

Strategic vision on Internationalisation

University of Humanistic Studies

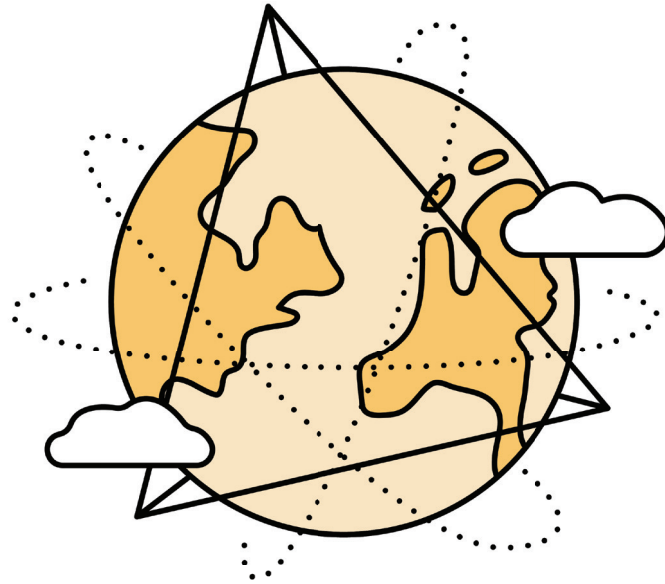
By Globi – Roos Beerkens – January 2024

Notes on the document

Over the past few months, a delegation of the Steering Committee Internationalisation has, under the guidance of Globi, formulated a strategic vision on internationalisation. The strategic vision process consisted of three sessions with a core group of representatives of the steering committee, reflective sessions with students and staff, a Management Team session, a session with the Internationalisation Steering Group and a coordination meeting with the chair of the Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group. These activities have resulted in a strategic vision widely supported within the organisation. This document describes the vision for internationalisation and related objectives for the next five years (2023 - 2028).

The groundwork for internationalisation at the University of Humanistic Studies was laid years ago: now it is time to take additional steps with the help of a strategic vision. Strengthening education, research and the organisation, we develop a tailor-made internationalisation program for each area. In this document, we clarify the context of our approach, and explain what this approach means for students, faculty and staff. The vision is closely intertwined with the vision on Diversity & Inclusion. Both strategic themes are developed by separate steering groups and visions, but overarching principles are intertwined and the programmes need each other to achieve the mission stated above.

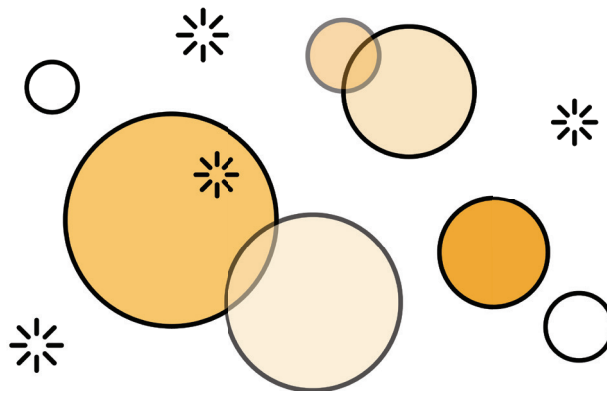
Rationale: Our right to exist and our place in the world



Since its foundation in 1989, the University for Humanistic Studies has grown into an academic knowledge centre for questions surrounding the meaning of life, and the creation of a humane society. The mission of our university is to conduct high-quality research and to offer inspiring education in order to contribute to a meaningful existence in a humane society.

We are aware that society is both nearby and far away, extending in all directions and across the world. Furthermore, we are aware that society is global, plural and diverse, but is it also still unjust. In order to make a valuable contribution to the world around us using our expertise, we continuously reflect on our place in society and our connections to others in it: in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, in Europe, and in the world. By approaching and embracing that plural world, we aim to increase our relevance inside and outside the university through honest, sustainable and groundbreaking work.

