



Raising Global Awareness

International Strategy of the University of Tübingen

Summary

A research-intensive university of global standing such as the University of Tübingen must regularly review and further develop its internationalization strategy. This paper presents the results of such a process and presents goals and priorities for the next five years against the background of past strategies and developments. In general, it is important to more closely link our international activities with the idea of responsible research and teaching. We express this with the term “global awareness”, i.e. including consideration of the global dimension in everything we do, because the major challenges facing society - and the University as part of it - in the coming years are global in scope. This guiding idea therefore underlies the strategic orientation of research and teaching at the University of Tübingen.

Previous overarching goals - such as promoting internationally visible research and teaching and securing our place among the top 100 universities in the world - are still important and remain linked with this focus. The long-term goal is to sustainably establish Tübingen as a globally active research university with internationally competitive study programs, thus maintaining the best possible conditions for research and teaching at the university. This includes an orientation towards the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals well as promoting the internationality and diversity of Tübingen as a location.

The measures set to be our top priorities in the area of international affairs over the next five years are detailed below. These are:

1. Align recruitment with internationality and diversity
2. Reaffirm and develop strategic partnerships
3. Expand new forms of digitally enhanced mobility
4. Promote the formation of a transnational campus with international teaching content
5. Continue with the internationalization of administration.

Introduction

Tübingen has always been a cosmopolitan university with many strong international partnerships and world-renowned researchers. More recently, the reforms and strategies formulated since the introduction of the Excellence Initiative have provided key impetus to sustainably position the University in the world class. This brings advantages, such as close cooperation with other world-class institutions, but also challenges, such as international competition for the best minds in academia. In order to hold its place here, the University has sought advice from international experts and has created new structures at all levels, which can be described as **mainstreaming internationality**: New degree programs have been increasingly designed in English; new hires have been increasingly international; permanent institutions to support them established a more

confident and competent welcoming culture; the central administration and Deans' Offices were adapted to reflect the University's international view of itself and ongoing internationalization as a dimension of everyone's tasks.

We see our renewed success in the nationwide Excellence Strategy 2019 as a further confirmation of our activities and seek to further **intensify this internationality in the next phase, linking it even more closely to our mission of responsible research**. The idea of global awareness and the guiding principle of a 'global scope of action' mentioned in the Excellence Strategy are reflected in a new orientation across three dimensions:

1. Targeted research in international collaborations focusing on global challenges, oriented towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example vaccine development, geoscientific and environmental research and plant biology, but also focusing on globally key technologies such as artificial intelligence (a set part of the University's research priorities);
2. The consistent engagement of all disciplines with the global dimension of their respective fields -- both in research and in teaching -- for example with regard to climate change, migration society, transculturality and digital transformations, including openness to interdisciplinary collaboration (promoted for example via the Global Encounters platform);
3. Particular support for critical and interdisciplinary reflection on the diverse effects of globalization, especially among students (supported for example by Global Awareness Education, an interdisciplinary service).

The cultivation of this attitude across the University is reflected in the priorities we set in promoting mobility and research collaboration. Tübingen has had strong bilateral partnerships across Europe and in North America for decades, but also maintains ties with South Africa, South America, Australia and New Zealand. In the last ten years, some long-standing partnerships in Asia have been expanded into strategic partnerships, including our three branch offices in Kyoto, Beijing and Seoul. There has also been a focus on expanding multilateral network partnerships, starting with the Matariki network. In the future, we will remain strong in these areas while dedicating ourselves to a careful but determined **strengthening of our partnerships in Africa and the Middle East**. We already have a strong medical research center in central Africa (Lambaréné/Gabon), well-established partnerships in South Africa in the humanities, and productive relationships in the Middle East. Based on these foundations, and **working with our European partners** in The Guild network and the CIVIS university alliance, we seek to reinforce sustainable cooperation and lively exchange in this part of the world which is so important for Europe -- in order to work together on the major questions and challenges of our time. In the formation of these strategic networks, as in all international collaborations, the principles of equal partnership, responsible research and academic freedom should be our guide .

