Researchers (KFN). The success of KFN award criteria will be reviewed and these criteria adjusted accordingly. In addition, The University will work with the faculties to reach an agreement on future instruments for internal research funding. This process will also aim to create incentives to submit applications involving complex application procedures. Within the faculties, we will aim to establish instruments for funding projects that are aligned with the strategic orientation of the faculty and the University's profile focus areas.

We will pursue the development of an integrated current research information and research data management system (see section 2.2). The current research information system will be located within the Department of Research, Junior Researchers and Transfer and will enable the centralised, low-threshold preparation and retrieval of reporting data on University research activities such as projects, publications and events. It will therefore be an information source and planning

tool for researchers and professional service staff alike, and, through its portal function, will promote the creation of partnerships both within the University and beyond. The system will in future also be used to manage research data directly. The system will be used to record, index and archive research data and where possible release them as open data. Research data management will be implemented by the University Library. This will include technical infrastructure and advisory services, the latter ranging from producing a data management plan to archiving research data to compliance with data protection regulations.

In addition to these central University services, research activities will also be funded directly by the faculties. The VISTRA, BERGVINK and Institute of Gerontology (IfG) research institutes have been established to bring together inter-faculty research and knowledge transfer activities. The goal is to strengthen the University's profile focus areas and to realise a combined approach to boosting third-party funding income. We will evaluate the contribution of these institutes to honing our profile and to research performance over the period of this development plan. The long term aim is that, through third party funding, they should become self-financing and independent of central funding.

Key objectives

- to optimise processes and structures for research and supporting junior researchers
- to evaluate and optimise research funding instruments
- to establish an integrated current research information and research data management system
- to enhance the visibility of the University's research achievements.

3.2 Support for junior researchers

The University has declared supporting junior researchers and providing them with the skills they need as one of its strategic goals. In keeping with this goal, a carefully weighted mixture of general and individual funding measures will provide junior researchers with the best possible preparation for a successful career.

In Germany, the definition of *wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs* (junior researchers) is a topic of heated debate, as the term can be interpreted as referring to a range of groups in the post-doctoral phase. The boundaries of the doctoral phase are entirely clear, of post-doctoral phases much less so. Post-doctoral researchers undertake independent research and teaching, but they do not or cannot all aspire to more elevated academic positions. Because the majority will not be able to obtain a professorship, funding programmes need to take into account a range of potential career paths. Support for junior researchers at the University will in future be aligned with the European Commission's framework for research careers:

- R1: First stage researcher (doctorate phase, age limit of 35)
- R2: Recognised researcher (post-doctoral phase, age limit of 45)
- R3: Established researcher (researchers who have developed a high level of independence)
- R4: Leading researcher (researchers who are leading in their research area or field)

Efforts to support junior researchers will in future more clearly differentiate between the stages laid out in this framework. Differentiating between junior researchers at the University based on status lays the foundation for targeted funding measures. Funding programmes will in future better support junior professors. In addition, greater emphasis will be placed on the time taken to complete a qualification. Differences in the time required to complete a doctorate by subject will be indicated for all specified individual degree courses. With one exception, a doctorate in engineering takes an average of 4.4 to 4.5 years, in the natural sciences 3.3 to 3.7 years and in the humanities and social sciences

3.8 to 4.2 years. Given the range of subjects offered at the University of Vechta, this means that the average doctorate should be able to be completed in about four years. It should be noted that most doctoral candidates take nearly eight years to complete their doctorate – twice as long as the national average. To improve supervision conditions for both supervisors and doctoral candidates over the period covered by this University Development Plan and to bring the length of time spent completing a doctorate more in line with the subject-specific average, the University believes that action is required at a number of levels.

One measure, already instituted through colloquia and binding supervision agreements, is support with the actual substance of a doctorate. This proven approach will be maintained and developed further. Information and advice services on doctorates, habilitations (post-doctoral lecturing qualification) and funding opportunities for academic activities will be updated on an ongoing basis with the aim of providing junior researchers with wide-ranging support. In addition, the University will develop networking events and opportunities for junior researchers. We will endeavour to develop a peer-to-peer mentoring programme. With a view to improving the quality of teaching and providing junior researchers with additional qualifications, the University intends to introduce participation in the *Landeszertifikat Hochschullehre Niedersachsen* (Lower Saxony state university teaching certificate). This will involve combining existing university didactics offerings. The University will further develop the structure of central and faculty/organisational unit programmes for supporting junior researchers, ensure better coordination between these programmes and will disband any duplicate structures.