The interwovenness of themes

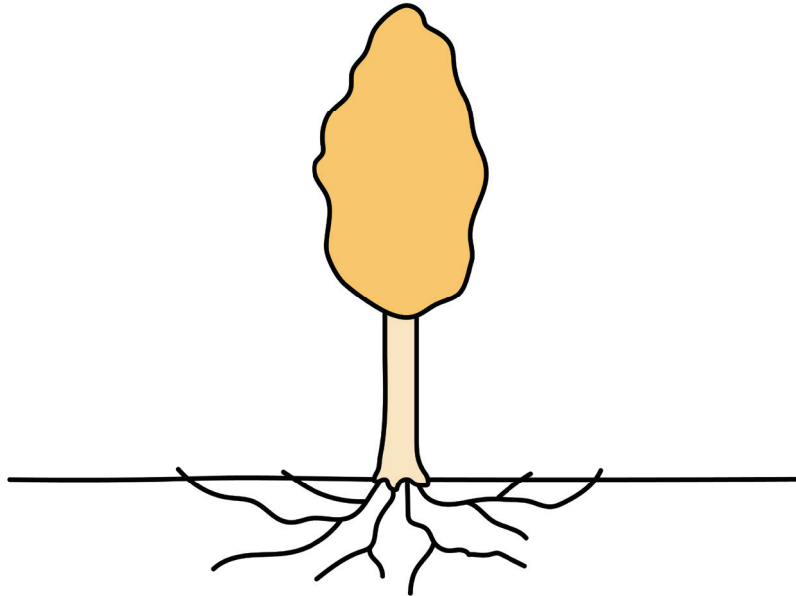


As a relatively small university we cannot do everything ourselves. That is why we have a vision on internationalisation and a tailor-made approach for an internationalisation policy with concrete objectives. The vision on Diversity & Inclusion, and the developments within Room for Everyone's Talent (Ruimte voor ieders talent), in which the national programme Recognition & Rewards (Erkennen & Waarderen) plays an important role, are linked to the vision on internationalisation.

Seeing and hearing, recognising and valuing multiple perspectives are imperative for the implementation of this vision of internationalisation. Moreover, looking critically at one's own processes and creating a socially safe environment are fundamental to the themes of Diversity & Inclusion and Room for Everybody's Talent. Competences associated with these values and the organisational and cultural preconditions required for this, are closely related.

Finally, sustainability is an important aspect of our university's Strategic Plan. The climate crisis is a national and global problem. Exploitation of people and other forms of life raises new philosophical and ethical questions about meaning and humanisation, increasing social concerns. The Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Report at UvH states, "It is increasingly clear that a dignified existence can only be realised on a liveable earth. Moreover, globally, the most vulnerable social groups are experiencing the worst consequences of the climate crisis". These problems affect the vision of internationalisation and increase the urgency for moral-political choices around ethical guidelines, financial policies and cooperation with social and scientific partners.

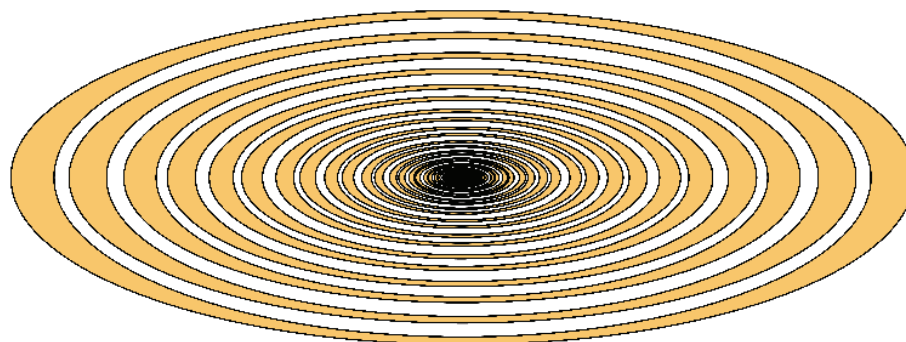
The Dream



We want to grow into a university where internationalisation is no longer a programme, but part of our everyday work: internationalisation as an integral feature of the university. A university that constantly engages with the world, while also reflecting on what we mean to the world in all its diversity, from sustainable and intersectional perspectives. We are agile, adaptive and move fluidly in a world that is constantly transforming. Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly and silently. We recognise the need to actively connect with people and institutions that show us other worlds and perspectives, that open and enrich our view even more. We thus recognise the need to critically review and enrich our western, anthropocentric view of the world with other perspectives.

