

FORUM

The background of the cover features a close-up photograph of several hands holding and fitting together large wooden puzzle pieces in various colors: orange, white, green, and red. The hands are positioned around the puzzle pieces, suggesting a collaborative effort.

MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education

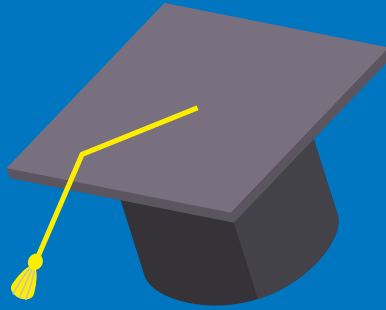
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

LOOK SMALL, THINK BIG 09

IN CONVERSATION WITH SIMON MARGINSON 14

USING STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURS TO
BUILD STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS 21

U4 NETWORK: INSTITUTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TRUST 33

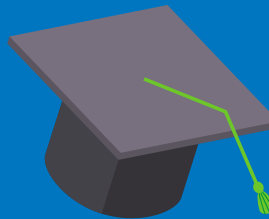
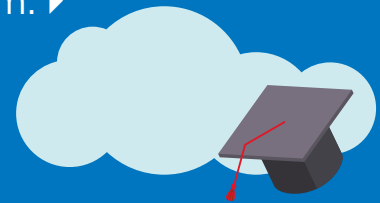
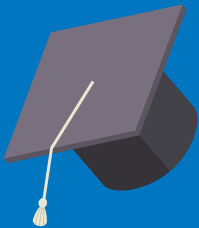


U4 NETWORK

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TRUST



The U4 network is an inspiring strategic partnership between Ghent University (BE), the University of Göttingen (DE), the University of Groningen (NL), and Uppsala University (SE). These four European universities, comparable both in profile and size, are living proof that strategic partnerships can add a lot of value to the institutions that embark upon them. ▶



Founded in 2008, the U4 network consists of four comprehensive European universities with similar profiles and of similar size, namely Ghent University, University of Groningen, University of Göttingen, and Uppsala University. All universities have an international reputation of excellence and share a history of cooperation, which is culminating in the U4 partnership. The latter has turned into one of the universities' most important strategic partnerships.

The added value of the U4 network is based on the mutual commitment of the partner universities to form a platform for cooperation, with the aim of capitalising upon the partners' complementary strengths and pooling resources. The U4 network is hence more solidly anchored in governance and policy on the institutional level.

The first aim of the partnership is to build a framework for joint cooperation initiatives in the field of education, research and institutional management, and to build a platform enabling it to act as preferential partners in international projects and contexts to strengthen the international position and visibility of the individual partner institutions.

CONSIDERABLE COMMITMENT

The U4 network is a durable, long-term and cross-project cooperation on an institutional level. This is particularly valuable in light of the fast-changing global and European higher education context, characterised by an ever growing quantity of short-term and/or project oriented bilateral agreements. It aims to:

- broaden the education offer by pooling resources and enhancing the students' international experience;
- strengthen the research output through cooperation and joint projects;

- share knowledge and pool resources with regard to university management.

Cooperation within the network is divided into four academic clusters: Humanities, Medicine & Pharmacy, Science & Technology, and Social Sciences, Economics & Law, with a fifth cluster for Institutional Management.

This fifth cluster is considered unique amongst strategic partnerships and has led to the excellence the U4 network demonstrates on an international level. It consists of a series of projects focusing on the optimisation of the collaboration within the entire network. Showcase projects are the Peer Review Sessions and the Leadership Programme.

GROWTH THROUGH PEER REVIEW

Peer review sessions are held annually and focus on one specific topic relevant to the partnership. Each session seeks to improve the internal processes of each partner institution as well as the intensity and depth of the cooperation. Rather than setting a formal benchmark in order to achieve a certain level of performance, the act of peer reviewing should especially signal new approaches and new opportunities. Each partner alternately takes the lead in preparing and hosting themes such as 'Finance and Allocation Models', 'HR and Gender Policies', 'Research Infrastructures' or 'Governance Models'.

The activity of peer reviewing is a valuable tool for assessing each other's specific strengths and challenges. A prerequisite is that all partners of the U4 network provide the necessary information on the given topic to all partners. This form of peer assessment increases awareness of problematic areas and also highlights strategies with a high impact on the network. The ideas that have been taken on board are used to improve

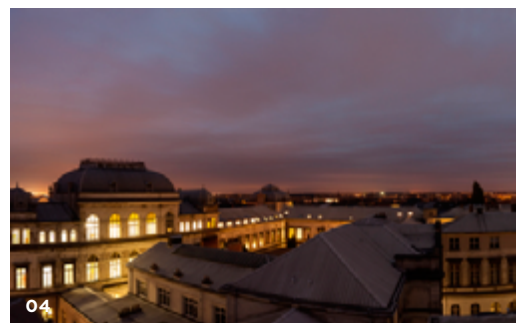


01



02

Photo: Frank Stefan Kimmel



04



Photo: Mikhail Markovskiy (shutterstock)



Photo: gary718 (shutterstock)



Photo: Marcel Derweduwan (shutterstock)

- 01 University of Groningen
- 02 Assembly Hall of the University of Göttingen
- 03 Uppsala University
- 04 Ghent University

the current structure and impact of the framework. Therefore, the focus of the peer review session is on policy processes and activity profiles rather than on output performance and boasting figures.

Rectors of the four partner universities govern the U4 network; they meet at least once a year to discuss milestones and advances within the framework. In addition, an increasing number of administrators from all four partners have received profound training in international study programme management and international perspectives on teaching and learning. The training takes place within the framework of the Institutional Management cluster, in the form of joint workshops, staff trainings and staff exchanges. In addition, the leadership programme also focuses on top-level executives within the university and their training is also aimed at increased involvement in the network and further internationalisation of the universities.

Resulting from revised leadership and management, the network continuously improved in different aspects. For example, research facilities and online resources can be shared between the universities, leading to an accumulation of shared knowledge. In this way, governance, management of complex infrastructures and research opportunities and processes between the partners are improved, and further academic profiling can be achieved in the form of publications and joint research programmes.

MULTIPLE GOALS

Another main objective of the network is to join forces when it comes to supporting young researchers. The network organises various interdisciplinary summer and winter schools, such as the school on Antiquity, which took place for the sixth time this year. During the last six years,

the series of summer schools developed a large community of researchers and PhD students from interdisciplinary fields around the topic of antiquity. The framework and increased exchange between researchers and students have ultimately led to jointly supervised PhD students.

To facilitate joint supervisions, the U4 network has developed a framework agreement for joint PhD supervision (*co-tutelle*) and provides funding for (prospective) jointly supervised PhD students. To further support the development of joint programmes, the U4 network provides workshops for interested researchers and funding for preparatory missions. This way, the network manages to include students at an early stage and provides them with the opportunity to establish themselves within an international, excellence network.

The inter-university peer review and continuous training of staff and top-level executives is only possible because of the remarkable level of trust that has been developed between all four partner universities over the last years. The openness and transparency that is necessary to perform these projects is most likely unique. In each of its existing years, the cooperation within the network has continuously increased. By joining in each other's networks and setting up new joint international projects, the reputation and international visibility of all four partners has increased dramatically.

The close connection on all levels that has been developed over the last years – resulting in efficient and non-bureaucratic communication – increasingly facilitates the development of academic research partnerships and creates a university network that transforms the individual universities into one extended campus.

— UWE MUUS, MARCO LANGE & AVRIL VON HOYNINGEN-HUENE