The Graduate Centre has established itself as a useful mechanism for supporting junior researchers. The structure of the Graduate Centre will be further developed, and, by developing quality criteria for faculty-independent services, the Centre will guarantee targeted, demand-led support for doctorates and habilitations. The Graduate Centre provides methodological and practical support for doctoral candidates and develops this support to match demand and in keeping with specific criteria. One objective of this support is to make junior researchers more employable and to enhance their academic and non-academic career opportunities. To help develop the Centre's services further, the University will also establish annual formats for analysing user needs.

As with supervision agreements for doctorates, in recruiting for junior researchers, the University will develop means for following up and evaluating the effects of measures aimed at supporting career advancement.

The expertise possessed by professors, particularly junior professors, will be systematically used to tailor the services provided by the Graduate Centre. This obligation will, in consultation with the Dean's Offices, be written into academic employment agreements.

The profile focus areas will be used as a foundation for exploring the idea of establishing structured doctoral programmes. This measure is intended to enhance the structure of support for junior researchers, to ensure that the academic qualification process is sound and broad-based, and to reduce the length of time taken to complete a doctorate.

In contrast to the Graduate Centre, which provides structured, faculty-independent support to junior researchers and is responsible for overall administration, in faculties and research institutes the focus is on providing individual support and personal advice to junior researchers.

Key objectives

- to further develop demand-led, differentiated, criteria-guided support for junior researchers
- to combine university didactics offerings for participation in the *Landeszertifikat Hochschullehre Niedersachsen*
- to develop a concept for structured doctoral programmes.



3.3 Transfer, start-up consultancy and research alumni/alumnae

The last few years have seen a number of positive developments in the knowledge transfer field, an increase in transfer activities and the establishment of the Science Shop as a permanent facility.

One of the strengths of Vechta as a research location lies in its strong roots within the region. To promote exchanges of academic knowledge and research findings with the region, the University is further developing its transfer strategy and expanding its transfer activities. In addition to our established transformation research profile focus area partnerships with regional stakeholders, we will also deepen our collaborations in the teaching-learning research and profession and inclusivity research profile focus areas. In the spirit of citizen science and service learning, we will aim to involve citizens more closely in research and teaching. To this end, we will develop event formats for fostering dialogue between academia and society. Outstanding knowledge transfer achievements and innovations will be recognised and supported through an endowed award for knowledge transfer. The University will develop a concept for the award and find a sponsor.

The open science movement is becoming more and more significant. In addition to open access to publications (open access) and facilitating access to research data (open data), the University will also focus on other

third mission activities. We will launch a participatory process aimed at developing a tailor-made open science strategy (see also section 2.2).

Scientific communication is an important element in our research positioning. The objective is to provide outsiders with a clearer understanding of the University and academic work at the University. Scientific communication is aimed at helping citizens, politicians, business, academia and the media understand the relevance of the University's research activities, building trust and – in keeping with the University's 'Responsibility is Key' mission – establishing transparency. Scientific communication is a fundamental element of our public relations strategy and key to transferring scientific knowledge to the public and getting input back to the University. This enables new perspectives, including research perspectives, and the pursuit of a multidirectional transfer strategy. In addition, scientific communication will be incorporated into the Graduate Centre staff development programme with the aim of encouraging junior researchers to communicate their research results to the scientific community and society. One objective is to establish a cooperation platform to facilitate sharing of information and collaboration between different stakeholders inside and outside the University, e.g. via a virtual Science Shop. We will aim to involve researchers at an early stage of their qua-

lification journey in particular, with the goal of, firstly, making research findings accessible to the public and, secondly, promoting careers in non-academic fields and raising the profile of the University's research.

The University start-up service TrENDi is an established entity within the region. A key focus for their offering is social entrepreneurship. A further goal is to continue to develop and expand our start-up consultancy services to meet demand.

To help build bridges between the University and external organisations, we will establish a network of research alumni/alumnae. The network will provide a space for sharing experiences, mentoring and initiating collaborations.

Key objectives

- to network researchers
- to develop event formats for facilitating interaction between the University and society
- to develop an open science strategy
- to establish a research alumni/alumnae network.





4.1 Digitalisation of teaching and studies

The university recognises the need to further develop its teaching by integrating digital, virtual services in a target group-appropriate, didactically meaningful way. These should make the University's degree programmes more attractive and make it accessible to new target groups. At the same time, the University is also carefully watching more general developments with regard to integrating artificial intelligence (AI). The University in particular intends to update its examination system and examination culture to be more in keeping with the times. We will aim to identify updated examination formats capable of overcoming the challenges posed by the use of AI. The overall goal is to foster an effective and above all skills-oriented examination system, for which both lecturers and students take responsibility. We will also make available the ability to leave automated feedback for teaching.