A robust approach to internationalisation contributes to this. It is not an end in itself, but a means to accomplishing multi-voicedness, tailor-made, at the local and international level. Both online and offline and in hybrid forms. Both in education and research, as well as in our organisation. And tailored to the needs of each chair group and programme.

The brief version of this vision



The preceding leads to the following vision on internationalisation:

“Our international and intercultural activities are always guided by our **mission**: to conduct high-quality research and offer inspiring education in order to contribute to a humane and meaningful society. We believe that this responsibility does not stop at our national borders. Therefore, we also strive to make an impact in the world outside the Netherlands, always motivated by our humanist-inspired background and accompanying mission.

A reciprocal and lively connection with the society around us is essential in fulfilling that mission. In that connection, an international and intercultural dimension and a local one are always present. Therefore, we integrate the international dimension into our curriculums, research programmes and research activities. In doing so, we do not lose sight of the fact that we are rooted in, and primarily beholden to, Dutch society.

The international dimension of our work is characterised by cross-border research domains, **intercultural dialogue**—usually in English—and the inclusion of academic knowledge, insight and perspectives from other countries, cultures and disciplines. International and intercultural encounters provide new inspiration, knowledge and critical reflection on our own insights, values and frames of reference. Such critical reflection is central to the academic spirit in general and humanism in particular.

The internationalisation culture that we will develop is characterised by respect for, knowledge of and experience with the **diversity of lifeworlds, identities and perspectives** that exist both locally and globally. We help students and staff reflect on their living and working worlds, and look beyond their own borders and connections, thereby enriching the university's academic and social contribution to a humane society.

We strive to make various forms of internationalisation possible for everyone by paving **socio-culturally safe and sustainable pathways**, while ensuring relevance to the (future) professional field. This means purposefully and actively engaging in more international research cooperation, opening our university to international guests and ideas, actively contributing to the dialogue on a humane society in an international perspective and integrating an international dimension in our education.

Specifically, this may involve physical exchanges or visits to conferences, but we aim for **customisation**. Teaching in English is a possibility but not a must, with **language policy allowing both English and Dutch**. Going abroad is an opportunity that is encouraged and facilitated, but interacting within the Netherlands with students and colleagues who offer different perspectives is just as valuable. We make the learning effects of internationalisation activities explicit by focusing on **self-reflection and dialogue** and, together with the establishment of organisational preconditions, by creating an internationalisation culture. Within five years, we want to have incorporated concrete, tailor-made learning goals in the curriculums of the courses and job descriptions of employees.

Objectives for equal internationalisation: research, education and organisation



The dream and vision for internationalisation are now on paper. Now we need to ensure this vision comes to fruition. Therefore, we translate the vision into concrete, tailor-made objectives for education, research and the organisation as a whole.

Research

The globalisation of our society affects the way we conduct research, with ever-increasing demands for interdisciplinarity, internationalisation and relevance. Our academics deliver high-quality research by entering into collaborations in which both differences and similarities are sought and used for the benefit of research. In order to be and to remain internationally visible as the UvH, solid strategic alliances with a selective group of international, domestic universities and civil society organisations are needed. These partnerships help us realise our ambitions. By cooperating internationally and interdisciplinary, we deliver high-quality and relevant research for a society that is global and diverse. We strive to realise this by using an unconditionally egalitarian approach wherever we can. This can be achieved by reflecting on Eurocentrism, proper representation of non-Western perspectives in literature selection and data collection, and being consciously concerned with accessibility of our research results. Taking our expertise as a starting point, we want to connect with similar institutes and research consortia all over the world the world, from which we deploy exchange programmes for both academic staff and students.

