

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A YOUNG RESEARCH UNIVERSITY?

Reflections and stories from YERUN



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Contributors:

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Editors:

This publication was coordinated and edited by the YERUN Brussels Office, in particular, Gabriela Sachetti, Silvia Gómez Recio and Raquel Vega Rubio, with additional editorial contributions from YERUN member universities.

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Lay out and illustrations by JIXSO (Kristof Braekeleire, Thomas Van Ryckeghem)

www.jixso.com

info@jixso.com

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YERUN Brussels Office:

Rue du Trône 62

1050 Brussels

Tel: +32 479 19 48 54

www.yerun.eu

info@yerun.eu

bluesky: @yerunnetwork.bsky.social

linkedin: YERUN - Young European Research Universities

Special thanks go to:

Petter Aasen, João Amaro de Matos, Denis Ancion, Pia C. Bing-Jonsson, Celia Fustes Corpas, Kim Bredesen, Sueli Brodin, Marita Böhning, Corrado Cerruti, Peter Rahbek Elbrønd, Nordine Es-Sadki, Rebeca Schumacher Eder Fuao, Johannes Freudenreich, Ingvild Gjone Sildnes, Oliver Günther, Dorian Hayes, Minna Hendolin, Li Heyl, Daniel Holmberg, Jan Hupkens, Pawel K Grzeskow Jaszczyszyn, Malin Ideland, Lucyna Kejna, Shane Kilcommins, Heidi Tovsrud Knutsen, Alicja Kostrzak, Herwig Leirs, Dirk Leuffen, Christine Liebhardt, Marisa Labiri, Soili Makkonen, Ingvild Marheim-Larsen, Gordon Marshall, João Martins, Peter De Meyer, Katrin Niglas, Tine Lørup Noto, Vicky Passingham, Riikka Pellinen, Jussi Pihlajamäki, Joëlle Pletinckx, Petia Popova, Nina Premuš, Jens Ringsmose, Kjetil Rydland, Daniel Schmidtke, Iria Sorge-Röder, Jan Steinbrener, Tatiana Synodinou, Theo Tamis, Maj Vuorre, Neville Wylie, Saša Zelenika, Matthias Zimmermann, Xavier Palomares Cano



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Young research universities as identity and mission

Young lies in the acronym of YERUN (Young European Research Universities Network). But what does it mean to be a "young research university"? On the occasion of YERUN's 10th Anniversary, we are exploring this very question. To do so, YERUN looks inwards, towards the stories, values and reflections of its members. In exploring what it means to be a young research university, we listen directly to those being part of them, to their challenges, ambitions and contributions.

Founded in 2015, the Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) was established to bring together like-minded young research universities across Europe. With a main objective of amplifying the collective voice of these institutions in European policymaking, they have strengthened their cooperation and have created opportunities to grow together in multiple areas these past years.

For YERUN, being "young" is not merely a matter of years, but a defining **mission and identity**. YERUN universities were founded in response to concrete societal needs, such as expanding access to higher education, driving regional growth and modernising and innovating knowledge systems. These universities were often among the latest to be founded, but they were founded with a purpose and clear added value. This origin gives young universities a distinct **civic mission**, rooted in their communities but directed towards global challenges. YERUN universities actively construct their reputations through contemporary excellence. And in doing so, they define what being "young" truly means in higher education today.

YERUN has engaged with its member institutions to explore the concept of being *a young research university* and reflect on the key pillars that drive their missions, work and their institutional culture. This section will be followed by the stories of the YERUN member universities, as every young research university of our network has a particular and distinct story to tell.

During the months of February, March and April of 2025, several colleagues from YERUN universities have participated in our shared effort to define what a young research university is, what its defining features are, what challenges it faces and, more importantly, what opportunities it brings. They also reflected on why young research universities should take pride in this identity. This reflection process is especially timely, as YERUN not only marks its 10th anniversary but is also approaching the end of its second strategy, one that has helped consolidate the network and its members as a distinct voice among higher education institutions represented in Brussels.

Young research universities turn concepts into lived practice, and practice into proof that high quality and excellence are not the exclusive legacy of tradition. They are actively shaped, deliberately cultivated, and constantly redefined. Modern by conviction and dynamic by design, young research universities are not just keeping up, they are setting the pace. The world is changing – fast and fundamentally. And academia must do more than simply adapt, it must lead. Openness, foresight, embracing change and the courage to drive transformation: that's what we stand for: we champion open science, foster resilient academic career pathways, and act as drivers of digital innovation and environmental responsibility. We are not here to fit in or conform. We are here to tackle real challenges with determination, empower the next generation, and be a lasting spark for progress and a trusted ally to society.
– Dirk Leuffen, University of Konstanz.

BEING A YOUNG RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

What is a young research university?

A young research university, typically established after the 1960s, is defined less by its age and more by its innovative, agile, and future-oriented mindset. Founded with a civic mission, these institutions act as regional and local anchors, promoting social and economic development. They integrate research, teaching, and societal impact, with a strong commitment to interdisciplinarity, international collaboration, and talent development. Their diverse academic communities and institutional cultures foster openness, adaptability, and a proactive approach to identity-building. It is spirit and strategic orientation, rather than historical legacy, that defines their role and positions them as a crucial pillar in the higher education landscape.

Based on the input received and the stories shared by our members, we have framed a common understanding of what being a young research university means for YERUN.

While "young" is often associated with institutions established in the post-1960's era, **age alone does not capture the full story**. The concept of youth in higher education is highly context-dependent, and for YERUN members, it signifies a particular attitude rather than just a founding date. Youth, in this context, reflects an **institutional mindset**: one that is agile, bold and open to change.

Young universities can be proud of the fact that they have managed to create a profile for themselves within a short period of time that has earned them international recognition. – Jan Steinbrener, Klagenfurt University

Research at the core

Within young research universities, research is a **driving force** deeply imbedded across all aspects of our missions. From teaching to industry partnerships and societal engagement, research is integrated in our institutional fabric.

Young universities approach research as a **tool for impact**. They are often leaders in **emerging fields** and adopt **interdisciplinary approaches**, allowing to tackle problems from multiple angles. This makes them well-suited to addressing a wide range of complex and quickly evolving challenges, ranging from issues such as climate change and public health to digital transformation, technological advancement, and societal shifts.

YERUN's collective strength represents 4% of all publications published in the EU between 2020 and 2025 (OpenAlex) and contribute to roughly 5% of Horizon 2020 funded projects and 7% of Horizon Europe funded projects to date (CORDIS). This level of research activity underscores the role that young research universities play in Europe's knowledge ecosystem, not just as emerging voices but as established contributors to research excellence.

The thematic focus of YERUN members further highlights this leadership. They are highly active in cutting-edge digital research fields, including the



fastest growing subfield in Europe, which accounts for 8% of the EU's total research output. Their involvement in cognitive science and innovative education reflects a strong connection between research and teaching, while their significant presence in social psychology and political sciences, fields with over 1,600 publications from YERUN members in the past five years alone, illustrates their deep commitment to addressing societal challenges and fostering impactful change.

A young research university is a university that goes beyond its traditional borders, walls, and disciplines. In that sense, 'research' does not necessarily imply only a scientific approach, evidence-based discoveries, and usual tried and tested methods. Being a young research university implies fostering innovation and collaboration across all sectors and disciplines, not for the sake of science/research itself, but to achieve the greater good and improve the quality of life of all community members. In a rapidly changing world, only young universities possess the necessary courage and determination to approach research in a new, unprecedented way. Such universities do not think of science as a prestige that is only available to the selected few. On the contrary, although research is carried out by individuals, they carry it out for the benefit of everyone living on our planet.

- Nina Premuš, University of Rijeka.

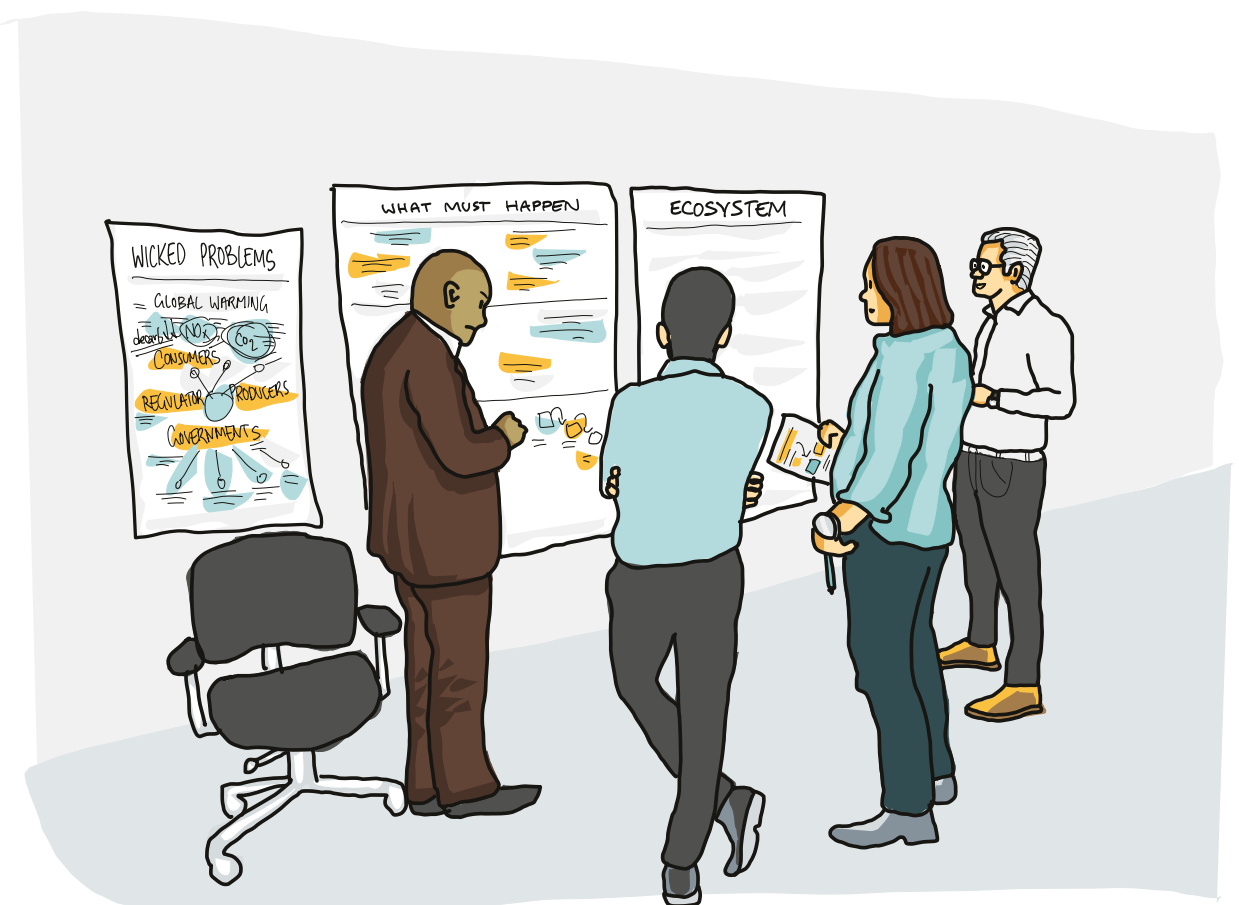
Interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration

One of the cornerstone traits of young research universities is their ability to **break down disciplinary silos**. Not built on existing traditional disciplines, they had the opportunity to foster academic environments where borders between fields are fluid, and where collaboration across **disciplines and sectors** is not an exception but the norm. This collaboration often translates into shared structures where various disciplines converge to address common challenges.

By establishing relations and working with industry, public institutions, civil society and non-profits, young universities accelerate the translation of research into real-world solutions. Their openness to **bold experimentation** allows them to tackle urgent societal challenges with creativity and agility, often leading the way in areas where traditional academic models struggle to adapt.

Young research universities are building up a community - across-universities and across disciplines - to create a critical mass of knowledge and experience as required to face the "AI in Research & Education" challenge.

- Corrado Cerruti, Tor Vergata University of Rome



Global outlook, local commitment

Young research universities, convinced of the need for collaboration at all levels, are distinctly **international in outlook**, engaging in robust networks of global collaboration, student mobility and joint research initiatives. They attract diverse student and faculty populations, offer global programmes, and engage in cross-border research initiatives. At the same time, they are **deeply rooted** in their local and regional ecosystems.

This dual focus enables them to act as **bridges between global knowledge and local needs**. They contribute directly to regional development through innovation hubs, policy engagement, and community partnerships. In doing so, they fulfil a modern civic mission, to contribute to a better society not only by producing knowledge but directing it meaningfully towards avenues of impact. Their role as regional and local anchors is integral to their identity.