The University's international activities in research and teaching bring the world to Tübingen and send Tübingen people out into the world. **Connecting the local with the global** is therefore the core of our international strategy. The University should think and act globally and at the same time be a cosmopolitan and international community at home. This means that exchange and interaction with researchers and students from other countries are not reserved for a privileged few, but are a matter of course for everyone. We want to give all Tübingen students the chance to participate in international courses and to feel part of a European community. Our involvement in **CIVIS - A European Civic University Alliance**, the higher education alliance under the EU's European Universities Initiative, will be an important motivator of this. In addition, our **Global Awareness Education** program offers students the opportunity to learn about the connections between the global and the local, both culturally and environmentally, in a way that has solid theoretical and academic foundations.

Internationality and diversity go hand-in-hand in Tübingen. Guests, students and staff from other countries contribute to the diversity of the University community, just as the diverse origins of the local students and staff are an expression of Tübingen's internationality. Students and academic staff who are the first in their families to go to university enrich this community with their experience. Similarly, for students and employees living with disabilities, enabling them to access and participate in the University is not just a matter of equity. By putting internationality and diversity on the same plane, the University not only acknowledges the **intrinsic value of cultural and social diversity on campus** -- and therefore does not tolerate discrimination, racism, or sexism of any kind -- it also sets itself the goal of promoting diversity and giving a voice to historically marginalized groups. Socio-economic, cultural and religious diversity opens up the University, makes it self-reflective and self-critical and its members capable of dialogue from different points of view. By imparting such skills not only in teaching, but also by exemplifying them, the University seeks to position itself at the heart of our society shaped by migration, to reflect its diversity, and to have an impact on it.

Despite the noticeable increase in internationality in Tübingen, recent years have also seen an increase in the difficulties of international exchange. Around us, forces are gaining strength that want to advance their own country 'first' - and to that end do not hesitate to abuse structures within academia that are designed to promote openness and circulation. In the spirit of responsible scholarship, the University of Tübingen continues to stand **uncompromisingly for academic freedom and adherence to academic standards**, will always confidently demonstrate this stance to both international partners and local stakeholders, and will require it of our cooperation partners in teaching and research. The same rules apply to all students and researchers on our campus, no matter where they come from and no matter how long or short their stay. All have the same obligations to uphold good academic practice, just as all enjoy the same right to freedom in research and teaching.

The restriction on freedom of movement that was suddenly imposed on us in the global pandemic in 2020 was a major challenge for international exchange, but it also showed us how much internationality is possible without mobility. The new experiences and insights from this time should be profitably developed for the University. We are aware that the pandemic will bring about longer-term changes in international action, some of which are welcome. We will respond strategically to future developments by continuing to promote physical exchanges -- and increasingly combine them with new forms of electronic collaboration. The pandemic has vividly demonstrated to us how important global exchange is for research and teaching. It has therefore not discouraged us, but has strengthened our resolve to continue to act globally -- even, and especially, where it will not be easy in the future. The University's mission in these times is to be a model of this global awareness, combining it with responsibility towards future generations, and thereby passing it on to our academic community.

With this in mind, the President's Office sets the following priorities for the years 2021-2026:

1. Active recruitment at all levels

We are seeking to increase the number of researchers, teaching staff and students from abroad, as well as immigrants and the children of immigrants, on the Tübingen campus. This means the targeted recruitment of top researchers from both Germany and abroad, especially in the areas of major global challenges; these people will bring with them their valuable perspectives and networks. We want our University and our region to remain open to connections in the world's most important research fields, which is why we not only want to be attractive to the best minds, but also be able to retain them in the long term. This also applies to students. The University is a driver of migration and integration. Whoever comes here should not feel like a 'foreign body' --

they should feel valued and welcome. New colleagues and students from abroad, as well as all those who are the first in their family to attend a university, should experience Tübingen as a stimulating, diverse research and learning environment with good opportunities for cooperation, and a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