In doing so, it is important to maintain our individuality and vision, and also avoid confusion. We are the University of Humanistic Studies, not Humanities. We want to create more places for international visiting PhD students and guest lecturers. Where possible, we cooperate in editorial boards of journals and actively participate in the organisation of international conferences and encourage substantive contributions to these. Additionally, we explicitly value these activities in the annual assessment cycle.

Education

We use the research and what we learn from international and interdisciplinary collaborations in our teaching. The UvH considers it important that students are well prepared to work in a plural, globalising society within both traditional and new fields of work. To achieve this, we want to expand and improve activities, taking into account the context of our own organisation. As a relatively small university, we cannot do everything. Furthermore, there is currently a national housing shortage and some universities have gone to great lengths to achieve internationalisation, leading Minister Dijkgraaf to set clearer frameworks and rules for all universities (Parliamentary letter May 2023). These are additional reasons not to use a 'narrow' interpretation of internationalisation (promoting as much English-language education and as many exchanges as possible), but a broader interpretation. First of all, we want to facilitate teachers in using and learning from the international education setting more explicitly, for example in the form of:

- properly supporting hybrid teaching;
- encouraging cooperation between Dutch and international students;
- providing space for different perspectives;
- reflection and discussion on our own thinking and acting with regard to other cultural perspectives.

Focused per chair group, we want to make more use of international guest lecturers in teaching. We aim to better facilitate the international, diverse teaching environment; we work on teachers' and students' English language skills and support them in mastering flexible communication strategies, such as listening language (luistertaal). We want to facilitate exchanges by selectively expanding the international network with similar institutes, so that exchanges are easily accessible and fit well into the curriculums. We look for opportunities to make exchanges as financially and practically feasible for all students wherever possible.

However, an exchange is not feasible nor a priority for all students and for all programmes. Therefore, we will explore the opportunities to also organise short international excursions and online exchange programmes. This naturally leads to opportunities to organise activities in one's own immediate environment (aka 'internationalisation at home') and within the Netherlands; activities that likewise contribute to the development of intercultural and diversity skills and connect with today's plural society. Internationalisation is also reflected in our intersectional perspective on the necessary attitudes and competences. However, competences alone are not enough. At our university, we bear institutional responsibility for creating spaces for reflexive openness, safety, humility and intercultural skills. We create spaces, policies and procedures that promote the inclusion of multiple perspectives, and ask staff and students to learn together. Skills that belong to a humanistic attitude, but can only be given substance in relevant contexts. Some students and staff have more experience than others with sociocultural and academic diversity. We create spaces in which they can continuously learn from and with each other. This learning environment boosts the learning effects of mobility and internationalisation at home. This process is supported through dialogue and guidance before and after activities, in which familiar, local themes are discussed and explicitly connected to themes from more unfamiliar contexts, and reflection is encouraged and made insightful.

Organisation and policy

In order to properly facilitate the ambitions described above, we need to set organisational prerequisites, including an organisation that provides or arranges appropriate support and in-house expertise. Examples are: accommodation, and the onboarding of international staff, faculty and students. We require sufficient capacity and expertise within the organisation to deepen existing exchange programmes. Furthermore, we want to selectively (and to a limited extent) set up new ones pertaining to grant applications, necessary policy frameworks, practical organisation and increasing their learning effect.

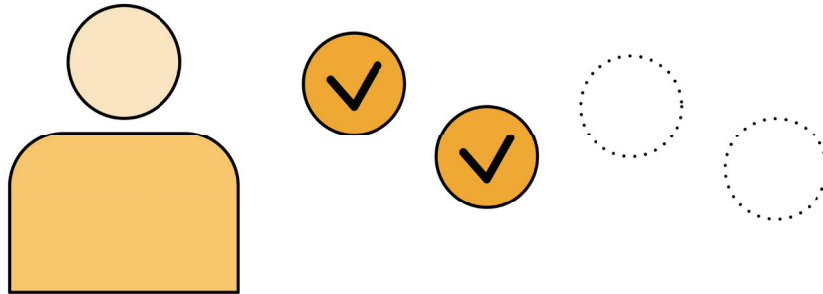
In order to host new international faculty from PhD student to professor to temporary guest lecturer, and to make them feel at home in their new learning and working environment, we also need in-house capacity and expertise.