Agility, flexibility and adaptability

In a world of constant change, agility is not a luxury, but a necessity. Young research universities thrive in this environment because they are structurally and culturally **adaptable**. Supported by dynamic leadership and a commitment to ongoing improvement, they can redesign programmes, reorganise departments and embrace digital and pedagogical innovation with ease. Their infrastructure and digital-first approaches support flexible learning environments, advanced research facilities, and innovative teaching models.

This **bold mindset** extends to research and administration alike: young universities are more likely to pursue novel funding avenues, foster start-ups and experiment with governance and evaluation models. Their willingness to take risks is grounded in a clear vision of academic and societal transformation.

Their identity is not inherited but actively constructed on a daily basis, strengthening the sense of belonging and cohesion within the university community.
- Elías Sanz Casado, Universidad Carlos III Madrid.

Inclusive and vibrant academic communities

At the heart of every young research university, there is a commitment to building an **inclusive, open and vibrant academic community**. These institutions recognise that excellence cannot thrive without diversity, one of people, perspectives and disciplines. This is reflected in the diverse student body and the way students are engaged in broader co-creation processes at the institutional level.

With flat hierarchies and a strong culture of participation, young research universities prioritise developing academic environments that focus on **wellbeing, equity and collaboration**.

Young research universities create environments that feel like true communities: dynamic, inclusive, and open to the world. Their strength lies not only in their outstanding academic and research environments and contributions, but also in the thoughtful way they engage with the needs of a changing society. They embrace diversity, foster openness, and create spaces where different voices and ideas can thrive. - Petia Popova, University of Konstanz.

Redefining academic excellence for the 21st century

Although young research universities are still pressed to measure success through centuries-old traditions or inherited rankings, YERUN universities propose a forward-looking vision of excellence that aligns with the CoARA¹ principles for broadening research assessment, and prioritises societal relevance, innovation, and collaboration. In these institutions, research is not an end in itself, but a means to create meaningful impact, locally and globally, through open, engaged, and interdisciplinary practices.

Despite their relative youth, many of these institutions have achieved high research visibility and public relevance by actively redefining excellence around responsiveness, adaptability, and purpose-driven scholarship.

YERUN universities place strong emphasis on open science², sustainability, policy engagement, and a redefinition of institutional pride based on ambition, adaptability, and the ability to evolve. In doing so, they are not just participating in the higher education landscape but actively shaping its future.

¹ Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

² A total of 70% publications in 2020-2025 from YERUN members are open access, compared to the 64% EU average, with some institutions championing more than 75% (UiT- The Arctic University of Norway, University of Maastricht, Nicolaus Copernicus University, University of Stirling and University of Eastern Finland).

There is so much in what the young universities do in Europe that should give them a sense of pride in what they accomplish. Many of them have been created following seismic shifts in their country's political history and have come to represent the aspirations of the young generation. Europe is proud of its rich history, but often finds itself hidebound by its historical past, in a way that is not experienced elsewhere. Young universities should be proud in representing a vision of Europe that is not embedded in past histories, power structures and opportunities; one that is future focused and not deferential to former practices.

– Neville Wylie, University of Stirling

WHAT ARE KEY CHALLENGES YOUNG RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES FACE?

Young research universities operate within a higher education landscape dominated by well-established systems, expectations and metrics of success. One of the key challenges is building institutional reputation and visibility, which takes time and consistency to be achieved. Without being backed by long-standing traditions or big alumni networks, young universities often work harder to **gain reputation** globally and establish themselves in the research and innovation ecosystems. While this also presents a unique opportunity, a blank canvas on which to build a distinctive and future-oriented reputation, the path is neither quick, nor straightforward.

Another complex task is represented by securing stable and diversified funding. Many young research universities rely heavily on **competitive external grants**, demonstrating their research excellence through successful proposals and collaborations. However, building the internal infrastructure to support sustained growth, such as research management systems, digital tools, and professional development pathways, remains an ongoing effort.

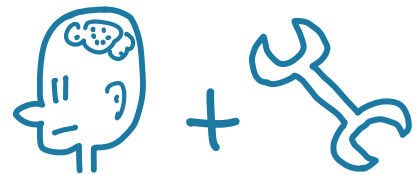
At the same time, these institutions are tasked with **balancing rapid growth with long-term sustainability**. As they expand their research profiles and international engagement, they must also ensure that quality assurance, governance, and support structures evolve in tandem.

Despite these challenges, young research universities bring with them a distinctive strength: **institutional agility**. Their flexibility, openness to innovation, and forward-looking orientation enable them to respond swiftly to emerging needs, whether societal, scientific, or policy-driven, and to play a vital role for the future as well as present of higher education.

YERUN: 24 stories united in one vision

While it would be natural to follow a reflection on challenges with a list of opportunities, the most compelling way to understand the contribution of young research universities is through their own stories. The following section brings together the stories of YERUN's 24 member institutions, each of them offering a unique lens on what it means to be young, research-driven and committed to impact. Through these narratives, the opportunities emerge organically: in the actions taken, the choices made, and the values upheld. Toward the close of this journey, we will return to explore those opportunities more explicitly, along with a collective vision for the way forward in the form of 10 wishes for the future.

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| 1. Brunel University London | 9. UC3M – Universidad Carlos III de Madrid | 17. University of Konstanz |
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| 3. Malmö University | 10. UiT The Arctic University of Norway | 19. University of Potsdam |
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| 7. Tallinn University | 14. University of Eastern Finland | 23. University of Stirling |
| 8. Tor Vergata University of Rome | 15. University of Essex | 24. University of Ulm |
| | 16. University of Klagenfurt | |



1. Brunel University of London

Bridging Academic Rigour and Practical Innovation

In 2026, Brunel will celebrate 60 years as a university. From its foundation, Brunel has combined academic excellence with entrepreneurial thinking, inspired by the pioneering spirit of Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

In 2026, Brunel will be celebrating 60 years as a university. However, our rich history traces back to 1798 through our predecessor colleges: Borough Road College, Maria Grey College, Shoreditch College, the West London Institute of Higher Education, Acton Technical College and finally, Brunel College. Since being established in 1966, during a period which was driven by Harold Wilson's government to be at the vanguard of the 'white heat' of technology, Brunel has risen to impressive heights, and our reputation has grown year on year. Now a member of the University of London (UoL) federation, our unique approach is to combine academic rigour with practical and entrepreneurial teaching and learning which was pioneered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel himself.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859) was one of the **great British engineers** of the 19th Century who left an impressive and memorable legacy. Isambard was born into an industrious family in 1806, with his mother Sophia Kingdom working for the Royal Navy and Father Marc Brunel being a prominent French engineer. Isambard took on formal training as an engineer and went on to build twenty-five railway lines, over one hundred bridges (including five suspension bridges), eight pier and dock systems, three ships, and a prefabricated army field hospital. In addition, Isambard was a keen social engineer and built many housing estates, churches and hospitals which benefitted local communities.

Fast-forward to today, our distinct foundations remain at the heart of the university. Brunel has a rich history of world-leading research, innovation and teaching excellence which provides our students with an outstanding, research-led education that sets them up to excel in their future careers. Brunel

University is recognised as a research-intensive institution with a strong commitment to producing high-quality, impactful research. The majority of its work submitted to the UK's national research assessment exercise was rated as world-leading or internationally excellent. This exercise also looks at the impact of our research on addressing the needs of the economy and society, and Brunel is one the UK's leading winners of funding for university industry links.

Brunel excels in **graduate employability** and provides students with a research-informed education, geared towards helping them to build a career when they leave. This applies as much to the 'sandwich degrees' that offer industry placement, with which Brunel is famously associated, and to our state-of-the-art focus on craft as a central element of subjects such as Design, Theatre or Creative Writing. What marks Brunel out is the combination of this research, excellence in innovation and focus on real-world relevance and application. We count among our staff two of the 54 United Nations Special Rapporteurs, the UK's top-cited Computer Scientist and two winners of major literary prizes.

Our single, suburban campus sits in an economic hotspot in West London, on the edge of a global city and just minutes away from one of the world's most directly and internationally connected airports, London Heathrow. Brunel is one of the most international universities with staff, students, and alumni from all over the world, with a rich and **diverse community** which reflects the enormous breadth of social, cultural, educational and political identities.

With many staff and students from across Europe, Brunel remains committed to pan-European collaboration in education and research. As such, our membership of YERUN embeds us into a network of like-minded universities facilitating **cross-border collaboration and cooperation**, enabling us to be both innovative and resilient in addressing global challenges today and in the future.



2. Maastricht University

The European university of the Netherlands:
A caring and sustainable university

Founded in 1976 to help revitalise southern Limburg, Maastricht University has grown into a distinctly European university, known for its international outlook, problem-based learning, and deep societal engagement.

Maastricht University (UM) first opened its doors in 1976, born from the need to revitalise the southern Limburg region following the closure of its coal mines. Established in response to economic upheaval, UM sought to transform the area by stimulating innovation, economic development, and a promising vision for the future.

From its inception, UM, the youngest Dutch public university, stood out with a distinctive **problem-based approach to education** and a clear commitment to international collaboration. Strategically situated in the heart of Europe, at the intersection of three borders, UM enthusiastically embraced international partnerships as essential for delivering top-quality education and research and contributing meaningfully to society. Founded in a uniquely European region, UM has developed into "the European university of the Netherlands," a title reflecting its enduring identity and ambition to welcome students, academics, and partners from diverse cultures and backgrounds. This vision is clearly articulated in UM's latest strategic programme, launched in 2021: "The European university of the Netherlands: A caring and sustainable university." These are not mere words. For UM, being a caring and sustainable university means cultivating a close-knit, engaged, and resilient community. UM's members form a truly international, diverse, and inclusive group, actively contributing to an open and inspiring academic culture. Wellbeing and sustainable employability are clear priorities; UM seeks to empower students and staff to thrive academically, professionally, and personally in an environment rooted in respectful dialogue and mutual enrichment.

Approaching its 50th anniversary in 2026, UM continues to reinforce its societal mission. It is expanding its efforts in cross-border regional education while also developing a multi-campus European University in partnership with the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance. Furthermore, UM is an important partner in the **Einstein Telescope initiative**, which seeks to mobilise knowledge, enhance regional and international collaboration, and promote scientific excellence. UM works closely with regional partners in the border region, a prospective location for the telescope. Maastricht University also hosts Studio Europa Maastricht, a centre fostering academic research, public debate, and dialogue around European integration and the legacy of the Maastricht Treaty.

Five strategic themes underline UM's core priorities: promoting an inclusive academic community; actively contributing to prosperity and development in the Euregion; enriching learning through innovative Problem-Based Learning (PBL); advancing socially relevant research built upon **open science** principles; and expanding its role as a network-oriented institution strongly connected within European and global contexts.

One of UM's key innovations is its pioneering problem-based educational approach, where students engage directly with real-world issues. By bridging theory and practice, students develop into collaborative and critical thinkers equipped to tackle complex societal challenges. Complementing its educational innovation, UM champions open science practices, encouraging transparency, accessibility, knowledge sharing, and collaboration extending well beyond campus borders.

Valorisation remains fundamental to UM's mission: it ensures that research translates into tangible societal and economic benefits. Through close cooperation with businesses, governments, Maastricht University Medical Centre+, and the four

Brightlands innovation campuses, UM continuously fosters innovation, **regional prosperity**, and **wellbeing**.

Young research universities can take pride in their agility, openness, inquisitiveness, and experimental spirit, qualities uniquely positioning them

to address contemporary global challenges and pioneer meaningful solutions. UM is strongly committed to collaboration with its fellow members within networks such as YERUN.



3. Malmö University

Redefining the university: equal, engaged, evolving

From its foundation in 1998, Malmö University has challenged academic convention, prioritising inclusion, societal collaboration, and interdisciplinary knowledge for change.

When Malmö University College was founded in 1998, two key principles shaped its mission: recruiting students from **non-traditional study backgrounds** and breaking away from traditional scientific disciplinary structures. These foundational ideals have guided the university's strategic direction from the start and continue to define its identity today.

After only 20 years as a university college the institution was granted full research university status in 2018. Since then, we have worked strategically with increasing research quality and research activities, including internationalisation, doctoral education, research support and research infrastructure. These efforts have proven to be successful.

According to the current Malmö University strategy for 2023–2025 our vision is to contribute to a more **sustainable and equal society** through research-based knowledge, critical reflection, and readiness to act. Our foundation relies on human, democratic and academic values. Our objectives are to provide education and research of the highest quality in collaboration with other societal actors. The university strategy is thus still in line with its original mission.

Malmö University offers research-based general and professional educational programmes and emphasises external engagement through comprehensive cooperation with the public and the private sector as well as the civil society. The education is characterised by internationalisation as well as collaboration with the society around us.

