UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE
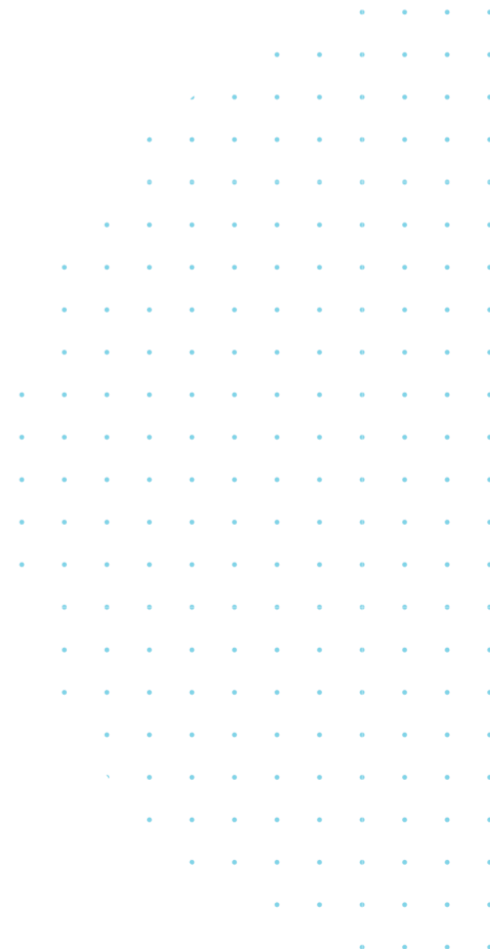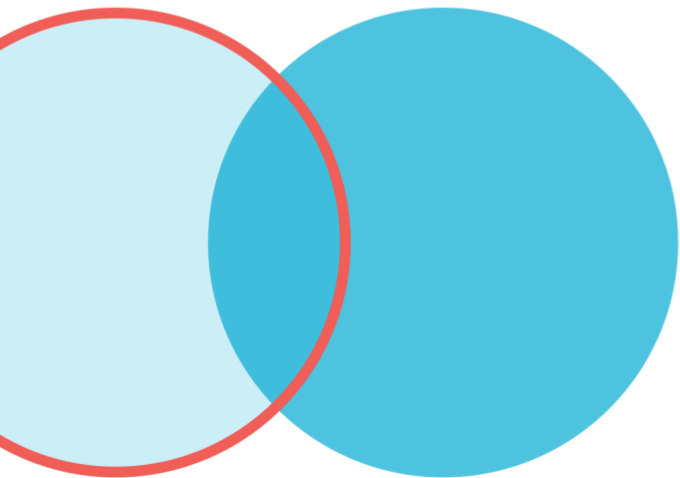
INSPIRING PEOPLE, CONNECTING MINDS AND SHAPING THE FUTURE

Strategic Development Plan 2023–2028
Summary

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Development Plan 2023-2028 (SDP 2028) 'Inspiring people, connecting minds and shaping the future' builds on the successful development and substantial achievements of the University of Cologne (UoC) over the last decade and sets out how we intend to develop and shape the University over the next decade. It states our vision, mission and values and defines our institutional goals in five core performance areas, as well as setting out concrete strategies for reaching these goals. The performance areas represent the areas in which we create impact as a university. The SDP 2028 also provides a framework for other strategies of the UoC.

Starting points and challenges

We are currently facing challenges and threats that range from climate change to growing social inequalities, rapid technological changes, conflicts, pandemics, unsustainable practices and the loss of biodiversity. The goals and strategies of the SDP 2028 were developed against the background of these challenges and map out the ways in which we can contribute to solutions through research, education and transfer. We believe that it is our responsibility as a public university to thereby contribute to the future of society.

Our history and heritage

Founded in 1388 on the initiative of the City Council of Cologne, the UoC is one of the oldest European universities. After a period of closure during the Napoleonic era it was newly founded in 1919 – again on the initiative of its citizens. Our founding history is reflected in our research and teaching profile, which combines excellent fundamental research with application-oriented research and profession-oriented training, enabling us to address both scientific and societal challenges. Being founded by citizens for citizens, we have a strong understanding of our societal responsibility, which we meet through excellent research, teaching and innovation. Our heritage goes hand in hand with a thoroughly modern outlook and an ambitious future agenda. Today we are one of the leading German public research universities.