The cross-cutting issue of digitalisation is a critical factor for teaching and studies and in developing an open, family-friendly university offering a good work-study-life balance. It enhances the appeal of our degree programmes and therefore also of Vechta as a place to study. The increasing heterogeneity of the student and staff bodies requires a coordinated, future-proof, university-wide teaching and learning concept that reflects the challenges created by work-study-life issues.

Key objectives

- to develop innovative forms of teaching and learning that meet the wide-ranging challenges posed by work-life balance issues
- to focus more strongly on developing the skills necessary for individual professions
- to modernise the examination system and examination culture, including tackling the challenges posed by the use of AI
- to develop a tailored, future-proof, university-wide teaching and learning concept.

4. Development priorities in teaching and studies

In view of the increasing heterogeneity of the student body and a wide variety of individual challenges (for both students and lecturers), the overarching goal is to more closely realign the degree programmes to our target groups. This will be achieved through innovations in the various teaching and learning settings. The foundation for this will be the flexibility offered by the in-person university, which provides the latitude needed to realise innovative and participatory forms of teaching and learning (temporal and spatial, digital and analogue). A think tank-like character will be created by the establishment of a stronger learning community among teaching staff. Increasing the level of skills acquired by students through supported self-study within the framework of self-learning offerings underpins developments in teaching and supports the development of individual professional understanding.



4.2 Course and degree programme development

The University is committed to continuously reviewing and further developing the range of degree programmes it offers. For the 2023/24 winter semester, the University offers four Bachelor's and seven Master's degree programmes. Our main focus is on social and human services and teacher training. A distinctive feature is our polyvalent two-subject Combined Studies Bachelor's degree (BACS). The BACS features 16 different subjects and can be taken as part of the teacher training programme or can be studied without the goal of becoming a teacher. Looking back over the last ten years (figure 2), the number of students has been declining since the summer semester of 2016. This is primarily accounted for by degree programmes with non-school career goals. Demand for degree options in which the focus is on teacher training has been steady or rising.

The University will therefore endeavour to evaluate the BACS model with the aim of making the polyvalent degree programme even more appealing to prospective students. This means analysing A-subject choices and common subject combinations, particularly for

students not pursuing the teacher training option, and exploring the possibility of offering defined course variants. This would involve defined subject combinations directed towards a common goal which provide students with the skills and qualifications required for a more specific non-teaching occupation. This will enable us to meet the desire, increasingly expressed by students during and following the recent crises, to work towards a defined profession. Teaching staff responsible for all modules and degree programmes are careful to ensure that teaching is continuously reviewed. Where necessary, they will also submit a concept for improving capacity utilisation. Building on the existing range of subjects and bearing in mind our profile focus areas, the University is aiming to expand the degree programmes. In view of the steady to increasing interest in dual-subject combinations in the BACS, which can also be part of a teacher training degree, the University plans to continue to strengthen its teacher training activities. For the 2024/2025 winter semester, we will therefore introduce a Values and Norms degree programme.

In response to the restructuring of teaching qualifications for general (i.e. non-vocational) level I and II secondary schools, the University of Vechta is, through the *Verbund zur Lehrkräftebildung* (teacher education alliance), participating in the development of a structural framework, including a proposal for accreditation of a new *Lehramt 4* teaching qualification (*Stufenlehramt*), which replaces the previous *Hauptschule, Realschule* and *Gymnasium* secondary school teaching qualifications.

The academic departments and faculties are responsible for the conceptual development of degree programmes. The structure of the process of developing degree programme concepts will be further developed and the process itself added to the process map (see section 5.4).

The University will also in future explore the possibility of making individual modules available to students from other universities. In such a scenario, responsibility for teaching, including quality assurance and development, remains with the relevant university, using the expertise it possesses.

Given that they are likely to end up working together in multi-professional teams, a closer look will be taken at options for more tightly intermeshing the teacher training and social work degree programmes through projects or *Profilierungsbereich* (cross-curricular) modules. The University will explore the idea of using service learning ('learning through engagement') and education for sustainable development offerings for this purpose. These offerings will also serve to enhance public perceptions of the University. Further networking of modules and degree programmes in areas where graduates already work closely together, such as social work and teaching, might also be worth pursuing at some point in the future.

In addition to participating in external tenders for developing teaching and/or teaching and learning facilities, the University also invests in internal continuous development project ideas. This objective will be a high future priority and will be complemented by an integrated improvement management system.