Research at Malmö University is **transnational and interdisciplinary**, takes on original research questions and future societal challenges, and works in collaboration with other societal actors to produce, disseminate and utilise knowledge. Research is conducted and developed dynamically within coherent and border-crossing knowledge environments at the departments. These environments include education in all three cycles as well as research. To promote excellence, Malmö university funds university-wide, interdisciplinary research centres. The research centres bring together researchers from various departments across the university with the aim to take on complex societal challenges and work closely together with associated stakeholders in society.

From 2025, the **research centres** at Malmö University are: Biofilms – research centre for biointerfaces, Centre for Sexology and Sexuality Studies, Imagining and Co-Creating Futures, Institute for Urban Research, Malmö Institute for Migration Studies, Promoting citizen health through collaborative practices, Sustainable Digitalisation Research Centre, The Research Centre Literacy and Inclusive Teaching, and Centre for Work Life and Evaluation Studies.

Without Malmö University a lot of **first-generation academics** would not have gone into higher education and the city of Malmö would not have transformed from a poor, industrial city to the vibrant, super-diverse knowledge-intensive hub for innovation and growth that it has become today.

Malmö University's relatively short journey, from a newly established university college (1998) to a full research university (2018) and up to the present day, has been marked by a high pace of development. Since becoming a full research university, the focus has been on strengthening research, doctoral education, and the research-based foundation of teaching in undergraduate and graduate education. Five academic values have guided this development: **academic freedom, integrity, responsibility, quality, and collegiality**.

In line with the academic values, Malmö University strives to impact society through **social and technological innovations** as well as through providing a critical voice in support of an equal and sustainable society. Demonstrating a wide range of impacts, Malmö University stands out as a **boundary-crossing, creative and collaborative university**.

Academic impact is illustrated through the university's ability to attract competitive research grants and through having a stable proportion of highly cited publications, aligning with the global average of 10%. The research outcomes, along with their connections to the university's educational offerings, are often produced in interdisciplinary contexts, meaning that the university's strengths are in bringing perspectives together for novel academic and societal impact.



4. Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

A modern university with a local and global mission

With roots stretching back decades, NCU is one of Poland's leading universities, where research excellence meets regional development and international reach.

Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU) in Toruń and Bydgoszcz is one of the leading academic centres in Poland. We combine tradition with modernity, merging high-level scientific research with a real impact on the social and economic life of the region and global cooperation. As a comprehensive university, NCU conducts research and education in almost all fields of science, offering an interdisciplinary approach and wide development opportunities.

NCU consistently develops modern research infrastructures, creating a friendly and inspiring environment for scientific work. Since 2015, NCU has held the prestigious HR Excellence in Research award, which confirms high standards of personnel policy and support for researchers.

Our infrastructure includes some of the best facilities, such as the **NCU Polar Station in Spitsbergen** – one of the few places in Europe conducting year-round research in the Arctic; two University Hospitals – facilities for clinical research and practical education; the Art Conservation Centre – a unique place in the country combining science with the protection of cultural heritage; the Institute of Veterinary Medicine – modern laboratories and clinical facilities; and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Modern Technologies – supporting projects in the fields of exact and natural sciences.

On the **European Research Infrastructure Roadmap**, we have the National Laboratory for Atomic, Molecular, and Optical Physics (KL FAMO), a leading centre for experimental physics in Europe; E-RIHS.pl, which is part of the European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science; and the NCU Interdisciplinary Astronomical Observatory in Piwnice, with the largest radio telescope in Poland and advanced observational infrastructure.

NCU combines science with real action. Our academic clinics are an example of the university's direct involvement in the life of the region. Among them are the Archival Emergency Service, Equality Clinic #Inclusive, Water Management Clinic, Mural Design Clinic, Intellectual Property and Standardisation Law Clinic, University Legal Clinic, Website Creation and Audit Clinic, Student Health Clinic, and University Prevention and Assistance Clinic SYNERGIA.

These initiatives show that science can and should have practical applications. NCU leads a team of international **civic engagement** specialists within the Young Universities for the Future of Europe alliance (YUFE). Together, we develop and test various models of cooperation between academia and local communities, strengthening mutual ties and benefiting from each other's experience. We also work towards the reform of research evaluation as a member of the COARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment), promoting qualitative, sustainable, and fair approaches to assessing scientific achievements.

NCU is an **innovation engine** for the Kuyavia and Pomerania regions. We collaborate with companies, local governments, and social institutions, implementing projects in new technologies, law, health, education, and culture. Our experts participate in designing urban strategies, advising businesses, and supporting the development of local initiatives.

With a strong scientific background, modern infrastructure, and a growing network of international partnerships, NCU is a university that not only prepares for the future, but it also actively co-creates it. It is a place where interdisciplinarity meets social engagement, and local identity connects with global responsibility.

By joining YERUN, we have gained the support of partner universities and the opportunity to present our perspective as a Young European Research University from Poland, which fills us with pride.

strategic cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa and Latin America. In the Mediterranean region, the University has expanded its presence through the opening of a new campus in Cairo. In Europe, NOVA is a member of EUTOPIA, the European University Alliance of excellence, which is composed of ten top universities and four international associate members.

With a strong focus on **pedagogical innovation, knowledge transfer**, and **entrepreneurship**, NOVA leads projects that cross disciplinary boundaries and address the major challenges of the 21st century, from environmental sustainability to global health, from justice to technology.

With nearly 52 years of history, NOVA remains institutionally young but academically mature, combining the tradition of the university with a forward-looking vision. Its mission is clear: to educate leaders and professionals prepared to think critically, act responsibly, and contribute actively to a more sustainable, equitable, and informed world.

In a nutshell, NOVA's innovative ethos is strongly aligned with its active role within YERUN. As a committed member of the network, NOVA strives to contribute mean-

ingfully to its strategic priorities, including research excellence, open science, sustainability, and academic mobility.

To illustrate this, NOVA has positioned itself at the forefront of open science promotion. Through the EU-funded OPUS project, the University has piloted progressive reforms in research assessment to incentivise open and transparent scientific practices. NOVA researchers have also been actively involved in YERUN's Research and Mobility Awards as well as in the Open Science Awards, underscoring the institution's dedication to international research engagement.

In recent years, NOVA has hosted key YERUN events, such as the Research Workshop on Health and Ageing and the General Assembly in October 2023, focused on talent development and innovation in research. NOVA benefits significantly from its membership in YERUN. The network facilitates collaborative research, enhances international visibility, supports academic mobility, and provides a platform for shaping European higher education policy.



5. NOVA University Lisbon

A young University with a global vision

Founded during a time of change, NOVA University Lisbon was created to break with tradition and build a forward-looking, globally connected university rooted in innovation, interdisciplinarity, and societal impact.

NOVA University Lisbon, officially known as *Universidade NOVA de Lisboa*, was founded on August 11, 1973, during a period of educational reform in Portugal. It emerged as a response to the growing demand for higher education and was designed from the outset to be a modern, dynamic institution with a strong emphasis on innovation, interdisciplinarity, and internationalisation. Unlike older Portuguese universities, NOVA was created with a forward-thinking mission: to break traditional academic norms and provide flexible, research-oriented education aligned with contemporary societal needs, setting it apart from older and more traditional Portuguese universities.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, NOVA expanded significantly, building its unique identity within the European higher education landscape. Comprising 9 academic units, including schools and faculties of recognised excellence in the fields of Social Sciences and Humanities, Health, Science and Engineering, Law, Economics, and Management, the University has affirmed its innovative academic model, based on **interdisciplinarity, socially-oriented research**, and the education of **global citizens**.

Today, NOVA stands out as an institution with internationally competitive research and teaching excellence, able to ensure high levels of professional success for its students. Its international focus has been directed towards a policy of talent and brand recognition in several key regions. In the South Atlantic, NOVA has established





6. Paris Dauphine University – PSL

A university shaped by reform, defined by relevance

Founded in 1968 amid social transformation, Dauphine-PSL combines academic excellence with innovation and strong ties to the socio-economic world.

Founded in 1968 in the wake of educational reform and societal transformation, Université Paris Dauphine-PSL was established with a clear mission: to create a new kind of higher education institution one that would blend academic excellence with the realities of the socio-economic world. Born out of the former NATO headquarters, Dauphine was conceived as a university that would break with tradition, specialising in organisational and decision sciences and developing a unique interdisciplinary approach.

Dauphine's foundation was grounded in the belief that education should not only reflect the needs of society but also help shape it. Its identity is defined by innovation, uniqueness, and strong ties to the professional world. Over the years, Dauphine has positioned itself as a leader in research and education, pioneering new teaching formats, fostering international partnerships, and **nurturing the next generation of thinkers, leaders, and changemakers**.

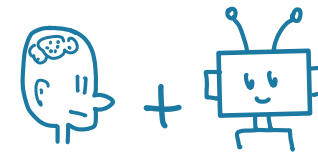
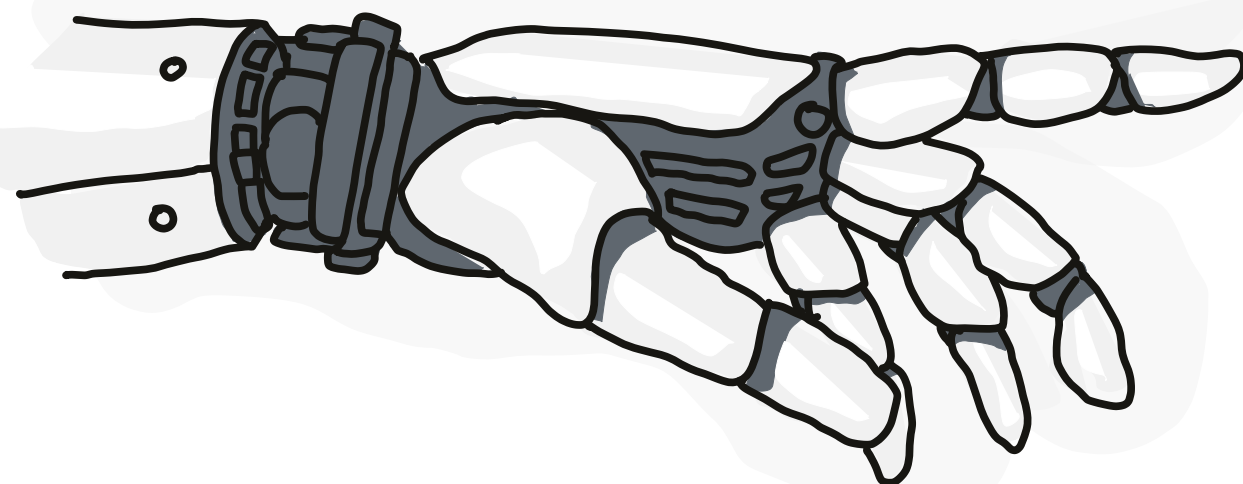
Today, the university is home to almost 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, representing over 90 nationalities; and over 4,000 continuing education students (France's leading university centre for continuing education). Its programmes span from economics, management and law to computer science, political sci-

ence, sociology and mathematics. As a member of the Université PSL, Dauphine combines the openness of a public university with the rigour and selectivity of French *grandes écoles*.

It is one of the very few institutions worldwide to hold the triple international accreditation (EQUIS, AACSB, and AMBA) a testament to the university's commitment to academic excellence, continuous improvement, and international engagement.

Dauphine demonstrates its impact in multiple ways. Academically, it is home to excellent research centres, doctoral schools, and chairs of excellence. Socially, it promotes **inclusion and openness to the world, environmental responsibility, and gender equality**, with concrete initiatives shaping campus life and curriculum. Economically, Dauphine's alumni network is a powerhouse across industries in France and internationally, contributing to innovation and entrepreneurship.

Dauphine is constantly evolving and is resolutely international in outlook, as demonstrated by its presence in London, Tunis, with two international campuses, and its delocalised courses in Madrid, Frankfurt and a new initiative in Dakar. Dauphine is also launching **interdisciplinary programmes** in AI, climate economics, and digital transformation; and creating new forms of dialogue between students, researchers, and society. Its story is still being written, shaped by a spirit of renewal and a commitment to shaping the future."



7. Tallinn University

Rooted in education, driving digital futures

With a legacy dating back to the previous century, Tallinn University has grown into Estonia's most agile, interdisciplinary institution, combining social science, culture and digital leadership.

Tallinn University (TLU) is a modern and dynamic research university with a leading role in promoting an intelligent lifestyle, encouraging critical thinking, lifelong learning, and a holistic approach to well-being. It seeks to cultivate not only knowledgeable professionals but also ethical, engaged citizens.