The UoC is firmly rooted in the City of Cologne and the Rhineland and strongly contributes to the development of the area as a leading research and innovation region within Europe. We are set on a large urban campus in the heart of the lively and thriving city of Cologne. Open, friendly and with an international outlook, Cologne is a great place to live, work and study, where one can easily feel at home. We build on strong cooperation with the City of Cologne, for example with regard to civic engagement activities, our involvement with schools and hospitals, our collaborations with the rich cultural scene, the start-up support we offer, and our campus development.

We have also established a strong international network with partners around the world. A particular focus in recent years has been to build the UoC Global Faculty and to expand our European network, including the establishment of the European University for Well-Being (EUniWell) alliance.

The UoC has taken advantage of the comprehensive reforms in Germany's higher education system and has leveraged the strong organizational and management autonomy provided by the North Rhine-Westphalian Hochschulfreiheitsgesetz since 2007.

Significant achievements in the last decade include the development of our strong thematic research profile, the UoC's successes in the German Excellence Initiative and Strategy, and the comprehensive redesign and improvement of our study programs in the context of the Bologna Process. We have also made great strides regarding the cross-cutting topics of internationalization, diversity and inclusion, as well as providing excellent working and studying conditions. The UoC's quality management system in teaching and learning promotes the acquisition of the competencies needed in the (post) digital age.

Process and implementation

The SDP 2028 was developed on the basis of a broad participatory process in 2021, when students, faculty and staff came together in a series of thematic workshops to provide the ideas and input that helped inform the plan. That input was used to develop the SDP 2028, which was then endorsed by our governing bodies. This process shows some of our values at a glance: the participation of university members, respecting and appreciating people and their opinions, and taking time to discuss are all core elements of our university culture.

The SDP 2028 is embedded in a dynamic strategic and implementation process, which includes a mid-term evaluation that will review the implementation of the strategies and will adjust measures and priorities if necessary. It is complemented by further thematic sub-strategies and planning documents that focus on specific aspects of the UoC's development.

VISION, MISSION & VALUES

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2. VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Our vision, mission and values serve as leitmotifs for our overall development. They express our sense of purpose across all performance dimensions, define our common objectives and underpin our actions and decision-making.

2.1. VISION

We want to create an environment in which our members can develop individually and freely and be curious and creative in their research and learning. At the same time, we believe that cooperation and connectedness are the basis for ideas and approaches to unfold in such a way that we can shape the future. These principles are summarized in our vision:

Inspiring people, connecting minds and shaping the future.

2.2. MISSION

We create and transfer knowledge, educate global citizens, advance scientific methods and drive innovations to meet scientific and societal challenges and opportunities.

2.3. VALUES

Excellence: We strive for outstanding performance in research, education and innovation. We encourage curiosity, creativity and thinking across disciplinary boundaries.

Integrity: We act honestly and truthfully and are committed to the principles of good scientific practice, compliance and transparency.

Academic Freedom: We maintain an open scientific discourse and are committed to the freedom of thought and speech.

Respect: We act with respect for different people, cultures, ideas and perspectives, encourage participation and promote an open, diverse and inclusive university culture.

Responsibility: We take responsibility for our conduct and for the impact of our actions on the individual and institutional levels, as well as for addressing societal needs and challenges.

THEMES

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3. THEMES

We believe that innovative solutions to today's complex problems require equally complex approaches that integrate a variety of different perspectives, methods and ways of thinking. The ability to engage in transdisciplinary, problem-oriented collaboration is critical. Drawing on its disciplinary breadth, the UoC has for a long time been very successful in pursuing transversal approaches and establishing appropriate structures and formats for research, teaching and transfer activities.

The following six themes inform our goals and strategies:

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

OPEN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

SUSTAINABILITY

DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

QUALITY CULTURE

These themes cut across our five core performance areas and define overarching opportunities for UoC's institutional development. All these themes are institutionalized and are supported by specific units.