Key objectives

- to evaluate the polyvalent Combined Studies Bachelor's degree model and introduce designated programme variants
- greater networking with other universities – import and export of courses
- to boost employability by using module-associated project work to foster skills for working in multi-professional teams
- to promote sustainability skills within the degree programmes (see section 2.4).

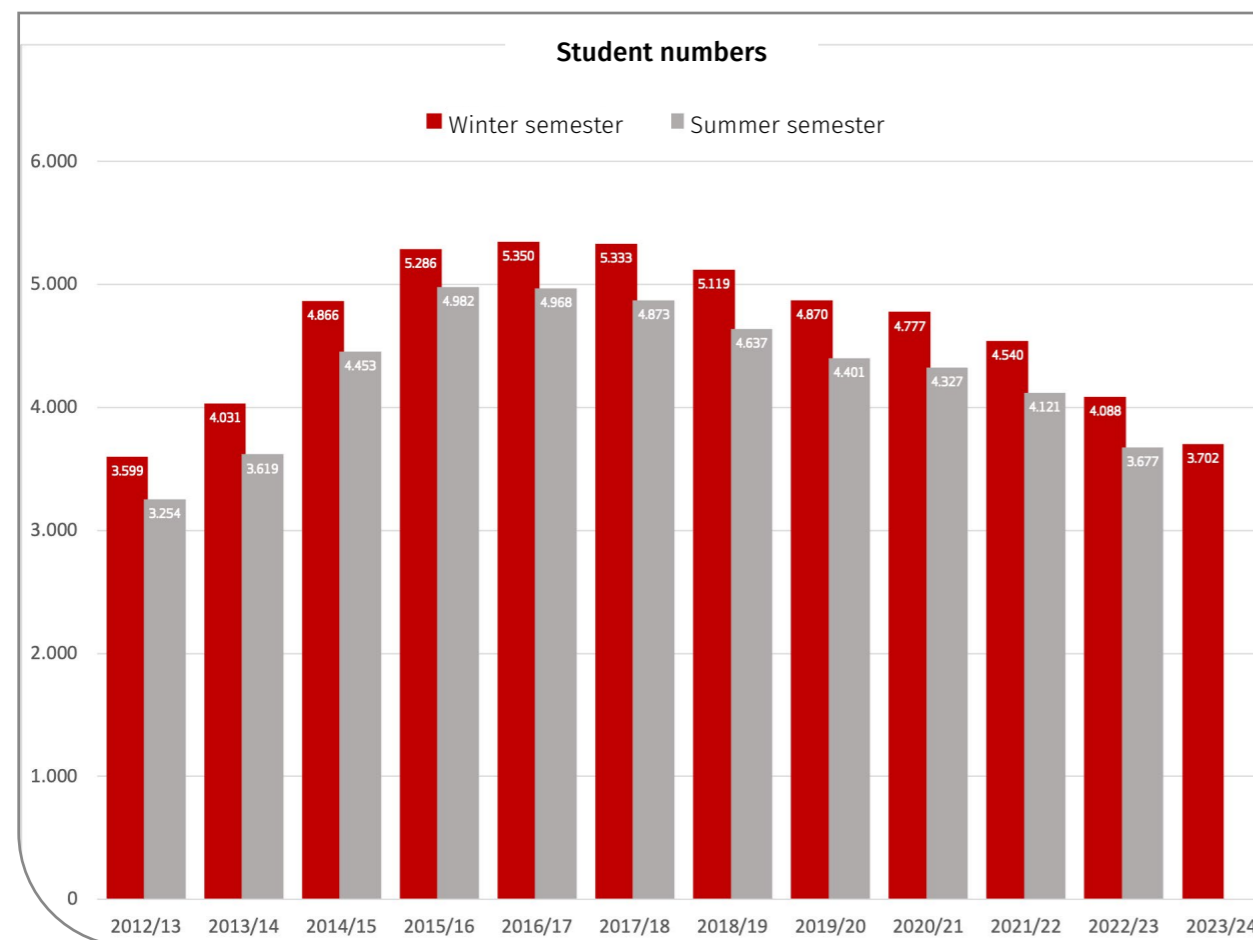


Figure 2: Evolution of student numbers

4.3 Internationalisation of teaching and studies

As a cross-cutting issue (see section 2.1), internationalisation should be more strongly structurally embedded in degree programme development and in future accreditations. As well as continuing with and promoting mobility windows, the University will in future aim to consistently offer students English-language courses. English-language courses serve three principle objectives:

1. To improve the English language skills of students enrolled at the University. Structural measures, such as the language course portfolio offered by the Language Centre, help to enable and encourage student language skills. Mobility windows enable students to take periods of study abroad without extending the standard period of study required to complete a degree programme. There are specific initiatives aimed at supporting teacher training students in this area (DAAD scholarships for teacher training students, internships at German schools abroad, etc.).