TLU, as it exists today, was established on March 18, 2005, through the merger of several universities and research institutions in Tallinn. Its roots, however, extend back to 1919 with the founding of the Tallinn Teachers' Seminar, the predecessor of Tallinn Pedagogical University. This strong legacy in **educational sciences** remains a core pillar of the university.

The merger brought together diverse institutions, creating a distinctly interdisciplinary environment. Research at TLU is organised around five broad focus fields: Educational Innovation, Digital and Media Culture, Cultural Competences, Healthy and Sustainable Lifestyle, and Society and Open Governance. These focus areas create a framework for interdisciplinary collaboration and ensure that research outputs have both scientific value

and societal relevance. TLU participates in numerous European Commission, EU regional and Erasmus programme projects, both as a leading partner and as a partner. TLU has been represented in the world university rankings since 2019 as research intensive university.

TLU serves as a national and regional catalyst for digital transformation. Leveraging Estonia's global reputation as a digital society, the university integrates information and communication technology expertise with disciplines such as education, media, governance, and health, creating unique profiles for its graduates and research projects. Its role in the digital sphere is not limited to technological advancement but extends to **human-centred digitalisation**, emphasising ethical innovation and inclusive digital societies.

Situated in Tallinn, a city where medieval charm meets cutting-edge innovation, the university benefits from a dynamic urban environment. Finally, Tallinn University is unique in the way it combines agility with ambition. It is large enough to offer a comprehensive array of disciplines but compact enough to remain flexible, responsive, and student centred. This agility enables the university to quickly adapt to emerging trends and maintain its leadership in shaping the future of education, research, and societal development.





8. Tor Vergata University of Rome

Today, the University of tomorrow: innovation, internationalisation and sustainability

Conceived as a forward-looking campus on the outskirts of Rome, Tor Vergata University has grown into a dynamic centre of research, sustainability, and international exchange, where education meets the evolving needs of a global society.

The story of Tor Vergata University of Rome is one of a clear vision and a persistent commitment towards international openness and sustainability. Founded in 1982, Tor Vergata was conceived as a modern institution inspired by a campus model, with a sprawling 600-hectare site on the outskirts of Rome. From its inception, the university set out to provide high-quality education that would prepare students for the evolving demands of society and the global workforce.

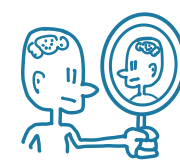
From the very beginning, Tor Vergata distinguished itself as a dynamic centre for research and innovation. Its campus became **home to leading national and international research institutions**, including the National Research Council (CNR), the Italian Space Agency (ASI) and INFN (National Institute for Nuclear Physics), fostering a vibrant environment for scientific discovery and technological advancement. The university takes part in major EU Horizon Europe programmes, collaborating on research themes ranging from AI and cybersecurity to climate change and sustainable technologies, with advanced facilities in Biomedicine and Nanotechnology labs carrying out cutting-edge research in molecular medicine and nanomaterials. Through its Technology Transfer Office, Tor Vergata supports innovation and entrepreneurship with many spin-offs and start-ups in the fields of biotech, green energy, and ICT.

Internationalisation has always been a cornerstone of Tor Vergata's identity. Through its International Division, the university actively promotes cross-cultural integration and academic cooperation, running numerous bilateral and multilateral research and teaching programmes. Tor Vergata is committed to being a hub for European and global collaboration, organising workshops, conferences, summer schools, and joint research activities that bring together students and faculty from diverse

backgrounds. Moreover, its academic structure encompassing six schools, offers a wide range of programmes in economics, law, engineering, humanities, medicine, and the sciences, with several courses taught entirely in English to attract students from around the world.

Equally central to Tor Vergata's mission is its dedication to sustainability. The university aligns its research, teaching, and third mission activities with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, striving to contribute to social, technological, and organisational innovation that benefits both local and global communities. This commitment is reflected in its **Interdisciplinary Committee for Sustainable Development**, which coordinates sustainability representatives from each department to ensure that sustainability goals are pursued across all university functions. The university publishes an annual Sustainability Report to transparently communicate its progress and engage stakeholders in its sustainability journey. On campus, Tor Vergata prioritises environmental protection and resource efficiency. It uses 100% renewable electricity, has reduced both energy and water consumption, and implements specific projects such as the SEDIA project (solar-powered outdoor benches), the CARTA project (circular economy and paper recycling), and the GOCCIA project (reducing single-use plastics by promoting reusable bottles and installing water dispensers). The university's 83-hectare Botanical Garden supports biodiversity, research, and CO₂ reduction, while a photovoltaic system helps generate renewable energy on-site. Additionally, the university is involved in integrated urban plans for the redevelopment of its surrounding area, focusing on sustainable mobility, energy-efficient buildings, and the creation of green and public spaces to enhance community well-being.

Today, Tor Vergata stands as a leading example of a young, forward-thinking university. It is recognised not only for its academic excellence and research achievements but also for its focus on international engagement and sustainable growth, truly embodying its motto: "Today, the University of tomorrow".



9. UC3M – Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

Excellence in motion: a model for modern universities

Since 1989, UC3M has emerged as one of Europe's most globally engaged universities, valuing academic quality, employability and institutional innovation.

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M) is a prestigious Spanish public university renowned for its excellence in research, teaching and innovation. A leader in employability, it is recognised as one of the best public universities in Europe distinguished by its strong **international presence** and its **commitment to innovation and the improvement of society through cutting-edge research**.

Established in 1989, it has four campuses: Getafe, Leganés, Colmenarejo and Madrid-Puerta de Toledo.

Our university holds a prominent position in international and national rankings, placing us among the best Spanish and European universities. Our commitment to academic excellence and research has been validated by prestigious accreditations that endorse our high-quality standards.

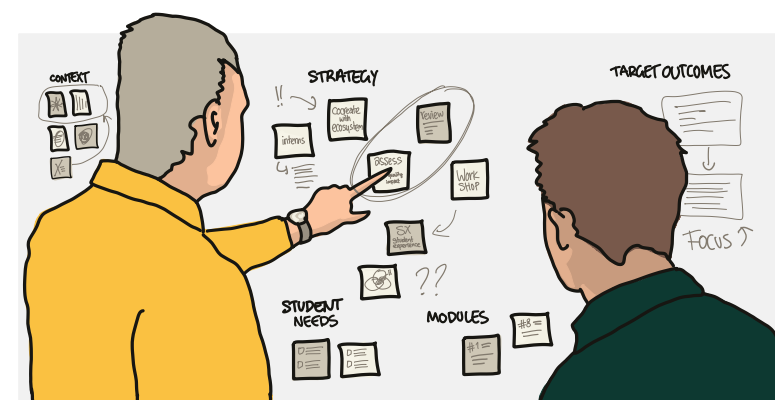
It ranks among the best universities in the world according to the QS World University Rankings, and it is among the best higher education institutions in the world, according to the latest edition of the Global University Employability Ranking and Survey (GEURS). For these reasons, many students from other countries choose UC3M for pursuing their studies.

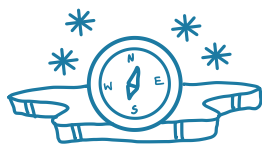
UC3M offers a wide range of undergraduate and master's degree programmes in Social Sciences and Law; Documentation, Humanities and Communication; Engineering, recognised with the prestigious EUR-ACE quality certification, and in Health Sciences, recently implemented. More than 76% of these programmes are taught in English.

The university boasts more than 760 exchange agreements with top universities worldwide, facilitating student and staff mobility within a framework of international cooperation. UC3M is one of the Spanish and European universities that promotes more Erasmus + mobility, and it plays an active participation in the YUFE Alliance, promoting collaboration among young European universities.

Professional career development is another of UC3M's hallmarks, which makes it a leading university in terms of employability. With an employability rate of 88.4% among graduates. The university collaborates with more than 5,000 companies and institutions, offering solid internship opportunities and access to job opportunities. Students also enjoy a dynamic university life with modern academic and sports facilities and many cultural activities.

UC3M has been recognised as one of the most internationalised universities in Madrid and Europe, consolidating its reputation as the best option for students seeking a dynamic, globally connected educational environment, with great possibilities in research and academic excellence.





10. UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Knowledge for the North, impact for the world

Established to serve Norway's Arctic region, UiT has become a global leader in cold-climate research, community development and international collaboration.

UiT The Arctic University of Norway (UiT) is the northernmost university in the world. UiT's main campus is in Tromsø and expands across 11 different campuses throughout Northern Norway. The university is relatively young and was formally established in 1968, although it did not have a physical campus until 1972, when it was inaugurated as The University of Tromsø.

Since 1918, both politicians and business leaders in Northern Norway had made several attempts to create a **framework for establishing higher education** in Tromsø. A key reason was the significant shortage of qualified civil servants, scientists and leaders in both the private and public sectors. From the outset, there was potential to build on existing academic institutions, such as Tromsø Teacher's College (1848), Tromsø Museum (1872) and the Geophysical Institute (1918), which already had professional researchers in disciplines such as pedagogy, archaeology, botany, zoology, meteorology, geology and oceanography. Later, in Narvik, a nursing education programme was established at the local hospital (1941), followed by the establishment of Narvik Technical School (1955), which enabled the education of engineers in Northern Norway.

The potential for building on this expertise to establish a new university, however, were largely ignored by the majority of Norwegian politicians over four decades. They did not consider it necessary to invest in a university in a sparsely populated region with a limited economy that was mainly based on fisheries and agriculture.

This situation changed in the early 1960s, when there was a sudden increase in the number of students completing secondary high school. Consequently, there was a pressing need to expand the capacity of the university sector to accommodate the growing student population across the country.

At the same time, there was a shift in how higher education and research were perceived at a political level. New research strongly suggested that universities were not only important drivers culturally and scientifically, but universities also fostered growth, created new opportunities, and were a prerequisite for increased development.

To create an equitable framework that ensured opportunities for growth, better access to education for young people, and a supply of qualified personnel for the labour market, Norwegian politicians had to act swiftly and decisively. After several years of political deliberations and planning, King Olav V was finally able to lay the foundation stone for UiT in 1971.

In the same period, in the Arctic regions of Sweden and Finland, new universities were also founded. The University of Oulu (1958), Umeå University (1965), Luleå University (1971) and the University of Lapland (1979) were established for the same reasons which drove UiT into existence. All universities established in the Arctic regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland are now members of the alliance The Arctic Six. This entails collaboration on research, education and innovation.

In recent decades, the academic community in Tromsø was integrated with campuses in other towns in Northern Norway. This included the merger of UiT with the University College of Tromsø (2009), the University College of Finnmark (2013), the University College of Harstad (2016), and the University College of Narvik (2016).

The vision of UiT is to be a **driving force** for the development of the High North. UiT is a comprehensive university and offers a broad and diverse portfolio of research and education, providing an interdisciplinary advantage that benefits the region's diverse population as well as the private and public sectors in Northern Norway and the rest of the world. UiT has had a major impact on its surroundings. Over 50 years, more than 60,000 people have taken a higher degree at UiT. These include 8,000 nurses, 2 500 medical doctors, 5,000 teachers, 4,000 kindergarten teachers, 2,000 lawyers, 6,000 economists and 12,000 engineers. Every year, more than 110

PhD-candidates are educated at UiT. 70 per cent of the graduates stay and pursue careers in the Northern Norway.

UiT has always been an international institution, and around 10 per cent of all staff and students at the university are international. To stronger impact the world, UiT have chosen to prioritise collaboration with European universities through the EUGLOH, and YERUN-alliances, and to strengthen our position in the Arctic, we're actively participating in the UArctic network and the Nordic Arctic Six alliance.

UiT is a top five global leader in Arctic research. Being a comprehensive university differentiates us from other, major Arctic research institutions because our competence in Arctic research and innovation spans all disciplines from biosciences, fisheries and economics, engineering, technology, fine arts, health sciences, humanities and social sciences. We own and operate **unique research infrastructures**, such as field-stations, research-vessels, databases and large-scale research-instruments in the Arctic. These infrastructures, our access to areas in the Arctic that are hard to get access to, the competence of our research-groups and our network of local and international partners, makes us capable of solving challenges that few other institutions can. UiT aspires to continue to be a key provider of knowledge about and for the Arctic region, and to keep developing sustainable solutions for the world.



11. University of Antwerp

Even a young university can have an international impact

The University of Antwerp (UAntwerp) is more than an academic institution: it's a dynamic institute that shapes the future through groundbreaking research, student-centred education approaches and a strong social commitment. Its story is one of transformation, daring decisions and visionaries who looked beyond the present.