STRATEGIES

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4. STRATEGIES

Our institutional strategy for the next five years focuses on five overarching institutional goals. Each goal is connected to several strategies in order to translate our vision, mission and values into actionable items and to drive the UoC's institutional development. They are grouped by the UoC's core performance areas:

- Research and Innovation
- Education, Teaching and Learning
- University and Society
- People and Ways of Working
- Governance, Organization and Infrastructure

The goals and strategies of the SDP 2028 build on our previous achievements, are informed by current societal challenges and are underpinned by an analysis of our strengths and weaknesses in our core performance areas.
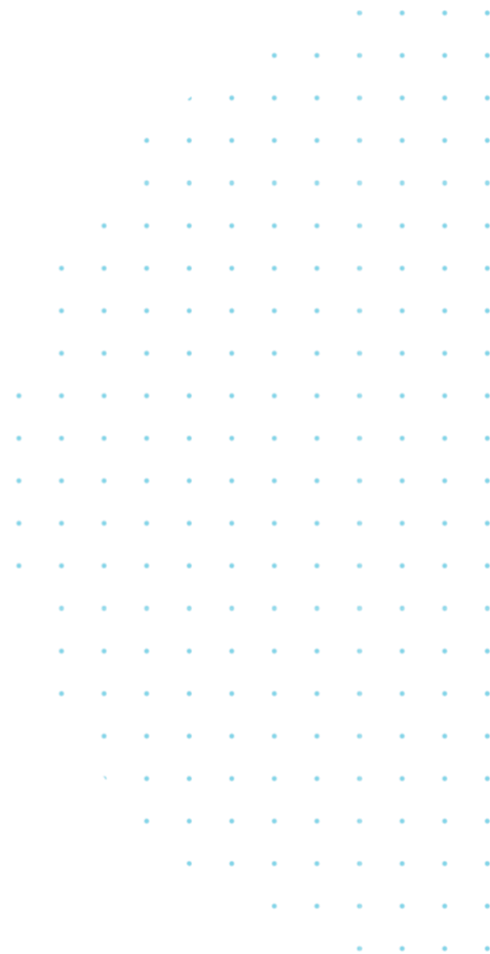
4.1. RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The University of Cologne is home to world class research, both fundamental and application-oriented. Based on a broad spectrum of research excellence across our six faculties, as well as on a culture of curiosity and academic freedom, we have a well-established institutional research profile. We use this broad spectrum of research excellence to cross-fertilize curiosity and application-driven research. Our Key Profile Areas are thematically defined interdisciplinary research areas, based on our four Clusters of Excellence, five North Rhine-Westphalia networking and profile development projects, and numerous other high-calibre collaborative research activities, with substantial critical mass and world class scientific outputs. They address both scientific and societal challenges, covering issues such as aging societies, climate change, quantum computing, food security, markets and public policy, as well as the political, cultural and societal developments in the Global South. Our high creative potential emerges from both the individual and the cooperative excellence of our faculty.

Strategic Research Support

To support and fund the strategic development and continuous renewal of our profile, we have successfully established the Excellent Research Support Program as the UoC's major internal funding mechanism, which is open to all faculties. In its different formats it promotes academic excellence, enables new trans- and interdisciplinary, cross-faculty collaborations, supports bottom-up initiatives, rewards individual excellence and enables early scientific independence. The Excellent Research Support Program is a major tool to support new research topics and to react flexibly to emerging developments.

Quality management

Our profile development is quality driven and subject to well-developed quality control and monitoring mechanisms, based on external informed peer review processes. This guarantees the developmental dynamism and excellence of our research profile and support structures, including the identification of emerging areas and the redirection or closure of areas that are no longer successful. All funding decisions in the Excellent Research Support Program are also quality-driven, being based on peer evaluation using transparently defined criteria.

INSTITUTIONAL GOAL 1: LEAD IN RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

To lead in research excellence and innovation we will pursue the following strategies:

STRATEGY 1: FURTHER DEVELOPING OUR RESEARCH PROFILE

STRATEGY 2: STRENGTHENING OUR INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORKS

STRATEGY 3: ENHANCING RESEARCH EXCELLENCE IN THE RHINELAND RESEARCH AREA

STRATEGY 4: STATE OF THE ART RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

By implementing these strategies, we will generate and preserve knowledge through fundamental research, helping us to understand the universe und our role within it. We will address societal challenges and create new opportunities for the development of a sustainable and democratic future. These strategies will furthermore enable us to capitalize on the opportunities of the German Excellence Strategy and Horizon Europe. The UoC is already established among the top 10 research universities in Germany. We aim to consolidate this position and establish ourselves among the leading universities worldwide.