2. To make the University more appealing to international students as a place to study. In contrast to the general decline in student numbers, the level of interest from international students in studying in Vechta has for many years remained relatively constant, without the University having put any great effort into recruitment. For exchange students, who come to Vechta for a shorter period (usually one semester), we will aim to ensure that Vechta retains its appeal as a place to study through a permanent English-language course offering.

3. To initiate a transformation at the University so that intercultural exchanges, openness to the world, international experiences during teacher training and in developing a professional profile, and international exchanges and collaborations for developing student teaching and learning become everyday practice. Stronger support for students and lecturers in developing their foreign language skills (both in English and German) boosts open dialogue and positions the transformation and internationalisation of society as a linguistic opportunity. Appropriate support services (cross-curricular language modules and self-learning and online self-assessment offerings) can be used to increase the number of exchange students transitioning to regular degree programmes at the University, and to strengthen ties to and identification with the University. When establishing new degree programmes

(particularly Master's degree programmes), the University will also explore the possibility of an international track, with the aim of targeting our courses at a broader pool of potential students in English-speaking and other German-speaking countries. International partnerships between teaching staff and between researchers also ensure that the University has its finger on the pulse when it comes to teaching and degree programme innovations and is able to play an active role in shaping these innovations. Internationally-oriented projects will support this aim.

Key objectives

- to support students and lecturers in developing English language skills
- to make the University more appealing to exchange and international students as a place to study
- to initiate a transformation at the university which fosters intercultural exchanges, openness to the world and international experiences
- to expand the range of courses taught in English.

4.4 Widening access and work-study-life issues

To improve the student experience and in recognition of the increasing diversity of the student population, the University will continuously examine options for realising alternative routes to university admission. It will also provide prospective students with appropriate information and advice services. In particular, the University will seek to establish an in-house university entrance examination as an option for gaining admission to the University. As part of the process of implementing a standardised procedure for the recognition of skills acquired in non-higher education settings, the University will explore adding further occupations. This will be in addition to previous equivalence assessments for the regulated occupations 'IHK-WB Fachwirte im Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen' (specialists in health and social services) and 'Fachschulausbildung Erzieherin/Erzieher' (vocational training in a professional school for preschool teachers). The goal is to make it easier for people who have completed these training programmes to embark on a university degree programme. In future, this could also be combined with our university-based further education provision. In addition, in designing its accreditation processes, the University will in future endeavour to make the curricula more inclusive, so that students can tailor their timetables to their circumstances and individual needs. This will require programmes, especially Master's degree programmes, to offer more flexibility in terms of scheduling by offering part-time options, and by using online and blended learning. Lecturers will be incentivised to make programmes more

flexible and thus more in keeping with the needs of working students and students with family responsibilities. Nonetheless, the University is and will remain an in-person university. As well as promoting flexibility of scheduling and opportunities for studying elsewhere in Germany and abroad, the emphasis will remain on shared campus experiences, personal interactions and, above all, a strong networking culture. Students should feel part of the University and student cohort not just as a result of course content and subject-related factors, such as collaborative work and examinations, but also socially. Long term, the University will also aim to restructure the initial student induction phase. This will be modelled on the induction phase for the social work degree programme.

Key objectives

- to expand the pool of prospective students by recognising skills acquired in non-higher education settings
- to increase flexibility and mobility through the use of part-time options, and of online and blended learning
- a University-wide restructuring of the initial student induction phase.



4.5 Health promotion and student health management

The University will seek to use insights from the consequences of the Covid pandemic to redesign its teaching and studies to be more conducive to good health. Led by the ViBeS and Zwischen:Räume projects, the focus will be on shaping self-study, the acquisition of skills by students (and lecturers), and further synergies between organisational units at the University. Health promotion therefore needs to be designed with an eye to individual course profiles and the overall degree programme. Health promotion also serves the purpose of developing a robust professional understanding and encouraging social responsibility through the dissemination of health promotion knowledge. Health promotion efforts are therefore focused in three areas:

1. Infrastructure: The physical and virtual spatial design of the campus is designed around fulfilling health promotion and accessible design requirements, and around increasingly flexible furnishing and zoning of teaching and learning spaces to enable flexible working and learning while sitting, standing or walking. We will ensure that rooms offer flexibility of use by moving away from the predominantly frontal orientation of rooms towards a variety of teaching and learning settings that focus on group and project-based learning.

