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A European Technical University with Global Reach.

The internationalisation strategy of the
Technical University of Darmstadt



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Background and process

Internationalisation has long been part of the identity of the Technical University of Darmstadt. In 2013, internationalisation was defined as an overarching strategic goal of the university for the first time. The resulting structures, processes and measures have made a significant contribution to the development of TU Darmstadt in the international context. The constantly changing global environment means that regular updates to the strategy are necessary. Against this backdrop, this internationalisation strategy was created via a participatory process in 2020. It is part of the overall TU Darmstadt strategy that will include the three pillars of research, teaching and transfer/xchange, flanked by the cross-cutting themes of internationalisation, diversity, digitisation and sustainability.

In open working groups, committee meetings, and a university-wide workshop, members of the university were invited to develop the new strategy. Consultations on vision, strategy and measures followed an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Communication and participation plans were also discussed to develop the cross-cutting theme of internationalisation in an identity-forming process. All members of the TU Darmstadt were involved in the discussions and fed into this strategy.

After a preamble on the basic understanding of internationalisation at TU Darmstadt, the two core visions will first be explored. These will then be developed into four guiding principles. In the following, the core visions and resulting guiding principles and targets for five action areas will be defined as follows:

Study and teaching

Research and transfer/xchange

Structure and organisation

In these five action areas, subsidiary objectives in line with the core visions are formulated with the aim being to achieve each of these in the respective context.

Recruitment and marketing

International network and regional grounding

1. Preamble

The societal challenges of the 21st century are truly global, as vividly demonstrated by climate change and the coronavirus pandemic. Science can play a major role in overcoming these challenges, opening up responsible pathways to sustainable development, along with societal and technological renewal. Global dialogue that is focused on finding the best solutions is one of the most crucial preconditions for this.

As European technical university, we see TU Darmstadt as having a particular obligation to uphold fundamental European values. By working together with partners throughout Europe and internationally, we intend to play a pioneering role in the quest to develop innovative, sustainable, ecological and socially equitable solutions that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

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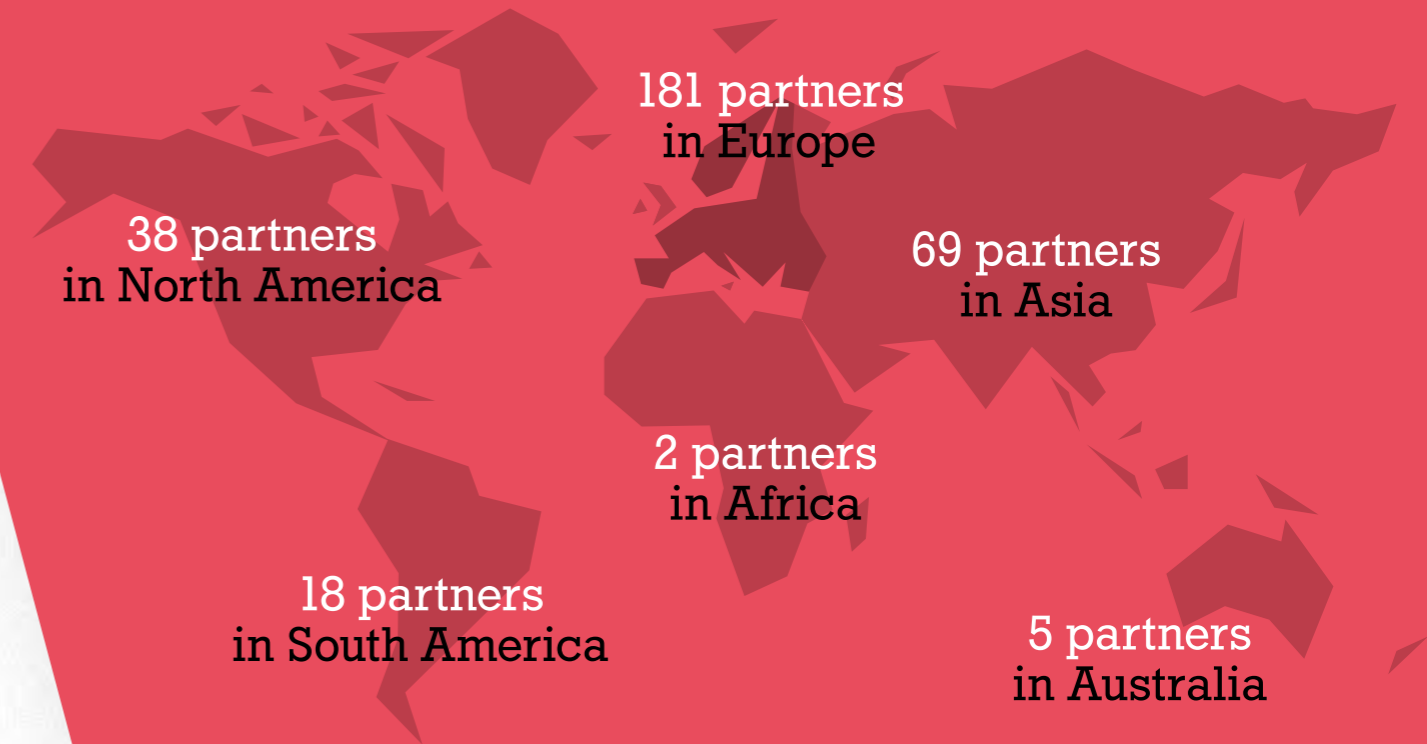
2. The international profile of TU Darmstadt