UAntwerp's roots go back to business colleges, deep in the nineteenth century. In the second half of the previous century, this gave rise to RUCA, UFSIA and UIA, three respected institutions, each with their own academic strongpoints. For years, these universities mainly worked alongside one another, but they did lay the foundation for what would grow into an internationally respected research and education institute. They shared the same ambition: to create a university that would lead the way in knowledge and innovation. The merger in 2003 wasn't

just an administrative decision; it was a turning point, the beginning of a new chapter in which UAntwerp would establish itself as a leading university.

As the university grew, it embraced change. The integration of new faculties in 2013, offering programmes in areas such as product development, architecture, engineering, applied linguistics, rehabilitation sciences and physiotherapy, strengthened UAntwerp's reputation as a **diverse** and **forward-looking institution**. The university had sky-high ambitions for these new fields of study: to offer world-class education and challenge the establishment.

In the bustling city of Antwerp, the university operates at the intersection of culture, economics and international cooperation, giving students and researchers the opportunity to flourish in a unique environment. The **city** itself functions **as the ideal laboratory**, as evidenced by

its numerous citizen science projects. From the vaginal microbiome in women (Isala) and strawberry plants and air quality (AIRbezen) to the flow of traffic in the streets (Straatvinken), citizens and UAntwerp researchers are working together to solve scientific problems. Many of these projects have been replicated abroad.

The university's motto, *Let's shape the future*, isn't just a slogan, it's a call to action. Through free and innovative research, student-centred education and community service, UAntwerp actively contributes to a more sustainable, democratic and inclusive world.

It goes without saying that putting UAntwerp on the world map required vision and ambition. A pivotal moment in the international story of UAntwerp came with Rector Alain Verschoren, who wanted to strengthen the voice of young research universities. Verschoren, rector from 2008 to 2016, realised how important it was that institutions such as UAntwerp played a role in European higher education policy. It's no coincidence, therefore, that he cofounded YERUN. Thanks to his inspiration, YERUN has grown into a paragon of open science, innovative research collaboration and mobility of students and scientists. His commitment to creating stronger ties between younger universities transformed UAntwerp's role in the European academic world.

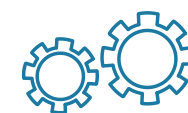
Even today, Verschoren's legacy shines through in the strong international network that UAntwerp has built. Of course, this success cannot be entirely attributed to one

person. The first rector of UAntwerp, Professor Francis Van Loon, oversaw the historic merger and guided the university through its early years. After Verschoren's term of office, the baton was passed to Professor Herman Van Goethem (2016–2024), a lawyer and historian who was committed to inclusivity and democratic values, giving UAntwerp a voice in the social debate. At the end of 2024, Professor Herwig Leirs took over the rectorship, with a continued focus on academic excellence and international cooperation.

Every day, UAntwerp proves that young universities have true impact. In 2025, the university positioned tenth in the number of patents applied for by European universities, the result of great ambitions combined with a roll-up-your-sleeves mentality.

The university's vision goes beyond the classroom, beyond the city and beyond national borders. This makes it an institute that's not only rooted in Antwerp, but also has a worldwide influence, as illustrated by its membership of the European University Alliances. And, not to forget, of YUFE. As a proud member of this alliance, UAntwerp works day after day to help build a truly European university.

By empowering students, stimulating groundbreaking research and actively engaging with society, UAntwerp is doing more than just shaping the future: it is determining it.



12. University of Bremen

A spirit of reform, a legacy of excellence

Founded in 1971 as a bold educational experiment, the University of Bremen continues to embrace reform, excellence, and societal impact as pillars of its identity.

The University of Bremen was founded in the early 1970s, a time when the student movement, in particular, had triggered important social reforms that led to changes in politics and institutions.

When the first semester began on October 19, 1971, the reform university had just 459 students, most of them teacher education students. The university was the talk of the nation. This was down to the fact that the "Bremen Model" was practiced on campus – a system that broke with some ideas of the traditional university. Many of the academic establishment regarded it as too radical, which is exactly why many young people found it so attractive.

After various reforms during the beginning stages, an important phase of consolidation and growth followed in the 1980s. In 1982, a cooperation contract was signed with the newly established Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research (AWI) in Bremerhaven. By doing this, the university laid the foundations for its broad **expertise in marine and climate** research, which has been expanded over the years.

The university also broadened its research and teaching base with new faculties such as Production Engineering (1983) and Geosciences (1986). In 1986, the University of Bremen was accepted into the German Research Foundation (DFG), and in 1988, it demonstrated its continued and outstanding strength in attracting third-party funding with the establishment of one of many later Collaborative Research Centres.

From 1988 onwards, the Centre of Applied Space Technology and Microgravity's (ZARM) Drop Tower, which received its 146 meter "crown" in 1990, was constructed on the Technology Park Bremen campus. Today, more than 500 high-tech companies and more than 50 research institutes are part of the Technology Park.

The university has always gone down innovative paths in matters of structural modernisation and been connected to the pioneering spirit of the early days in this way. In 2001, the university was the first in Germany to introduce the tenure track system for the support of assistant professors: This was the so-called "Bremen perspective." The switching of the degrees into bachelor's and master's programmes was also completed particularly quickly in Bremen.

The university has also been a pioneer in the field of **diversity and gender equality**. For example, the university's gender-equality concept has ranked at the top in the so-called "Professorinnenprogramm" (Female Professors Program) of the German Federal Ministry for Research and Education (BMBF) since 2008. The latest gender-equality concept entitled "Gleichstellungskonzept für Parität" was rated as being excellent in 2024.

Intense **support of early-career academics**, internationalisation, and the shaping of the research profile elevated the regional and international visibility of the university and was finally rewarded with great recognition. Together with numerous partners from the fields of science, politics, economy, and culture, the university won the title of "City of Science 2005" for Bremen State. The university also celebrated great success in the three rounds of the Excellence Initiative and the subsequent German Excellence Strategy – for example for the Cluster of Excellence at MARUM (Centre for Marine Environmental Sciences) at the University of Bremen, which is still in existence today. The university also held the title "University of Excellence" for several years. In 2013, a special award for the extraordinary supervision of international students followed: The Stifterverband and German Academic Exchange Service honoured the University of Bremen as "International University 2012."

With over 100-degree programmes – from the deep sea into space – the choice of subjects at the University of Bremen is broad. The study programmes are designed to involve students right from the start: In the search for answers to the questions of our time and new insights.

As one of the leading European research universities, the University of Bremen maintains cooperations with universities and research institutes across the world. Regionally, the university is part of the U.Bremen Research Alliance and also founded the Northwest Alliance with the University of Oldenburg in 2025. The challenges of the future can only be successfully tackled together. The University of Bremen has recognised this and has significantly expanded its international network. It is a founding member of the YERUN network, from which the YUFE university alliance emerged in 2019.

The University of Bremen will continue on its path. As a learning organisation, it will continue to strive to constantly redefine its role in the current and future academic landscape. In line with the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals, the University of Bremen pursues a holistic approach, continues to develop its structures, and has adopted a university-wide sustainability strategy for 2025.



13. University of Cyprus

From national hope to regional beacon

Created in the early 1990s, the University of Cyprus was born from national aspirations and has since become a centre of scientific excellence in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

It was the late 1980s, and Cyprus stood at a pivotal point in its history. Still finding its voice on the global stage and undergoing significant economic and social transformation, the country needed more than economic growth, it needed a place where ideas could flourish, a beacon for research, education, and cultural development. The founding vision behind the University of Cyprus (UCY) was to establish itself as a Pioneer Research Institution, focused on achieving International Scientific Recognition in the European Higher Education Area, offering Competitive Programmes and to become a Centre of Excellence in the wider Euro – Mediterranean Region. The first higher academic institution in the country offering tuition-free university education to Cypriots.

In 1989, that vision took physical form with the establishment of UCY. Three years later, in 1992, UCY opened its doors, welcoming its first students: to define higher education on the island, to foster an inclusive academic culture, and to generate knowledge that transcends borders. And thus, UCY started building thereon a solid and bright future.

From its inception, UCY was defined by three core values: academic excellence, international orientation, and social contribution. Its extrovert nature and international mindset paved the way for UCY's involvement in European research networks, including YERUN, where it stands out as a dynamic institution. Today, UCY embodies leading research centres in fields like archaeology, energy, physics, biomedicine, natural resource management and more.

*"The University of Cyprus was created with the belief that **knowledge is the foundation of a just, innovative, and prosperous society**,"* says Professor Tasos Christofides, Rector of UCY. "In joining YERUN, we found like-minded partners who share our commitment to excellence and to the transformative power of education."

But UCY's impact goes beyond labs and lecture halls. It has become a cornerstone of Cypriot society, a space where culture, dialogue, trust, and civic responsibility are nurtured. It has played a crucial role in shaping public discourse, from environmental sustainability to the reunification of the island. Its graduates hold prominent roles in government, industry, education, and civil society.

*"**Collaboration and openness** have always been fundamental to our mission,"* notes Professor Tatiana - Eleni Synodinou, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs. "We are committed to fostering an environment where open science, open education, and open dialogue form the foundation for fostering innovative ideas and dynamic partnerships—with our students, our community, and our European peers. It's through this spirit of inclusivity, creativity and collaboration that we pave the way for a future defined by academic excellence, social contribution, and enhanced international cooperation."

In many ways, UCY tells the story not just of an institution, but of a country growing into its potential. The people in our university believe that education must provide more than simply the accumulation of knowledge. It must also encourage students' active participation in the process of learning and the acquisition of those values necessary for responsible involvement in the community.

Research is promoted and funded in all departments for its contribution to science in general and for its local and international applications. Our story is one of resilience, innovation, and aspiration. And as UCY celebrates its journey alongside its peers in YERUN, it stands as a reminder of why young universities matter: because they are not bound by legacy but are driven by purpose.

Ten years after YERUN's founding, and over three decades since its own, UCY remains firmly focused on the future. The world it serves is complex and ever-changing, but its mission remains clear: to create added value through actions related to science and intellectual culture, foster an Open society, and contribute to the economic and social development of Cyprus and Europe.



14. University of Eastern Finland

Where interdisciplinarity meets impact

Formed through a strategic merger in 2010, the University of Eastern Finland has grown into Finland's most multidisciplinary institution, where collaboration fuels societal relevance.

Today, the University of Eastern Finland, UEF, is known as a driver of innovation, growth and academic excellence in the heart of Eastern Finland, and beyond. Founded in 2010, UEF emerged from the merger of two well-established and well-recognised universities in Finland: The University of Joensuu and the University of Kuopio.

The years leading up to the 2010 merger could be described as somewhat turbulent in the Finnish university sector. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Culture announced its initiative for a university reform in Finland, which included both amendments to the country's university legislation and strongly encouraged university mergers. Ultimately geared towards strengthening Finland's research and innovation capacity, the initiative

was, despite all its laudable goals, met with some scepticism, intense political passions and even resistance at times.

The University of Eastern Finland, or its predecessors to be exact, stands out as a university that decided take on the challenge head-on and, importantly, on its own terms. A project preparing for the merger was launched rapidly, giving the new university ample time to hone the details of its structural development. As in all mergers, some decisions were painful but, as pointed out by UEF Rector **Tapio Määttä** at the university's 15th anniversary celebration this year, the course the new university embarked on has proven to be sustainable, standing the test of time.

What sets the University of Eastern Finland apart in the Finnish university landscape is its status as the **most multidisciplinary university** in Finland. UEF offers ed-

education in nearly 100 major subjects across 12 different fields of study, which translates into a genuinely diverse body of students. Our campuses in Joensuu and Kuopio are home to a delightful mix of students aspiring to become teachers, lawyers, biologists, historians, medical physicists, linguists, theologians, chemists, medical doctors and business professionals – just to mention a few. Recent years have also seen the launch of a growing number of degree programmes taught in English, further increasing the number of international students in our campus cities.

The advantages arising from the university's multidisciplinary are not limited to education, but its benefits are reaped in research as well. Indeed, the University of Eastern Finland is internationally well-recognised and lauded for its interdisciplinary approach. At UEF, research is spearheaded by carefully selected Research Communities that bring together researchers across departmental and disciplinary boundaries to seek solutions to global challenges.

The University of Eastern Finland plays a pivotal role in the Eastern Finland region by creating and fostering conditions that encourage people and companies to pick Eastern Finland as their first choice. The university boosts the region's intellectual capital and contributes to an ecosystem that retains talent, thereby not only enriching the local communities and driving regional growth but also contributing to the broader competitiveness of the region by attracting national and international talent, investment and collaborations.

This is well-exemplified by UEF's involvement in the Forest Joensuu network, which brings together the **forest bioeconomy** sector's leading companies, researchers, educators, business developers and global enterprises. Last year, Forest Joensuu was recognised with the Internationalisation Award of the President of the Republic of Finland.