PRIORITIZED GOALS

1. **The UoC has eight internationally leading Key Profile Areas**.
   Indicators:
   1. All Key Profile Areas have submitted pre-proposals for funding as Clusters of Excellence within the Excellence Strategy.
   2. At least four Clusters of Excellence will be funded.

2. **The UoC has a modern and innovative Computer Science Institute**.
   Indicators:
   1. By 2028, the UoC will have established up to 20 professorships, will offer well-established cross-disciplinary study programs at BSc and MSc levels and will have a significant number of in-training computer science teachers.
   2. Third party funding of about €10m p.a. will be achieved by 2028.
   3. Interdisciplinarity will be visible through inter-faculty collaborations and projects.

3. **The UoC has enhanced its research activities within (subject) teaching and education science**.
   Indicators:
   1. An analysis of the potential for increased collaborative research activities across faculties will be conducted by 2024.
   2. Based on this analysis, a roadmap for implementation, with concrete target figures for third-party funding and publication activities, will be defined by 2025.

4. **The UoC fully taps into the collaboration potential within the Rhineland Research Area**.
   Indicators:
   1. The UoC will have at least two Clusters of Excellence in collaboration with other universities from the Rhineland and/or non-university partners.
   2. A detailed realization plan for a joint innovation campus with the University of Bonn will be established by 2025 and the first modules will be realized by 2027.

5. **The UoC has successfully developed a network of strategic research partners with prominent European universities, aimed at securing EU funding for joint projects**.
   Indicators:
   1. Each Key Profile Area will collaborate with its European partners, resulting in the submission of 24 additional proposals for collaborative projects within the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2025-2026.
   2. There will be a 25% increase in third-party project funding from the EU by 2028, reflecting our commitment to expanding our collaborative efforts.

3. Our cooperative endeavors within EUniWell will be enhanced, for instance by collectively submitting a minimum of two proposals for EU funding opportunities.

6. **The UoC has implemented a masterplan for the further development and planning of research infrastructure**.
Indicator:
The UoC will define a central strategy for research infrastructure and a coherent and sustainable life-cycle planning process for research infrastructure to optimize its construction, efficient use, management and funding by 2025.
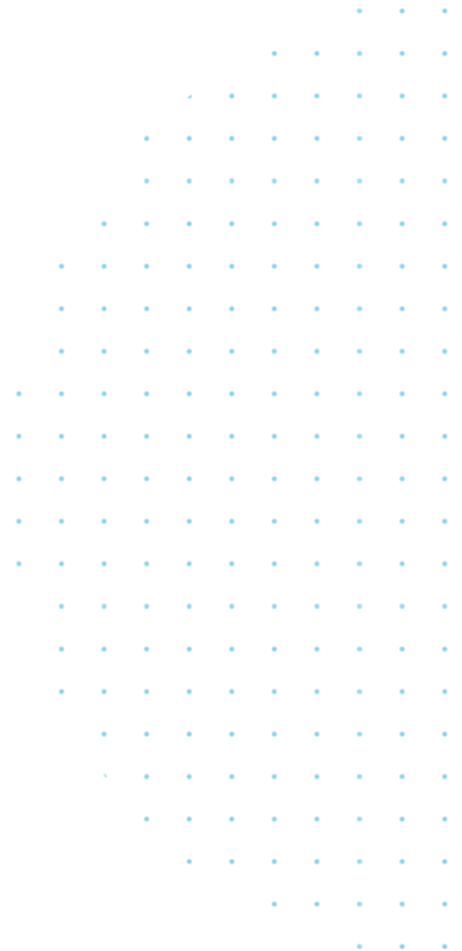
4.2.   EDUCATION, TEACHING AND LEARNING

Our teaching is closely linked and interwoven with our research, as evidenced by the wide breadth and interdisciplinary scope of our study programs. Our students benefit from the intersection of excellent academic and professional education. In total, the UoC currently offers 337 study programs, including international programs and double degree programs with international partners. In addition, we offer a wide range of opportunities for personal and general professional development, as well as a wide range of additional learning opportunities (e. g. micro-credentials). We encourage and enable our students to set their own priorities. Finally, our teaching and assessment methods are varied and versatile, and innovation in teaching is supported. We have comprehensive offers as well as support structures for educators in place, such as our Center for Higher Education Didactics and our Competence Center E-Learning.