2. Media: This involves using information on exercise, nutrition, mental health and social contact developed for media, workshops or other self-learning formats to raise University members' awareness of health promotion-related issues. These services help both students and staff improve their skills and promote an individual health development and maintenance process.

3. Methodological: This draws on developments across the above two levels and focuses on health promotion in teaching and self-study through innovative development of existing inclusive and innovative forms of teaching and learning in the virtual, blended and physical worlds. In addition to formal learning opportunities, implementing these innovations promotes social interaction, and therefore a mutual sense of responsibility for the teaching and learning process, and promotes student self-efficacy.

Student health management will also be closely intermeshed with occupational health management (see section 5.1). The aim is to implement a university health management system, which facilitates health-

conscious studying and working at the University and supports all University members in acquiring health literacy and health resilience.

Key objectives

- to support students and lecturers in acquiring health promotion skills
- to promote a self-image of professionalism and the dissemination of health promotion in the labour market and society
- innovative space design (virtual and in person)
- informal learning opportunities to boost student self-efficacy and foster social interaction, thereby strengthening ties to the University.

4.6 Supporting students through scholarships

The University undertakes to support academically outstanding students and students who display significant social engagement, and to facilitate applications to one of the numerous *Begabtenförderungswerke* (funding organisations for talented students and researchers), providing them with additional financial and non-financial support for their academic education. Interested students will be put in touch with university contacts or lecturers responsible for liaising with the relevant organisations, who will advise them on their application. In addition to financial support, the *Deutschlandstipendium*, *OM-Stipendium* and *Landesstipendium* scholarships also offer useful regional networking opportunities. The selection process for these scholarships is dealt with by the university. Contact with sponsors and with volunteer organisations at which students volunteer helps foster knowledge transfer to the region. This networking will become more important in future in the context of helping to ensure the availability of skilled workers.

Key objectives

- to support high-performing students
- to improve advice and support for students when applying to *Begabtenförderungswerke*
- to strengthen scholarships with more regional roots.

4.7 Academic continuing education

The University's continuing education provision leans heavily on the degree programmes and subject specialisations at the University, is aimed at meeting labour market demands and is open to interested professionals from across the region. The realigned, process-oriented structure of this offering is currently focused in particular on social affairs/social and human services professions.

Prospective students from a range of occupations will in future be able to choose academic continuing education courses from a modular system. This offers students taking academic continuing education courses the opportunity to pass individual modules, for which they will be awarded certificates and microcredentials, enabling them to access or re-access undergraduate courses. A compact, flexible programme of this nature is particularly important for people with professional qualifications, not traditionally targeted by universities, as it enables them to combine work and academic continuing education. In addition to the significant need to adapt to the needs of people attending uni-

versity-based academic continuing education courses, the University aims to maintain in-person contact and consciously utilise its in-person offerings to promote networking and encourage professional dialogue. For this target group too, we aim to make the campus an attractive place for teaching and learning. The integration of research into teaching is equally important in academic continuing education, and courses will be designed to be research-oriented.

Key objectives

- demand-led course development for the region
- modular academic continuing education courses with the possibility of certification or admission to an undergraduate degree (Widening university access).



5. Development priorities for the organisation

The development priorities for the organisation of the University are shaped by changing requirements, in particular resulting from the significant changes we have seen since 2020. These upheavals have highlighted the need to make the University more resilient, particularly in periods of crisis, in the sense of ensuring that it remains in a position to take effective action.

University organisation is shaped by some specific conditions. For this reason, it is important that the academic and professional services sides of the University have a shared understanding of normative goals and a constructive working relationship built on mutual appreciation and respect. Comprehensive information on the University's objectives, on developments in the academic and professional services domains and on resolutions passed by committees in this area (academic self-governance) will be made available rapidly, with the aim of ensuring the active participation of organisational units and staff. Staff expertise is valued and is continuously incorporated into the University's policy-making and decision-making processes. Decisions and results are fed back to staff.

As a learning organisation, the University tackles, and actively supports and shapes existing and future social requirements. In this context, developments in the professional services domain are geared towards the idea that it should be a quality-oriented service organisation which exists to support the core and cross-cutting missions of the University. Work will continue on improving governance and infrastructure in the personnel, finance and controlling, infrastructure, quality development, process management and communication spheres. Governance and infrastructure play an importance role organisationally. In addition, organisational development in the years covered by this University Development Plan will be complemented by a strategy and structure process.

5.1 Personnel

In view of the increasing competition for outstanding academic staff between universities and a further exacerbation in the shortage of skilled technical and administrative staff, ensuring that applicants and employees view the University as an attractive employer is a key objective. As well as personnel planning and recruitment, staff retention is equally crucial. In addition, in a globalised, international world, the demands, both specialist and more generic, placed on staff are constantly changing and highly dynamic. Where this development is particularly tangible is in the progressive digitalisation of society, work, ways of working and work processes. These change processes also modify the requirements placed on managers at all levels.