Coinciding with YERUN's 10th anniversary, this year marks the 15th anniversary of the University of Eastern Finland. During its 15 years of existence, UEF has made a profound impact on various sectors of society and, most importantly, on the lives of individuals both in Finland and abroad.

A particularly clear demonstration of the university's ability to respond to global challenges is its development of a nasally administered vaccine for COVID-19, which is currently undergoing its first clinical trials in humans. Climate change, too, is a global challenge that requires input from the scientific community. Focusing on climate change-induced environmental changes, our researchers have uncovered the root causes of forest damage – a particularly important topic in Finland, with more than 70% of its land area covered by forests –, while our toxicologists have provided important insight into how climate change will affect allergies and pollen in the future.

Today, the world is witnessing geopolitical changes and shifts of an unprecedented scale, with the rules-based international order creaking at the seams. Here, too, the scientific insight offered by our scholars of border studies and mobilities is invaluable for well-informed analysis and decision-making.

We are the most versatile provider of teacher education in Finland, having trained more than 5,500 teachers so far. We are also proud to play a pivotal national role in the revitalisation of the Karelian language, which is currently spoken by some 11,000 people in Finland.

These are just a few examples of our action with impact. To get a more comprehensive idea, we encourage you to visit our Action with Impact website.



15. University of Essex

Innovating with purpose, connecting with the world

Since its founding in 1964, the University of Essex has embraced radical innovation and global outlook, empowering students to thrive and research to make a difference.

Here at Essex, we have much to celebrate, as we mark our 60th anniversary and reflect on six decades of incredible achievements.

Our ever-expanding community of international academics delivers a transformational education to more than 19,000 students. We put student success at the heart of our mission, supporting every student from every background to achieve outstanding outcomes, and preparing them to thrive in their future lives. We aim for excellence in education and research alike.

Our founder, Sir Albert Sloman, outlined his ground-breaking plans for a new University in Essex during his Reith Lectures for the BBC in 1963, the year before we opened. During these lectures Sir Albert explained how Essex was going to break the mould and challenge expectations about what a university could be. Sir Albert told listeners that "**radical innovation**" would be at the heart of Essex's approach to research and education, and this remains constant and visible today, along with our truly **international outlook**. We are proud to be able to say that at Essex you really do experience "the world in one place".

In 1964, 122 students arrived at our university for the very first academic year, attracted by its bold vision. Since then, more than 100,000 students from over 140 countries have graduated, and—inspired by the inquisitive and ambitious Essex Spirit—gone on to make a difference in the world.

Our academics have produced inspiring work which has established Essex's reputation for research in the UK, particularly in the social sciences. This ranges from pioneering research into poverty and inequality by Professor Peter Townsend, to the development of the world's first publicly available computer language by Professor Tony Brooker. We continue to push the boundaries, from

promoting human rights around the world to pioneering the use of big data in developing countries. One of our unique strengths at Essex is our **interdisciplinary approach** to fostering collaboration across diverse fields to tackle complex global challenges, and we are pleased to have secured impressive levels of external research grant income.

As the Higher Education sector faces increasing challenges worldwide, and as universities across the UK have had to deal with significant financial challenges in recent years, our conviction here at Essex is that future success lies in collaboration. Our thriving partnerships with universities across Europe are something we are particularly proud of, and we look forward to expanding our amazing network of partners in Europe in 2025. In this context, YERUN remains a key focus for us. As a founder member, our continuing involvement positions Essex at the heart of ongoing debate about the value of university education across the continent, amplifying our voice, and informing our decision-making as we navigate the common challenges and opportunities facing our sector together as a network.

Membership of YERUN allows University of Essex to co-operate with a large, and growing, community of young, innovative, research-intensive and socially engaged Higher Education Institutions across Europe. Together, we share experiences and best practice and collaborate on exciting new research projects and mobility opportunities. Equally important, our membership opens Essex to the wider world of European policy engagement, ensuring that our voice is heard in Brussels and London, and that our achievements are understood in the context of European policy and development.



16. University of Klagenfurt

Built by its people, radiating expertise and innovation across borders

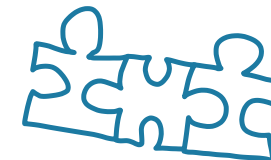
Emerging from local ambition and international advice, the University of Klagenfurt began in 1970 with a vision shaped by its community and continues to drive regional and scientific progress.

The birth of today's University of Klagenfurt, located in the capital of Austria's southernmost province of Carinthia, was preceded by turbulent times. While other Austrian provinces were already setting up universities in the 1960s, it took until 1970 for the University of Klagenfurt to follow suit. The *Universitätsbund* in Carinthia, founded in 1964, served as a powerful advocate for the establishment of the university. They collected an astonishing initial budget with a novel fundraiser, a country-wide building block campaign. The general direction of today's university was discussed intensively: Finally, based on a requirements analysis by the OECD, a decision was taken to establish a university specialising in educational science. And it was the OECD that lent its considerable support to the endeavour at a conference in June 1969. On the 21st of January 1970, the Austrian Parliament passed a resolution to establish the University College of Teacher Education in Klagenfurt. Regular studies commenced in 1973 with 242 students. In the decades since, new fields of study, buildings and faculties have been added. Today, students at the university pursue a diverse array of degree programmes, including several taught in English, reflecting the institution's international outlook. Academics conduct research and teach across a wide spectrum of disciplines, from arts and humanities to technical sciences, social sciences, and law. The university community is enriched by a vibrant international presence, with students from a broad range of countries contributing to its global character.

Today, the University of Klagenfurt enjoys international prestige. Inventions by researchers are demonstrated by two prominent examples, among others: In **drone and robot research**, researchers are working on the development of autonomous multi-drone systems in which several drones navigate autonomously, coordinate with each other independently and exchange data. Researchers at Dronehub Klagenfurt use one of Eu-

rope's largest drone halls as infrastructure for their work. The research conducted at the Christian Doppler Laboratory ATHENA is also of international renown. Here, a team is working on new technologies to ensure that video transmission remains smooth and energy-efficient despite high data volumes. In addition to research activities in the technical sciences, the university features many other focal points: Numerous interdisciplinary projects have been set up in the fields of sustainability and energy management, for example. Another example is the research field of visual culture, which focuses on analysing contemporary discourses on images. Other key areas of research are self-organising systems and new perspectives on optimisation. The university also supports students and employees who want to bring innovative ideas to the market in order to make their way as entrepreneurs.

At the venerable age of 55, the University of Klagenfurt, located at the heart of the Alps-Adriatic region, remains youthful and dynamic. The manageable size of the institution facilitates easy and direct contact between colleagues, fostering a rich environment for interdisciplinary cooperation. Students also benefit from the university's compact size: The guiding principle 'It's all about you!' places students and their needs front and centre in terms of their future careers and educational paths. Every year, the University of Klagenfurt awards degrees to around 1,000 graduates, who go on to make an invaluable contribution to the development of the region and beyond. With a comprehensive range of continuing education programmes, the University of Klagenfurt welcomes people at all stages of their educational journey wishing to pursue further growth and development. Over half a century, the University of Klagenfurt and the community of those who have shaped it and have been shaped by it have grown into a network that spans the Alps-Adriatic region, reaching across Europe and well beyond its borders.



17. University of Konstanz

Committed to society, shaping the future

Since 1966, the University of Konstanz has challenged academic traditions, becoming a model of open science, interdisciplinary collaboration and reform-minded education.

The University of Konstanz was founded in June 1966 during a period of educational expansion in Germany. The vision: to build not just another university in the traditional sense, but a research-oriented model university that would play a pioneering role in reforming higher education.

Choosing Konstanz as location, a city situated on the southern edge of Germany and at the border of Austria and Switzerland, had strategic reasons: to boost the economy of what was a structurally weak region at the time and to ensure that the people in this area gained better access to educational opportunities. However, rumour has it that the city's stunning location on Lake Constance, offering breath-taking views of the Alps, played a role as well.

Following the founding committee's vision, the University of Konstanz was conceived as a **"reform university"** from the very beginning. Its foundational philosophy set it apart from more traditional institutions, which were often marked by rigid hierarchies that no longer seemed to align with the democratic spirit of the post-World War II era. Today, the university's commitment to reform is still a cornerstone of its identity, fostering a culture of continuous reinvention and innovation – qualities that form an integral part of its success story.

But how is the concept of "reform", which is closely tied to the university's identity as a young research university, brought to life? *"At the University of Konstanz, we practice an open-minded, inclusive culture of collaboration: This means flat hierarchies, open structures and a strong integration of research and teaching focusing on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary formats"*, says Dirk Leuffen, Vice Rector for Research, Innovation and Impact.

This translates into an open structure of the three faculties: Sciences, Humanities and Politics, Law and Economics. Small academic departments encourage collaboration among researchers from various disciplines, as do the University of Konstanz's numerous interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research centres and its two current Clusters of Excellence: **Politics of Inequality** and Centre for the **Advanced Study of Collective Behaviour**.

The study programmes at the University of Konstanz offer about 10,000 students innovative teaching methods, ample freedom for project-based work and research-oriented education – incorporating the latest findings from the university's own cutting-edge research. *"Students are introduced to independent academic work early on, as fostering autonomy in students is regarded as a critical foundation for their future careers and impact"*, Leuffen adds.

The university's philosophy of shared creativity, open communication and short pathways is also reflected in its architecture and governance: The campus is unified under "one roof" and offers numerous spaces for interaction. Support facilities such as the **Scientific Engineering Services**, the library and administrative offices are centralised and equally accessible to all departments, as are the university's Core Facilities – central research infrastructure. The university's decision-making body, the Senate, comprises members from all status groups, including students.

For the region, the university is more than an educational and research institution or an important employer. It is a reliable partner for local businesses, governments and society. One that builds bridges between sectors and from Konstanz to partners around the world.

Funded as a University of Excellence since 2007, the University of Konstanz elevated many of its forward-thinking ideas to the next level, further pursuing its vision of being an "institutional laboratory". A shining example: the Zukunftskolleg (ZuKo), a pioneering initiative providing early-career researchers from around the world with both academic freedom and broad support.

In Germany, the University of Konstanz is not only considered a pioneer in the promotion of young talent, but also in other fields such as gender equality, sustainability and open science. The further advancement of open science is one of the many facets of the university's E-Science Strategy that focuses on enhancing modern and efficient working and learning environments for research, teaching, and governance and providing an outstanding data and information infrastructure. Just one example of how the University of Konstanz constantly develops as a whole.

As the university looks ahead, its reform spirit and close ties to the region also keep evolving. At the entrance to the campus, a building dedicated solely to fostering encounters and mutual exchanges between academia, industry, politics, and the people of Konstanz is under construction: the forum.konstanz. While the idea of the forum.konstanz is already alive in the form of various projects, events and facilities, the building will be the ultimate embodiment of the University of Konstanz's motto "creative.together". Its goal: sharing the "Konstanz spirit" with everyone.



18. University of Limerick

Wisdom in action - rooted in community, focus on the world

The University of Limerick blends innovative research and learning with real-world engagement, living its motto 'Wisdom for Action' in every classroom and research lab.

Founded in 1972 to meet the educational challenges of modern Ireland, University of Limerick is proud of its five decades of achievement and success.

In promoting new types of inquiry and learning, undertaking pioneering research and developing partnerships, and knowledge exchange initiatives UL is ensuring that our graduates are knowledgeable and engaged citizens who enrich the communities in which they study, live and work.

At the very core of UL is an instinctive drive to create knowledge for a better world.

UL continues to transform higher education and research in Ireland, providing innovative and sustainable solutions to local and global problems; that revitalise and create connections with internal and external partners; and that reflect our values and history as a university.

UL has always been outward facing, looking beyond the campus for inspiration, collaboration and innovation.

It was the first Irish university to offer work placement (Co-op) for its students. It also has Ireland's largest Erasmus programme with more than 600 students taking part in an academic placement abroad every year.

UL is an outward looking university, a place where we embrace diversity, champion internationalisation, and as the Irish saying *céad míle fáilte* goes, UL has one hundred thousand welcomes.

Erasmus+, and its predecessors Erasmus and Socrates, plays a pivotal role in how UL continues to look beyond the campus.

University of Limerick has participated in the Erasmus programme since 1988 and has links with more than 350 partner institutions throughout Europe, offering a wide range of possibilities. Our commitment to Erasmus has been recognised with the university being awarded Best Erasmus Programme by the Irish Education Awards in 2024 as well as in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

UL's motto *Eagna chun Gnímh* translates as *Wisdom for Action*, reflecting our mission to contribute to the discovery of new knowledge for a better world and today, almost 130,000 of our alumni lead and shape business, culture and society worldwide.

With strong links to business and industry, UL is ensuring that research excellence is paramount. It is encouraging and supporting academics and researchers as they tackle the grand challenges facing our society and environment.