The UoC's successful development in education is also reflected by its ability to attract competitive third-party funding for teaching and learning, including a total of €18m in the first and second funding phases of the Zukunftsstrategie Lehrer*innenbildung, a large federal project to revalue and strengthen the quality of teacher education in Germany. We are part of strong national and international networks, such as the European University for Well-Being (EUniWell) and the Digital University NRW (DH.NRW), a cooperation of 42 universities and the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, which aims to shape the digital transformation of universities.

Mission Statement Teaching and Learning

Following a co-creative, participatory process in which representatives from all areas of the university and all status groups participated, we adopted a university-wide Mission Statement Teaching and Learning in 2022. This will serve as a guideline for the future design of teaching and learning, while appreciating differences between disciplines and subject cultures.

Quality management and development

As part of the university-wide strategy process in teaching and learning, we designed the holistic quality management system Q^3UzK, which involves groups of all statuses and is shaped by them. It is a learning system, characterized by ambitious principles and based on our Mission Statement Teaching and Learning. In order to ensure the realization of the UoC's understanding of quality, both the quality goals and the quality criteria for teaching and learning are systematically anchored in the processes and procedures of Q^3UzK. The system is supported by a newly developed governance structure and was externally evaluated and accredited in 2023 (Systemakkreditierung).

INSTITUTIONAL GOAL 2: EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

To inspire and empower students we will pursue the following strategies:

STRATEGY 5: BRINGING TOGETHER RESEARCH, TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

STRATEGY 6: A NEW PLATFORM FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

STRATEGY 7: ADVANCING DIGITAL EDUCATION AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

STRATEGY 8: ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF STUDY PROGRAMS, STUDY EXPERIENCES AND EDUCATIONAL OFFERS

STRATEGY 9: GLOBAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

PRIORITIZED GOALS

1. **The UoC's cutting-edge research is reflected in its teaching through its own study programs within all of its Key Profile Areas**.
   Indicator:
   All Key Profile Areas have established study programs or formats reflecting research topics and/or methodologies.

2. **The UoC is a leading institution in the field of teacher education.**
   Indicators:
   1. Existing teacher education structures are interlinked and embedded in a new platform structure.
   2. Student satisfaction enhanced.

3. **The UoC has an attractive, demand-driven and future-oriented study offer that is continuously being further developed and quality assured, supported by a strategic capacity planning**.
   Indicators:
   1. There will be improvements in student-teacher relations, especially in highly overbooked programs.
   2. The quality management system Q^3UzK will be reaccredited in 2028.

4.3.   UNIVERSITY AND SOCIETY

Interacting with society, responding to its needs and creating new opportunities is a major part of our work. Our broad profile enables us to address societal developments and to combine research, teaching and professional practice in a particularly strong way. Prominent examples are the Inklusive Universitätsschule, our extensive school network, the University of Cologne Business School, the GATEWAY Excellence Startup Center and the University Hospital. We have established numerous activities in the field of knowledge exchange, such as our service-learning program, senior studies, and the children's university, as well as teaching offers such as micro-credentials. We successfully run a talent scouting program to identify and support young talent early on, especially in underrepresented groups. We respond to current developments and crises, for example through the Cologne/Bonn Academy in Exile, which supports researchers from Ukraine who are affected by war. We will also continue to expand our activities for at-risk scholars, such as the Philipp Schwarz Initiative, the Scholars at Risk network and our Academic Refugee Support for students.