In order to support faculty members/academic staff it is necessary that they have sufficient capacity in their workload for internationalisation-focused activities. This also applies to research endeavors, working on possible adaptations of the teaching curriculum, and further enhancing language and diversity skills. This is imperative as it equips faculty and staff with the tools to deal with international classes and to teach in a culturally responsive way. Moreover, faculty would then be able to properly supervise internationalisation activities.

We need commitment from everyone. Strengthening connection, resonance, reciprocity and equality in interaction with others requires something from the whole organisation: from our board, from our teachers, researchers, from our support staff and from our students. Working on awareness, working on responsiveness and safety (think language, intercultural and diversity skills), working on a more diverse curriculum and working on international interdisciplinary research projects. Good examples and expertise will be needed to facilitate that growth.

Finally, to be and to remain internationally visible as the UvH, solid strategic alliances with a selective group of international, domestic universities and civil society organisations are needed. These partnerships will help to us realise our ambitions.

Objectives



In the upcoming academic year (2023–2024), we are committed to the following key organisational initiatives:

1. Involve students in developments in internationalisation and diversity & inclusion.
2. Translate the objectives to the various chair groups and staff support (OBP), setting up a consultation structure and dividing tasks and responsibilities to realise the objectives.
3. Embed the objectives in the end terms of the programmes.
4. Embed the objectives in the job descriptions of employees, and include them in the evaluation cycle.
5. Create an organisational culture in which there is room for different perspectives and diversity, where a broad view is the norm.
6. Bring in capacity and expertise to support international employees and students in their arrival, in both practical matters and in making them feel at home.
7. Broadcast a clear profile of the UvH, both in Dutch as well as in English.
8. In a tight labour market, retain and improve the quality of employees by recruiting internationally.
9. Work on intercultural, diverse competences through training for teachers and other employees.

In terms of research, we intend to do the following:

1. Map current international relations and activities.
2. Establish and maintain long-term relationships with international partners whom we actively select, and that fit our identity, with whom we seek to establish international and interdisciplinary collaborations within our niche.
3. Finetune the preconditions and communicate them clearly to all staff: opportunities for temporary stays abroad (possibly sabbaticals), grant applications, clarity on working tasks and assignments.
4. Stimulate academic editorships and allocate research time.
5. Create a full-time position to write international applications.
6. Attract international academic staff, also for temporary projects (e.g. artist in residence or structural guest professorships).
7. Offer scholarships for international visiting PhDs, allowing them to join us for a few months.
8. Incorporate reflection (e.g. in the form of peer review) on current research (think reflecting on Eurocentrism, good representation in literature review and data collection, and being aware of accessibility of our research findings).
9. Expand the Horizon 2020 collaboration.

In the field of education, we set the following objectives:

1. Make curriculums more international (and diverse), tailored to the various subject areas.
2. Make exchange accessible to all by creating space for it in the curriculum, as well as time, money, and support (familiarising and working on self-confidence).
3. Work on intercultural, diverse competences through training and guidance in reflection during international collaborations and activities.
4. Work on developing language skills (especially BA programs have to offer better preparation for English-language Masters programmes, such as English language skills).
5. Offer more teaching in English so that we are more accessible to students from other linguistic backgrounds.
6. Create a safe atmosphere for English-language education, taking into account stimulating confidence of students (and teachers).
7. More international temporary (guest) teachers in education, ideally people who fit the niche, and who are, of course, relevant to the subject.
8. (Better) facilitation of online/hybrid education.