They are innovating in many areas across UL's wide-ranging research portfolio such as pharmaceuticals, software engineering, advanced materials, advanced manufacturing, hate speech, data-driven cancer research, sports science, patient-centric healthcare, and the wide ranging and multi-faceted approaches to climate action.

As we head into the next 50 years of UL's life, we are committed to being innovative, ensuring our research, our students and our staff are helping in their own way to make society's dreams come true.

Our faculty, researchers and students are empowered to be curious, to be questioning.

UL is home to a community of the curious, who are conducting excellent fundamental research with impact.

Our research strategy *Wisdom for Action* is aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with our vision to contribute to the discovery of new knowledge for a better world.

The higher education sector is constantly evolving; landscapes are changing with differing challenges along the way.

UL is focused on adapting and anticipating for the future. We are taking a holistic approach to how we can do better in a changing world, and how we can impact that world.





19. University of Potsdam

Bold beginnings, dynamic growth

The University of Potsdam, founded in 1991, has grown rapidly into a research powerhouse, deeply rooted in its region and boldly advancing the frontiers of education and science.

In 2025, we look back on 34 years of the University of Potsdam. In this period, many things have happened: Our university is still "young, modern, and research-oriented." Internationally and nationally renowned scholars conduct research and teach here at the Federal State of Brandenburg's largest institution of higher education. The University of Potsdam is successful in acquiring third-party funding, has an impressive record in technology and knowledge transfer, and a service-oriented administration. It has always been committed to promoting **equal opportunities** and a family-friendly environment, internationalisation, tolerance, and has been quickly adopting to evolving topics over the past decade as sustainability or digitisation.

After its years of formation and establishment, the university has of late been going through a period of unprecedented growth, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Starting with the inauguration of our School of Jewish Theology back in 2013 – a truly historic event: For the first time in Germany's changeful history, there is a Jewish Theology department at a German university. Since 2017, this Jewish Theology has been complemented by a central scientific institution, which we have named "*Forum Religionen im Kontext*" ("Forum Religions in Context") and which is dedicated to facilitating inter-religious exchange and the dialogue between theologies and secular scholarship.

In 2014, we realigned our "Centre for Teacher Training" to become the "Centre for Teacher Training and Education Research" – a deliberate effort to include **empirical education research**, in particular, which had been neglected in previous years nationwide. This integration allows us to directly incorporate research findings into academic teaching and teacher training. We also set up our Inclusive Education department in 2013-14. In this discipline, which is highly relevant considering recent societal developments, we were able to appoint five

new professorships and create a teacher training programme in Primary Education with a focus on **Inclusive Education**.

Then, in 2017, we founded our new "Digital Engineering Faculty," which addresses the digital challenges of our society. Drawing on the existing focus on software and systems engineering, the faculty also researches issues relating to digitalisation in the health-care sector, IT security, and energy management. Thanks to the extraordinary and generous support of our friend and benefactor Prof. Hasso Plattner and the Hasso Plattner Foundation, we were able to increase the number of professorships in this thematic field from previously twelve to 27 today.

We are also making big strides with regard to our Faculty of Health Sciences, which is jointly funded with the BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg and the Brandenburg Medical School. We are extremely confident that the faculty, with its proven strengths in research and teaching, can also contribute to the establishment of a medical school in the region.

The continuing expansion of teacher training programmes is also progressing very well, with special and necessary emphasis to be placed on a moderate digitalisation of the classroom.

With its seven faculties, the University of Potsdam is a prominent driving force for the region's economy and development. We will always emphasise, though, that growth per se is not our goal. Instead, the goal is to expand the university strategically, thereby meeting societal and scientific challenges, while also enhancing the quality of teaching thanks to an improved student-teacher ratio.

Overall, the university is in the process of growing from 215 tenured professorships in 2010 to more than 340. Then there are a dozen tenure-track professorships to add to that, including four open-topic professorships, all of which have been filled with outstanding young researchers. Of course, the number of non-professorial teaching staff members also continued to grow, in terms of both fixed-term qualification positions as well as permanent positions for long-term tasks. Finally, let us not forget the roughly 100 jointly appointed professors who do the vast majority of their work at a Helmholtz facility, a Leibniz Institute, a Fraunhofer facility or a Max Planck Institute. There is no other German university with more joint appointments.

Three Alexander von Humboldt Professorships, five ERC grants in Horizon 2020, and the four Collaborative Research Centres "Data Assimilation – The Seamless Integration of Data and Models" (No. 1294), "Limits of Variability in Language: Cognitive, Computational, and Grammatical Aspects" (No. 1287), "Light-driven chemical reactions at nanoscale metals" (No. 1636), and "Phenotypic plasticity in plants" (No. 1644) are proof of the excellent research profile that has been established at our university over the years.

The YERUN network unites universities with different specialisations, priorities, and focus areas. We hope to continue using synergies and working together in a complementary way in the future.



20. University of Rijeka

The University of the Future Open to Everyone

The year is 1633 in Rijeka. King Ferdinand II's charter granted students at the Jesuit College the same civil rights and privileges as those enjoyed by members of European academies and universities. As the years have passed, Rijeka has become a home to numerous institutions that nurture and promote culture, art, and education, including the modern University of Rijeka, founded in 1973.

Today, more than 50 years after its establishment and more than 390 years after the start of modern higher education in Rijeka, the **University of Rijeka (UNIRI)** takes great pride in being a modern European university and a centre of excellence whose impact extends beyond the region. Embracing '**openness**' as its key value, UNIRI has matured into a socially responsible and engaged university, choosing the path of dynamic growth and supporting all forms of international partnerships. As an open, future-oriented university, it fosters collaboration across all sectors and disciplines, both in research and learning and teaching.

Being a comprehensive university with **17 faculties**, almost **200 study programmes** at all levels of study, and one **Future Institute** comprising **13 R&D centres**,

UNIRI's academic community brings together individuals eager to express their talents and entrepreneurial potential. By promoting open education that is accessible to everyone, UNIRI encourages innovative T&L methods to provide an alternative to traditional formal education. In addition to its strategic partnership with **Coursera**, a leading platform for online learning and career development, UNIRI joined the **YUFE Alliance** in 2019, courageously stepping into virtual and real campuses that connect 10 young universities across Europe, thus offering personalised programmes for jobs of the future. Having created an educational system that puts students first, UNIRI is proud to be recognised by the European Students' Union as a paragon of a student-centred university.

Recognising universities as crucial actors in advancing the community's resilience and well-being, UNIRI seeks to fulfil its social role and extend its impact beyond its walls, disciplines, and borders. Relying on the premise that individual activities contribute to several different goals, UNIRI makes a multifaceted contribution towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals and improving the well-being of society as a whole. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., *one does not have to see the*

whole staircase, just take the first step, and the University of Rijeka is no stranger to taking the first step and being the first in many things.

As a member of the European Research Area, the University of Rijeka is also a research-oriented university that takes meticulous care of all researchers and their personal growth. As a testament to its dedication to creating an attractive research environment, UNIRI is the **first** in Croatia to sign the **San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)**, and for now, the only Croatian university to join **CoARA**. In 2021, the University of Rijeka joined the **YERUN** as the only university from the region, marking the network's first enlargement process since its inception.

Nurturing the culture of inclusion and diversity that has graced Rijeka since time immemorial, the University of Rijeka is the **first** academic institution in Croatia and the region to implement measures of equality in the domain of gender rights and politics, eventually adopting its institutional **Gender Equality Plan (GEP)**, paving the way for other like-minded Croatian and regional institutions to create their own gender-aware policies.

Often described as a university that expands new horizons, the University of Rijeka stands out for its pioneering work in community engagement practices. As a proud winner of the **'Engaged University of the Year**

Award 2022' in the People's Choice Category, UNIRI constantly proves its dedication to making a difference and improving the quality of life of all members of the community.

Advocating for social inclusion and demonstrating its strong commitment to promoting positive and healthy aging and enhancing the lives of elderly members of the (global) community, in 2025, UNIRI joined the **Age-Friendly University Global Network (AFU-GN)**, as the 20th member institution in Europe, and the **first** and **only** Croatian university in the network.

Only a few universities in the world can boast of world-renowned immunologists, bestselling authors, formula drivers, beer brewers, filmmakers, European and world medal winners, a woman of the year, and even a woman knight in the French National Order of Merit. They are all uniquely different, but united by a common trait – they all share the same place under the sun. That place is one that cultivates critical and responsible citizenship, transparency, and participation. One that replaced elitism with integration and institutional engagement. One that sees a better world in eradicating all inequalities and transcending all borders and boundaries. One that is inclusive and socially responsible because it respects diversity and promotes equal opportunities for all. That place is a true European university of the future. *That place is the University of Rijeka.*



21. University of South-Eastern Norway (USN)

A university with entrepreneurial roots

Formed in 2018 from centuries-old institutions, the University of South-Eastern Norway leads with its civic and entrepreneurial mission, bridging regional needs with global challenges.

The University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) was established in 2018. Although the university is young, its roots trace back to the early days of higher education in Norway, dating from the mid-18th century. USN is the result of mergers between several smaller higher education institutions that offered more vocational oriented education for the teaching, health and social care professions, engineering, economics, cultural work, and undergraduate courses in scientific disciplines. Several of these institutions were established in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The origins of technological education at USN, however, can be traced back to silver mining and the establishment of the Royal Norwegian Mining Seminary in 1757, the first **mining engineering education in Europe**. Through national reforms, these institutions were brought together into three colleges in 1994 and later into one higher education institution in 2016. Since 2003, higher education institutions have been able to obtain university accreditation, provided they meet specific criteria defined by the state. As a result, the number of universities in Norway increased. While there were four universities at the turn of the millennium, in 2025 USN is one of 11 universities.

The societal mandate of universities has been high on the political agenda in recent decades in Europe as well as in Norway. In Norway, successive governments have emphasised that the new universities should not be replicas of classic, comprehensive universities. Instead, they have been encouraged to develop unique profiles based on strategic advantages and societal needs. Internationally, different university labels are used when discussing the development of the societal role of the new universities, such as the entrepreneurial university, the civic university and the engaged university. The University of Southeast Norway's main profile is rooted in the **entrepreneurial and socially engaged** university tradition, where the ambition is that the relationship

between teaching, research, and engagement with society should be interconnected. There is a soft, flexible boundary between the university and society.

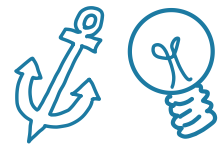
The university offers education programmes within technology, maritime sciences, health and social studies, teacher education, economy, administration and management, sports and outdoor life, social and cultural sciences and natural and environmental sciences. The university has enrolled approximately 18,000 students on degree programmes and 5,000 students on shorter programmes. Through profession-oriented and society, and working-life-oriented research and education, the university is developing and disseminating knowledge and expertise that addresses the world's climate, environmental, and energy challenges, combats poverty and injustice, ensures the sustainability of the welfare state, and strengthens interpersonal relationships.

As an entrepreneurial and a socially engaged university, the importance of research for society's cultural and socio-economic development is considered. Research is often collaborative and mission oriented. Teaching is community, and working-life-oriented and based on a strong social commitment with the long-term goal of expanding participation in higher education and contributing to knowledge-based, sustainable social development.

The university is a multi-campus institution with eight campuses and a study site serving competence development in a rural mountain region. The multi-campus concept, as developed at USN, is based on an integration model where study programmes located at one campus can, in principle, draw on the university's overall academic and administrative expertise and capacity. Each campus should be developed and profiled in dialogue with its surroundings for the benefit of **regional development**. At the same time, each campus should be a gateway for students and regional development actors to access the entire university's expertise and national and international networks.

Looking forward, institutional support for university-community partnerships and entrepreneurial and engaged scholarship aimed at giving scientific knowledge a greater role in building a sustainable society is a strategic priority. Strengthening this profile includes addressing the need to design flexible, interdisciplinary curricula that equip students with the skills and knowledge required for emerging careers, and developing pedagogical approaches that promote student engagement, critical thinking, creativity, and autonomy, preparing them for future employability. It includes encouraging impactful and meaningful research that fosters intellectual creativity and exploring innovative approaches to foster collaborations between academia and private and public sectors to address societal challenges and enhance research impact.

There is a growing recognition that societal opportunities and challenges increasingly transcend national borders. Internationalisation of higher education and research is a prerequisite for knowledge development that ensures sustainable social, cultural, and economic development. The engagement by university employees in international cooperation is significant. In recent years, increased international polarisation and the emergence of social trends that reflect a disregard for documented knowledge and for reliable ways of establishing knowledge have made international collaboration even more essential. Liberal democracies are under pressure. Traditional sources of authority, including scientific and academic institutions, face scepticism. Accordingly, alongside individual initiatives, pursuing academic values through universities' participation in European university alliances and international networks such as YERUN is crucial.