INSTITUTIONAL GOAL 3: ADDRESSING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES AND CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As a public institution in a democratic society, we acknowledge our responsibility towards society. We will therefore realize the following strategies:

STRATEGY 10: ENHANCING SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

STRATEGY 11: SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

STRATEGY 12: STRENGTHENING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

STRATEGY 13: REFLECTING ON THE HISTORY OF THE UOC AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIETY

PRIORITIZED GOALS

1. **As a public institution and as one of the biggest German universities, the UoC takes responsibility for bringing science and society into dialogue and exchange**.
   Indicators:
   1. The concept of a competence development program in science communication will be defined by the end of 2024.
   2. New collaborative formats with the City of Cologne and regional partners will be established.

2. **Sustainability is an established cross-thematic topic across all core performance areas at the UoC**.
   Indicators:
   1. All faculties have established study programs and/or extra-curricular formats and sustainability is part of the Studium Integrale.
   2. The Center for Sustainable Societies is established, bringing together sustainability related research and teaching, as well as outreach, at the UoC.
   3. The UoC has outlined a roadmap to become a climate-neutral organization in line with the climate targets of the German government and is monitoring the successful implementation of this.

3. **The UoC is the leading start-up university among full universities with a broad spectrum of humanities and life sciences**.
   Indicators:
   1. The number of start-ups will continue to increase, i.e., more than 25 companies will be spun-off from the UoC per annum.
   2. The UoC will continue to hold good positions in rankings, with permanent ranking among the top ten start-up-friendly universities in Germany.
   3. Entrepreneurship will be part of study programs in all faculties, i. e. up to 10% of all students each year and 1 to 2% of faculty will become interested in entrepreneurship.

4.4.   PEOPLE AND WAYS OF WORKING

The University of Cologne is a people-centered university and embodies a culture in which we empower our members to thrive as individuals and embrace cooperation. We are strongly committed to fostering the continuous development and well-being of our students, faculty and staff and to providing excellent, safe and fair working and studying conditions, family and career support, as well as offers in health promotion.

Over the past decade we have made major progress in supporting the career development of doctoral researchers with the comprehensive Albertus Magnus Network of faculty-wide graduate schools, the Albertus Magnus Center and a wide range of mentoring and staff development programs. We have also established quality-driven and transparent tenure track procedures, gained substantial funding through the federal WISNA program to increase the number of young professors and of permanent academic positions other than professorships in all faculties. All measures are bundled in our comprehensive Human Resource Strategy, which was awarded the EU-HR Excellence in Research Award in 2019.

We are convinced that excellent and responsible leadership is a prerequisite for success, both inside and outside academia. In our opinion, leadership is not a one-way street but implies a cooperative and also a serving mind-set, as well as the ability to listen, learn and change perspectives.

INSTITUTIONAL GOAL 4: CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE CAN THRIVE

Our key assets are our faculty, staff and especially our huge talent-pool of students and early career researchers. We will therefore pursue the following strategies:

STRATEGY 14: IMPROVING ACADEMIC CAREER PATHS

STRATEGY 15: RECRUITING AND RETAINING EXCELLENT FACULTY AND STAFF

STRATEGY 16: PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

STRATEGY 17: STUDENT WELL–BEING

STRATEGY 18: STRENGTHENING INTER– AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION

PRIORITIZED GOALS

1. **The UoC offers excellent working conditions and career opportunities for early career researchers**.
   Indicators:
   1. The UoC's permanent position concept will be fully implemented and evaluated in 2026.
   2. The UoC will routinely appoint at least 20% of W1 and W2 professorships with tenure track.

2. **The UoC has fully implemented its HR strategy with a focus on recruitment and development**.
   Indicators:
   1. Positive re-accreditation with the HRS4R label.
   2. Analysis of the duration of the recruitment process will be conducted in 2024 and measures to improve the process will be introduced.