In recent years, Tübingen has been in the top 4 in Germany for the proportion of employees with foreign nationality, and in the top 7 for professors (DAAD professorship data 2019). This standing resulted from an increasing trend in the years prior to that. In the period 2009-2013, an average of just under 9% of newly appointed professors were not German nationals; in the period 2015-2019, this figure had increased to 15% (internal annual reports 2013, 2019). The proportion of W-class tenured professors overall with a non-German passport has also been roughly in this range since 2015 (W3: 14%, W1: 14-19%). An increase in this area in the coming years is difficult to measure statistically, as professors often become naturalized citizens, so the category of appointments from abroad - with or without German citizenship - seems to be the appropriate benchmark, since it is less about passports than about the fact that new appointees bring international networking and energy to the University. In this category, however, we are seeing a decline: from 2009-2013, an average of just under 17% of new appointees came to Tübingen directly from abroad; from 2015-2019, the figure was below 14%, as, in the comparison, many more people with foreign passports were appointed from within Germany. However, the numbers show that it will be possible to get to an average of 20% appointments from abroad and/or foreign nationals in 2021-26, increasing the share of all international professorial appointees by a few percentage points to 18% by 2026. And although there are no statistics for this yet, as part of the diversity strategy, special attention will be paid to the recruitment of academics living in Germany who are immigrants or the children of immigrants. An improvement of the processes in appointment procedures will be implemented to achieve these goals.

Degree-seeking international students currently make up about 15% of our Master's students and about 18% of our PhD students (more if you leave out the many external PhD students who are not enrolled). However, the percentage of graduates with foreign passports has hardly increased since 2009. Expanding this potential for research in Tübingen will be supported by improved marketing of our English-language Master's programs. With the 34 programs that can currently be studied without any knowledge of German, we are already among the top 3 universities in Germany in terms of programs offered. The task now is to recruit the best students worldwide to attend them. And over the next five years, the departments offering these programs will develop indicators of their success and take stock in 2026 to plan further strategic steps based on the data.

The successful recruitment of international researchers, teachers and students, whether as guests (e.g. Teach@Tübingen) or as new colleagues, will be supported by improved orientation and communication of information, starting with the first visit to the website and continuing after arrival in Tübingen (see below, 5. Support for international affairs).

2. Intensified partnerships and mobility

The political and social conditions for international cooperation and shared experience have changed in recent years, especially as a result of the pandemic, in ways that will continue to shape the coming years. Mobility flows are being redirected; planning has become difficult. However, the University remains committed to student and researcher mobility for acquiring international skills. Now especially, it is important to reaffirm our good relations with our international partners and, where necessary, to develop new solutions for exchange and for stepping up communication. Even if physical mobility has become more difficult than in the past, it remains an important tool, for example in initiating collaboration and for research and study visits.

In these uncertain times, strategic partnerships are of particular importance. In recent years, Tübingen has developed them more with regard to research; now it is time to apply the concept to student exchanges. The broad and diverse range of exchange places should continue to be offered; at the same time, partnerships need to be regularly evaluated and the list of partnerships readjusted. Since the long-term consequences of the pandemic are still difficult to assess, precise figures and targets are risky at this point. What is clear is that the pre-pandemic numbers could have been higher. All levels (state, DAAD, Erasmus) regularly call for a much higher mobility target -- up to 50% of all students, which seems unrealistic. But it is also clear that the way we count mobilities will change, because physical and online mobility will increasingly be combined. That's why, over the next five years, we need to keep a close eye on developments, analyze them regularly and propose strategic goals for the time after that.

Within the framework of CIVIS, we have in any case committed ourselves to increasing physical and virtual mobility in the coming years. Here, all partners are taking multiple measures to boost physical mobility - including the establishment of Erasmus modules (30 ECTS in English), automatic recognition of credits at CIVIS partner universities, and embedding mobility into degree programs. Short-term student mobility may also be an appropriate way to cultivate partnerships, to offer students a variety of opportunities, and to promote our international degree programs.

New partnerships in Africa and the Middle East are to be established in a targeted manner, for research and early-career researchers, but also for students. Excellence funds may be used to provide scholarships for the recruitment of particularly talented research students from ACP countries. By 2026, we aim to have developed a partnership in Africa to strategic partnership status.

The development of institutional partnerships may build on research collaborations and networks of researchers; the international recruiting successes of today may prepare the ground for the strategic partnerships of tomorrow. The University can centrally promote such bottom-up partnerships if they involve more than one department and are designed for the long term. Here, the research division can provide advisory support. Researchers and administration should also maintain close contact with each other regarding how to navigate partnerships in 'difficult states' (see below, 5. Support for international affairs: round tables).