22. University of Southern Denmark (SDU) Innovation, anchored in Southern Denmark

Established in 1966, the University of Southern Denmark fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, research excellence and innovation that fuels both local development and global insight.

Founded in 1966, the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) is one of Denmark's leading universities. The university's main campus is in Odense, with regional campuses in Kolding, Esbjerg, Sønderborg, and soon Vejle. SDU also operates a research institute in Copenhagen.

SDU is known for its research excellence and for its interdisciplinary approach to research and education, fostering innovative solutions to societal challenges through collaboration across various disciplines. We collaborate closely at local, regional, national, and international levels.

SDU boasts **strong research environments** within its five faculties: health sciences, engineering, business and social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. The university is also home to several research centres with international impact, including the SDU Climate Cluster, which addresses sustainability and climate challenges, and DIAS (the Danish Institute for Advanced Study).

Innovation and collaboration with the local business community are central to SDU's mission. Through partnerships with companies, organisations, and public institutions, the university contributes to regional growth and development. The newly established MedTech Odense exemplifies how SDU supports the development of **new technological solutions** in the healthcare sector, in close collaboration with Odense University Hospital (OUH).

The university has a strong international focus, attracting students and researchers from around the world. Many degree programmes are offered in English, and SDU has more than 500 exchange agreements with universities globally. Additionally, SDU participates in EU projects and global networks that enhance research and knowledge sharing across borders, such as the YERUN network and the European university alliance, EPICUR.

Sustainability is a key priority for SDU. The university actively works to reduce its climate footprint and integrate sustainability into research, teaching, and operations. SDU's Climate Plan 2030 aims to achieve carbon neutrality through energy efficiency, waste reduction, and the green transition of transport.

In the past five years, SDU has experienced rapid growth in external funding from private and public sources. This growth followed significant investments in central research support, further bolstered by additional investments at the faculty level. Throughout this process, SDU's research support has undergone significant professional and organisational development, establishing a flexible local-central support concept across all types of research support. SDU RIO has positioned itself as a unique resource and professional intra-organisational stakeholder with a high organisational impact.

As a key player in the region, SDU contributes not only through research and education but also by providing knowledge, innovation, and labour that strengthen business and society as a whole – with an entrepreneurial mindset, all contributing to the strengthening of local business and the surrounding society.

If SDU did not exist, several things would not be possible: Academically, certain research areas and educational opportunities would be lacking in Southern Denmark and Denmark, especially in fields where the university is particularly strong, such as health sciences, robotics, sustainability, and regional development in general. SDU's role in attracting and educating students and creating an international environment in Southern Denmark would be absent, which would have a negative impact on both local communities and talent development.

Innovation and business collaborations in the region would suffer financially without SDU, perhaps especially for medtech and climate initiatives. The local businesses in Southern Denmark would suffer from a shortage of skilled workers if SDU did not educate them locally. The region could face even greater challenges in recruiting skilled talent to specialised jobs, and without SDU's output of talented graduates with an entrepreneurial mindset, innovation and business development in the region could be extremely challenging – if not impossible.

Academically, SDU demonstrates its influence by publishing research, partnering with other universities and participating in international projects. Socially, through close collaboration with the local community, student activities, and initiatives such as the SDU Climate Cluster. Economically, through business collaborations, startup and spin-off companies, contributions to the labour market and strategic partnerships such as Odense Climate Partnership and MedTech Odense. And through entrepreneurship, by fostering innovation, supporting student entrepreneurs, and helping new ideas grow into businesses with societal impact.

SDU is a driving force for knowledge, innovation, and progress. With **strong regional roots** and a global outlook, SDU shapes the future through excellence in research and teaching, as well as collaboration. From pioneering medical technologies to advancing sustainability, SDU pushes boundaries and creates impact. As we move forward, we remain committed to fostering talent, developing new solutions, and contributing to a better society, locally and globally.



23. University of Stirling

Be the difference, shape the future

From its founding in 1967, the University of Stirling has driven change through education, sport and sustainability, uniting purpose and progress in Scotland and beyond.

The University of Stirling has been a centre for innovation ever since its inception in 1967. The first new university to be established in Scotland for almost 400 years, we were founded to lead a nation through the "white heat" of a technological revolution. Today, we are living through a new digital revolution; while also facing environmental challenges of unprecedented proportions, as well as a crisis in health and wellbeing. As a young, forward-thinking university, and driven by our mission to **'be the difference'**, our strengths are in areas critical to negotiating these major global challenges.

Over the years, we have remained true to our values of ambition, integrity and respect. We take great pride in providing education with a purpose and carrying out research which has a positive impact on communities locally, nationally and internationally. But a great deal has changed since 1967 too – and the past decade has been transformative for the University, as we have grown and diversified our student population, increased internationalisation, enhanced our student experience, strengthened our research profile and underlined our global reputation for sporting excellence.

From our roots in Stirling, through our research and teaching, we are addressing real issues, providing solutions, and helping to shape society. We are working to improve the lives of people with dementia, feeding communities through sustainable aquaculture solutions, tackling the impact of climate change and finding creative ways to inspire better health and wellbeing.

Today, 87% of our interdisciplinary, mission-focused research is having an outstanding or very considerable impact on society (REF 2021), and the efforts of our research and teaching communities have twice been recognised with a Queen's Anniversary Prize, for our Institute for Social Marketing and Health in 2014 and our Institute of Aquaculture in 2019.

We are also committed to meeting the needs of employers through the provision of world-class education – producing skilled graduates with a clear sense of purpose. We see this as one of our core objectives as a young university. In recent years, we have introduced more than 70 new courses, including in Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Paramedic Science, and Gerontology and Global Ageing.

Our impact and success are enabled and enhanced by the wealth of relationships and partnerships we hold across the globe. The decision to join the Young European Research Universities Network in 2022 reflected our desire to reaffirm the importance of European collaboration, following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. We embrace our role as an 'anchor institution' in the Forth Valley, playing a leading role in the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, a £90.2 million investment from the UK and Scottish Governments in innovation and infrastructure that will drive inclusive economic growth throughout the region. Significantly, the Deal provides an investment package of more than £46 million for university-led research, which has enabled the creation of Scotland's International Environment Centre, a National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub, and an Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub. Meanwhile, as a founding partner in the innovative Forth Valley University College NHS Partnership, we are also improving patient care and treatment locally.

Set amongst 330-acres of green space in the heart of Scotland, and with our campus including its own loch and 18th-century castle, our location is unique. And with more than 140 nationalities represented, our campus is a place where people of all backgrounds and cultures come together to learn, grow and thrive.

Notably, a £23 million investment at the centre of campus transformed the student experience in 2021, providing a **vibrant digitally connected space** for our students to socialise and study. Campus Central, which also includes catering outlets, shops, student support, and prayer rooms, received external recognition, one of seven winners in the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland Awards.

We are Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence, and our **athletes** compete at the highest level of their sports, including at the Olympics, Paralympics and the Commonwealth Games. Our sports scholarships are internationally recognised, and we actively support our student athletes to pursue a "dual career" comprised of academic studies and high-performance sport. Our passion for sport drives us in our mission to prioritise the health and wellbeing of our students, staff and wider community; Stirling is a place where our community is encouraged and supported to stay active and well.

As a young university, we are proud of all that we, and our 110,000-strong alumni community, have achieved to date, and are excited for what has yet to come. Last year, we launched our new Strategic Plan which sets out our ambitions to 2030 and beyond, and we are as committed as ever to continuing to make a positive impact on people's lives and being a force for good in the world.



24. University of Ulm

A University Forged by Community Spirit

Founded in 1967 by local initiative, Ulm University has become a global leader in STEM and medicine, shaping science, industry and society from Germany's high-tech south.

In the heart of southern Germany, where the Ulmer Münster's spire pierces the sky, Ulm University is situated at the country's highest-altitude campus. With its clear emphasis on **medicine and STEM fields** (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), this young research institution addresses global challenges of the future. Born from the town's unwavering determination, Ulm University shapes tomorrow's innovations through four forward-looking profile areas: Green Energy, Quantum Technologies, Lifelong Health, and Interdisciplinary Data Science & Artificial Intelligence. With 10,000 students spread across four faculties, the university offers more than 60 degree-programmes in both German and English, preparing the next generation of skilled professionals for tomorrow's challenges.

What sets Ulm University apart is its concentrated focus on future-oriented fields, which has earned it worldwide recognition, particularly in battery research. As home to POLiS (Post Lithium Storage), Germany's only excellence cluster for battery research, the Green Energy Campus in Ulm develops energy storage solutions for a sustainable future. In quantum sciences, Ulm's researchers rank among the world's leading experts,

working to understand and control quantum systems for revolutionary applications. Graduates enjoy excellent career prospects and professional opportunities.

But how did it all start? Let's rewind to where the university's story began. In 1961, skepticism loomed when Baden-Württemberg's then State Premier declared that "Ulm will never ever be a university city." Yet, echoing the same tenacity that once built the tallest church steeple in the world, citizens rallied. A grassroots initiative galvanised support from local media and politicians, championing the cause for higher education in their city. Their efforts culminated in 1967 with the establishment of the *Medizinisch-Naturwissenschaftliche Hochschule Ulm*, which would go on to receive the title of "university" only a few months later. Carving a niche in the academic world by focusing on a select range of disciplines, the university honed its strengths in STEM fields and medicine. This deliberate specialisation and the founding principle "all under the same roof" fostered a cohesive academic environment, promoting **intense interdisciplinary research**.

Today, the university's impact extends beyond its campus and into the city's urban development. As the beating heart of Ulm's Science City, it connects a vibrant ecosystem of hospitals, research institutions and high-tech companies, enabling knowledge transfer between academia, industry and society. The Science City is not

just a centre for research; it's a significant economic engine. Hosting research centres for global companies such as Daimler Benz, BMW, and Continental, it has created more than a thousand jobs, transforming Ulm into a science hub.

As a member of YERUN, Ulm University embodies the network's ideals: youthful vigor, research excellence, and societal impact. Its focused approach to research and education, combined with its role as a regional and global innovation driver, demonstrates how a specialised university can achieve remarkable impact. From pioneering battery technologies to advancing quantum

computing, from training tomorrow's medical professionals to driving technological innovation, Ulm University continues to prove that strategic focus and excellence go hand in hand.

Ulm University remains committed to its mission of addressing society's grand challenges through cutting-edge research and high-quality education. As an integral part of the Science City, it continues to foster innovation and knowledge transfer, ensuring that scientific discoveries translate into tangible benefits for society at large.



Young Universities leading the way forward

Listening to the voices of YERUN's 24 member universities, we can conclude that being a young research university is about defining new ways of doing, thinking and contributing. These stories show how the institutions are embedded in their regions while fully international in mindset. They are inclusive, bold, and driven by curiosity.

The journeys of young research universities are diverse, but a common thread runs through them: a deep sense of responsibility to their communities, an unrelenting commitment to research and education, and a belief that universities must help build a better future.

Rather than prescribing a single path forward, we end this reflection with 10 wishes. These are not endpoints but aspirations, articulated from within YERUN's diverse community, to guide and inspire young universities as they continue to flourish. Reflecting on our past 10 years but inspiring us for the next 10 to come.



10 WISHES

01 Stay bold and curious

Let's continue challenging the status quo, embarking on new approaches and creating space for experimentation, knowing that innovation is born from curiosity.

03 Keep students at the heart of everything

May young universities lead in co-creating education with students, listening, empowering, and leading into tomorrow together.

05 Continue creating connections

Across disciplines, sectors, people and countries, may young universities continue to collaborate widely and build bridges where others see walls.

07 Embrace open science and open innovation

Let us continue to champion openness and transparency, making knowledge accessible, reusable, and impactful for society.

09 Lead in sustainability - not only in words, but in action

May our institutions become models of sustainable, responsible and engaged institutions, through education, research, and institutional practices actively contributing to a much needed sustainable world we need.

02 Be recognised for what you contribute, despite age

We wish for an academic culture that values quality, collaboration and impact.

04 Invest in academic communities that are inclusive, well, and vibrant

A university is its people. Let us continue to build environments where everyone can thrive - across disciplines, backgrounds and career stages.

06 Foster talent with care and integrity

We wish for a future in which students, staff, researchers, educators, innovators and leaders can grow their careers in institutions that are fair, flexible and future-oriented.

08 Help transform society, not just mirror it

May young universities never lose sight of their civic mission, to be active agents of social progress and equity in their communities.

10 Stand together, as a network with purpose

Finally, may YERUN continue to be a space where young universities unite to advocate, collaborate, and amplify each other, strengthening our collective voice in Europe and beyond.