3. **The UoC continues to improve its gender balance and increase the diversity of its faculty and staff**.
   Indicators:
   1. Continuous increase in the number of female professorships, especially in areas with low representation.
   2. Reduction of gender pay gap. 3. Improved database on the diversity of faculty and staff in order to introduce targeted measures.
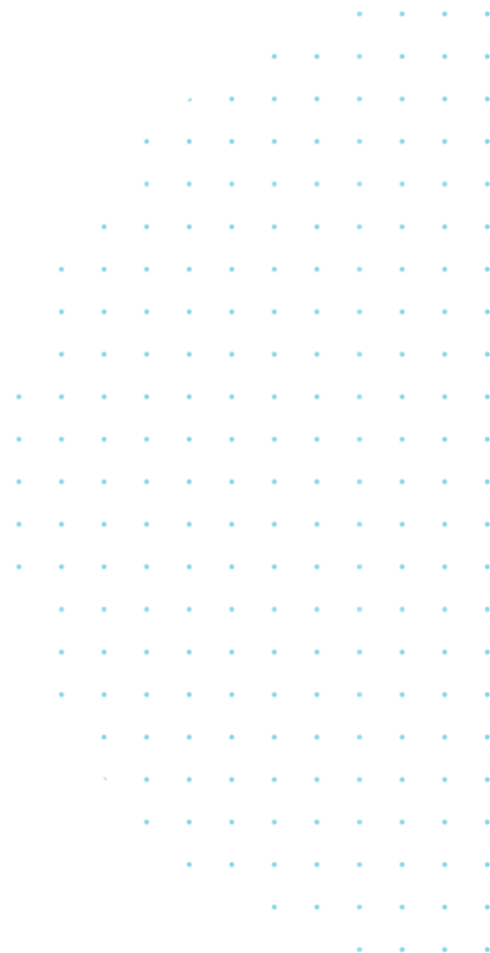
4.5. GOVERNANCE, ORGANIZATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In the context of the opportunities created by the Hochschulfreiheitsgesetz, the UoC has continuously developed its governance structures and steering instruments to strengthen its own capacity for action and strategy. In line with our values, participation, respect for diversity and quality assurance are central elements of the strategy and decision-making processes at the UoC. This includes, for example, institutional strategies and development plans being discussed within the framework of the Senate, the Rector's Conference, and the University-wide University Conference. In addition, quality management – through the inclusion of external expertise through the External Advisory Board (as well as specialized advisory boards) and external-peer evaluation, combined with internal quality assurance mechanisms – is a cornerstone of our decision-making and strategy processes. The establishment of a strategic planning process of professorships in 2020 is serving to better interconnect profile development and the reassignment of vacancies. Strategic control has been enhanced to support evidence-based decision-making.

INSTITUTIONAL GOAL 5: FUTURE–PROOFING OUR GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

We will future-proof our organizational culture to even better support the UoC's missions, further enhance our strategic capabilities and live up to our responsibility as a good educator and employer. We aim to achieve this by realizing the following strategies:

STRATEGY 19: STRENGTHENING EFFECTIVE COLLEGIAL GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION

STRATEGY 20: DRIVING THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF OUR ORGANIZATION

STRATEGY 21: REINFORCING AND ENHANCING OUR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY 22: ESTABLISHING A MODERN AND CONNECTED CAMPUS

STRATEGY 23: DEVELOPING AND TRANSFORMING OUR LIBRARIES

PRIORITIZED GOALS

1. **Increase in transparency and accessibility**.
   Indicators:
   1. Website outlining the processes and principles of the UoC's boards, and optimized processes regarding the establishment of new boards.
   2. 32 digitization projects to implement the e-Government Act will have been implemented by 2027.

2. **The UoC has defined a comprehensive IT/digitalization strategy addressing all core performance areas and has consolidated its IT structures within the newly founded IT-Center Cologne**.
   Indicators:
   1. Strategy is defined and measures are being implemented according to plan. 2. IT-Governance and IT Center Cologne are established.

3. **Building construction processes are optimized**.
   Indicators:
   1. Budget monitoring process implemented.
   2. Albertus Magnus Square refurbished.

4. **The three pillars of the UoC's quality management (institutional evaluation, quality management in teaching and learning and quality assurance of administrative processes) interlock in a meaningful way**.
   Indicators:
   1. Research Information System (FIS) and bibliography implemented by 2025. 2. Success Framework defined and monitored.

5. **The UoC has a state-of-the art library system**.
   Indicators:
   1. Definition of a central Library Masterplan, with measures being implemented according to plan.
   2. The library and teaching space are established.