3. More digitization for teaching and administration

The guiding principle of global awareness includes reflecting on one's own travel behavior. Even before the 2020 pandemic, it had become clear that the need for air travel to maintain international relations needed to be reconsidered for environmental reasons. Now, videoconferencing for shorter and more frequent meetings with international partners has proven to be extremely effective and will be maintained. This requires appropriate expertise, software licenses, and technical infrastructure in the IT area. Therefore, the University undertakes to develop and use digital and human capacities for holding high-quality video conferences. These will be useful for working meetings as well as for international academic conferences.

For students, online learning in collaboration with international partners will become increasingly important. Such formats internationalize on-campus teaching and enable direct discourse between students in different countries and on different continents. To this end, the acquisition and use of digital tools -- such as simultaneous translation of chat content and lecture subtitles -- will be expanded, as will the promotion of new didactic models through training opportunities and exchange among teachers. Through its participation in the European University Alliance CIVIS, Tübingen has the opportunity to lead the way here. But also our other network partners

(especially Matariki) as well as the faculties' own international contacts are suitable for such collaborative formats.

Last but not least, the ambitious mobility goals of the CIVIS Alliance will make digitalization of student administration, including mobility, essential. Since the 2020/21 winter semester, applications from abroad have been completely paperless. The University plans to optimize and digitize all other administrative processes to ease the burden on administrative staff as well as students. The innovations brought about by the pandemic, such as off-campus enrollment, may prove to be a great support for virtual mobility.

Virtual mobility has the great advantage of expanding access to international teaching and learning experiences, and we want to take advantage of this. However, the increase in digital teaching opportunities from partner universities should not lead to a decrease in physical mobility. Instead, the two forms should complement each other, for example in blended mobility formats or with virtual preparation programs for exchange students.

4. Transnationality of the local space and of teaching

The University sees itself fundamentally as a cosmopolitan, diverse community. This means that we cultivate a culture of internationality, which is also reflected in our multilingual interactions. The 'internationals' in Tübingen play a significant role in forming the character of the University and the identity of the town. Their presence makes it possible to experience Tübingen as a transnational place of knowledge; through them, interculturally competent global citizens can be trained right here on campus. Whether people come to us from our own region or from abroad, whether they are Germans with a foreign background via their parents or not - all contribute to a stimulating, innovative environment for all with their knowledge and approaches drawn from different life and work experiences. All members of the University sensitize each other to this diversity, but also to the advantages of quotidian encounters with what may be different or unfamiliar. This image the University has of itself is also underscored in our relationship with the city of Tübingen and the *Studierendenwerk* (the student housing and services organization), as we work with them to organize and live a culture of welcoming for all students and researchers.

As a European-oriented University, we support the European Union's stance on promoting linguistic diversity. In Tübingen, this includes the recognition of German as a language of research, the promotion of English as the lingua franca in academia, business and diplomacy, and the consideration of French as a historically important language in our neighborhood. In addition, as a comprehensive research university strong in philological subjects, international research centers, and members of all different origins, the University provides a home for a whole range of other languages whose native speakers should feel encouraged to use them in everyday life and in public, making the linguistic diversity of our community clearly audible. It is part of the international culture of our University that linguistic diversity is valued. This also means that everyone should be able to find their way around the University as easily as possible. Therefore, in order to eliminate language barriers, a pragmatic but consistent policy of bilingualism is to apply at the University. In addition to German as an official language, English should not only be accepted as a second working language throughout the University, but also made available where necessary. Conversely, where English is already firmly established as a working language, the non-university public should not be forgotten -- they need information in German. Recognizing that the University operates and exists both globally and locally, external and internal university communications (including signage in and around buildings) should always be mindful of the other language and, when appropriate or necessary, find creative solutions for it (e.g., using abstracts, digital tools, design solutions, etc.). Especially in writing, it is important to pay attention

to the correct use of language, but without insisting on excessive language perfectionism that may slow down or prevent translations.

In direct interaction, flexibility is also the order of the day. At the University, we can adopt "parallel language use" (as it is called in the Nordic countries) in a relaxed and pragmatic way in all conversational situations. Passive language skills allow conversations in two languages, for example -- or switching between the two. It can also become a matter of course that students in seminars or members in committee meetings, if they have not understood something, briefly ask for a translation into the other language. A University language policy is to be drafted, formulating agreed norms and expectations regarding the language proficiencies of students, teaching staff and other employees; and setting out measures to support them.