These challenges increase the need for strategic personnel development which takes into account the competencies and skills of university staff, their individual development needs, and generational changes in labour market conditions. The University will focus on the following strategic objectives:

The University needs to update and further develop the staff development framework, including guidelines, goals and fields of action, for all types of staff. In doing so, the focus will be on recruitment ('active recruiting'), staff retention and succession planning. The University will also aim to foster the English language skills of technical and administrative staff.

The University's appeal as an employer will be showcased both internally and externally by developing an employer brand/individual employer image. This will involve expressly highlighting the attractive nature of the work and the good working conditions.

Academic and professional services managers are key figures for realising successful staff development. We will therefore further expand our management development programme, and add in any new required or identified elements (e.g. remote management, managing hybrid teams).

We will develop formats and structures through which staff can contribute their ideas for improving and developing the University, and help shape the University. In this respect, staff development contributes to improving the communication culture and, by promoting good teamworking and a feedback culture, helps to make the University a place of open dialogue.

The University's future success will not be solely dependent on attracting and retaining skilled staff. Equally crucial will be providing staff with conditions that promote and help maintain health, promoting health literacy and health resilience, and promoting mental and social well-being. Consequently, the University will consolidate and undertake continuous development of existing occupational health-based behavioural and environmental preventive measures for staff to create a university health management system (in particular by intermeshing with the student health management system, see section 4.5).

Key objectives

- to further develop the staff development framework
- to develop an employer brand
- to expand the academic and professional services management development programme
- to promote open dialogue and a feedback culture
- to create conditions that promote and help maintain health.

5.2 Finance and controlling

Under the existing decision and dialogue-oriented management system, general financial management, preparatory work prior to decision-making, measuring effectiveness and risk management are activities across organisational units.

Organisational changes already undertaken in the Finance Division provide a good foundation for improving governance. In addition, to improve the governance structure, the University has set out transparent, university-wide regulations on personnel and material resource deployment. This is an important prerequisite and preparatory measure for a successful strategy and structure process (see section 5.6).

The University will increase its efforts to develop its management model to create a single coherent system. To this end, personnel and financial controlling, including academic controlling, will be systematically linked, and there will be a targeted expansion of the reporting system. A comprehensive monitoring system will provide demand-led access to management-relevant financial and non-financial performance metrics, including sustainability, equality and diversity metrics, across all areas of University activity. This will create a uniform pool of quantitative and qualitative information. External reporting will be aligned with internal management requirements. This creates a foundation for further development of a transparent, systematic communication structure between University and organisational/faculty units, with the aim of using common processes to develop coordinated strategies for action. This is particularly necessary in view of the strategy and structure process for decentralising personnel and financial planning.

The University will implement a risk analysis and risk assessment-based early risk detection system. Financial controlling will take the lead role in the process of setting up the early risk detection system. An inter-organisational working group will in future use a metric-supported traffic light system to regularly analyse potential key risks (risk catalogue), and report to and recommend countermeasures to the University Executive Board. The early risk detection system will also be linked to the internal audit.

A gender budgeting concept will be developed. It will then be piloted and subsequently reviewed with the aim of realising a phased expansion of the scope of gender budgeting. Gender equality will be explicitly considered in financial policy decisions and the budgetary system

and will be viewed as a measure of quality. Specific data will be analysed for equality monitoring purposes (see section 2.3).

Key objectives

- to develop the management model and reporting system into a single coherent system
- to set up and implement an early risk detection system
- to develop and pilot a gender budgeting concept.

5.3 Infrastructure

We continue to develop our building and information technology infrastructure, taking into account experience gained from the coronavirus pandemic and the energy crisis. In accordance with legislation (e.g. the Online Access Act, the Energy Efficiency Act), and with the aim of realising sustainable, resource-efficient operation, the University is positioning itself to be resilient and future-proof. Strategic development of University infrastructure is focused on the following areas:

With respect to properties, the University is aiming to centre university operations on the campus and gradually divest itself of rentals. Utilisation of existing areas and creation of new areas requires consideration of



accessibility and sustainability, and the development of cutting-edge office concepts, which take into account health promotion needs, changing workplace models and remote working. The University will also aim to make the campus more attractive and a more appealing place to spend time for students and employees. A key feature of the design of the campus is the creation of spaces that facilitate encounters for everyone; places where, outside of any formal framework, they can enter into creative discussions, can experiment and can generate ideas. There is a particular focus on modern teaching and learning spaces (see section 4), and on student workplaces. With respect to the cross-cutting issue of sustainability (see section 2.4), the University will further exploit available energy saving potential, accelerate energy-efficiency improvements (structural and technical) and establish an energy management

system. We will also increase the area of installed photovoltaic systems and in-house electricity generation.