The University will continue to promote and express the transnational character of the campus with many measures by 2026. These include the establishment of an International House: The community of international researchers will have a centrally located place, the Villa Köstlin, which will function as a particularly international social and cultural meeting place for all academics. The management of the College of Fellows will be located here, along with several offices for visiting researchers and meeting rooms for international events.

Internationality in teaching is already promoted through the recruitment of teaching staff from diverse backgrounds (see point 1 above); this can be achieved even better through the targeted internationalization of teaching content. This will be a focus over the next five years. More English-language courses, supported by the T@T program, continue to be an important building block; online collaborative forms of teaching with international partners (see point 3 above) are a second building block. The CIVIS staff unit and the Center for Teaching and Learning offer active support for this. But English is not everything; Tübingen also has many study programs in which fluency in a language besides German is required (multilingual study programs). Some of these are double degree programs and programs with an integrated year abroad. By 2026, we will make a significant increase in the number of cooperative degree programs offered with a mobility component - whether physical, blended, or purely online -- a focus of program development, within the framework of CIVIS and other partnerships. Particularly through the use of online elements in cooperation with international partners, we are significantly expanding access to international and transcultural experiences for all students -- including those for whom study abroad is difficult to arrange for a variety of reasons.

5. Support for international affairs - strengthening and networking the administration

The advantages of a well-functioning administration can hardly be overestimated - it is what makes academic operations possible and secure in the first place. The goals of better international recruitment, digitization and transnational campuses can only be achieved if we mobilize the necessary resources in the administrative area. International students and researchers may seem to cause more administrative work and problems, but they are actually often indicators of where administrative processes could be optimized for everyone. So it is worthwhile for everyone to invest here -- for example, with made-to-measure training opportunities and the implementation of digital, accessible processes. This benefits not only the international students and staff, but also all those who are new to the University, and not least the administration itself, which will see an easing of its burden through greater efficiency.

An international university is not one that assigns a single area of the administration to everything international -- instead, all areas of an international university's administration are aware of their international dimension and consciously live it (mainstreaming of internationality). Parts of this

form the 'International Network' of contact persons all across the administration, with an address book and information platform. It is important to maintain this networking among each other and with the President's Office and to make use of it over the next five years. But another important goal by 2026 is to ensure that there is at least one contact person in every area of central administration (and especially in the big administrations of the Deans' Offices) who specializes in international issues and speaks English very well. In addition, all the University's important regulatory documents, forms and standard letters should be available in an English-language version by then (even if the German version remains the legally binding one). In the course of digitization, it will be possible to read and write e-mails with the help of translation tools -- such tools should be made available as needed in all areas of the administration.

Despite such practical aids, the classic tools of internationalization of the administration remain important. The University will continue to offer language training to all employees, especially English and German, in line with the policy of bilingualism (see point 4 above). Staff exchanges with our partner universities abroad offer employees a good opportunity to look beyond their own field of experience and thus to advance the internationalization of their own work area in administration. Our network partners (CIVIS, Guild, Matariki) offer an excellent framework for this, as we are in regular, long-term contact with them, making it worthwhile to get to know them.

Support for international collaborations may also be improved through regular contact between researchers and administrators. To this end, we will create round tables so that regional experts from academia and administration can meet regularly and exchange views on policy developments and debates (e.g. Africa/Middle East, China (CCT), North and South America, Europe).

For international students, welcome activities will be significantly improved by 2026 by creating an International Student Services Center to assist degree-seeking Bachelor's and Master's students as well as incoming exchange students before, during, and after their stay. Some support and counseling opportunities have already been implemented with the help of tuition fees; these are to be usefully expanded and supplemented in the coming years (e.g., via online networking tools and preparatory services, a peer-to-peer help desk, orientation courses, etc.). Finally, contact should also be maintained after the students' departure -- in order to support them in their task as ambassadors of the University of Tübingen back at their home universities.

Concluding remarks

With these focal points, the University of Tübingen will in the coming years succeed in meeting the goal of a 'global scope of action' as formulated in the Excellence Strategy and in sustainably promoting global awareness among students, faculty and within the administration. If the international strategy effectively supports a culture of openness, diversity and inclusivity, the University can also have an impact on society and act in a beneficial way for the future.

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