Organisational digitalisation is a necessary foundation for a resilient university and is the engine of organisational development. Due to the vulnerability of system-related functions, however, it also requires a high level of protection (IT security). Artificial intelligence (AI) represents a new dimension, giving rise to both opportunities and risks. To enable the effective and purposeful use of AI, the university will therefore develop a concept for AI use in professional services and as an element of organisational development.

We will develop the range of IT services provided to meet demand and will further push forward the necessary digitalisation of administrative processes. IT security will be a further focus. The objective is a secure, efficient, high availability IT infrastructure that is able to adapt to new functionality, performance and security challenges as they arise (see section 2.2).

Key objectives

- to create an attractive campus which is a pleasant place to spend time
- to expand energy-saving and environmental protection activities
- to develop a specific concept for AI use
- demand-led IT services, in particular digitalisation of administrative processes, with a greater focus on IT security.

5.4 Quality development and process management

Quality development concerns the University as an overall system and is therefore geared towards the full range of fundamental processes. It covers all organisational units and all staff and student groups (*Statusgruppen*). Within this framework, quality management is viewed as an ongoing process which enables the University to react flexibly to different requirements and is based on the premise of a system geared towards durability. Quality development will in future be managed using an integrated quality management system. Integrated quality management will be linked to risk management. In addition, as part of the quality development programme, the University will develop an advice, improvement, complaint and conflict management system, which will likewise be geared towards the University as an overall system. We will ensure quality development in teaching and degree programmes through a process of continuous feedback from the labour market and from our in-house alumni management.

For all fundamental processes (management, core and support processes), the responsible organisational units will be involved in making agreements which lead into a comprehensive digital process map that establishes a direct link to the organisational chart and its division of responsibilities.

In addition, we will set up a crisis management system which encompasses crisis prevention and crisis management methods and instruments, and defines system-critical infrastructure. Crisis management will be closely interlinked with risk management.

Key objectives

- to develop an integrated quality management system
- to set up an advice, improvement, complaint and conflict management system
- to develop a comprehensive digital process map
- to set up a crisis management system.

5.5 Communication

With the advent of flexible working arrangements and teaching-learning settings – spatial and temporal, analogue and digital – there is a need to establish information channels that guarantee target-group-appropriate communication between university members. Across all activities and processes, communication should always be viewed as a cross-cutting task and strategic tool for encouraging the participation, support, acceptance and identification of all university members, and for supporting changes through an open and respectful communication culture.

Key objective

- to evaluate and develop existing information channels.

5.6 Strategy and structure process

The strategy and structure process now underway has the objective of more tightly defining processes and coordination between central University and faculty/organisational unit functions.

The overarching governance process will further develop organisational structures and processes, taking into account the size of the University. The aim is to identify cross-cutting topics within the University and, using appropriate mechanisms and by coordinating internal University stakeholders, to tackle these topics together. The design of management and administrative structures is underpinned by the principle of responsible action.

The objective of the strategy and structure process for the faculties is to develop and reinforce their understanding of their mission, thereby promoting autonomy, and to boost the faculties' scope for action by further decentralising decision-making. For this purpose, the University Executive Board will agree a separate strategy and structure plan with each faculty.

In preparation for the overall strategy and structure process and as part of our personnel and finance activities, a decision was taken to reshape personnel and material resource deployment. The aim is to create permanent staffing and equipment levels that increase latitude and certainty in planning and decision-making. Additional personnel and finance measures will be implemented in conjunction with the faculties and professional services. These include reconfigu-

ring our budgeting, changing how we manage financial flows and medium-term financial planning, and revamping our capacity planning.

The strategy and structure process is the start point for a participatory process to develop a mission statement. Discourse on organisational identity, philosophy and values triggered by the University Development Plan will be used to advance this goal. The mission statement is intended to serve as a normative reference framework for the strategic development of the university, and to clarify the University's profile and role within the German and international higher education landscape. The objective is to use a vision statement to arrive at a self-image that can be used for further strategic reflections. This will be supplemented by a mission statement that sets out ways and means of implementing this vision and establishes a compass for action.

Key objectives

- to further develop the organisational relationship between the faculties and the University
- to reshape budgeting, financial flows, and financial and capacity planning
- to develop a mission statement.