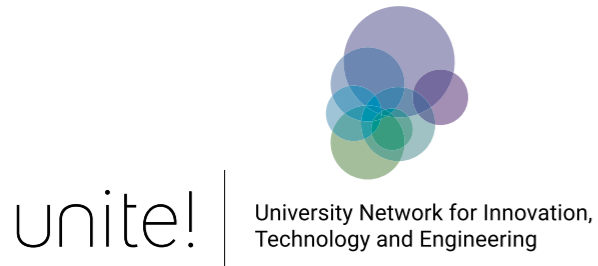
2.1 Background and motivation

As the only technical university in the Frankfurt Rhine-Main metropolitan area, internationalisation is essential to us.

TU Darmstadt is one of the 20 universities in Germany that have the highest number of international students (around 5.000, including PhD candidates) (see winter semester 2018/19 data from the German Federal Statistical Office). Every year, around 500 students from TU Darmstadt complete an exchange semester at a respected international partner university, while we host approximately 400 students on our own campus. Our aim is to significantly boost these numbers and simultaneously bring about a sustainable improvement in the academic performance of the international students.

TU Darmstadt has 300 high-quality partnerships worldwide and three strategic partnerships – with Tongji University in Shanghai (China), Virginia Tech in Blacksburg (USA) and the Graz University of Technology (Austria). The university is also a member of several leading international networks. In the strategically important regions of Asia and North America, we have opened regional offices to expand and strengthen cooperation and communication with local academic and corporate partners.





In the last few years, TU Darmstadt has continuously expanded its double-degree and English-language degree programmes. With more than 40 international double-degree programmes and 11 English-language Master's degrees on offer, a wide range of international options are already available.

In the Humboldt rankings, TU Darmstadt is regularly awarded top placings for engineering, based on the number of scholarships received from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Further, between 2015 and 2019, TU Darmstadt academics were awarded 12 ERC grants from the European Research Council. Particularly worth noting is the successful groundwork that has been laid for an integrated European university, a project that was

initiated by the European Union in 2017. Since 2019, TU Darmstadt has been the coordinating institution for a grouping of seven outstanding European technical universities in the Unite! network (*University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering*).

The long-term aspiration is for this network to be transformed into an integrated European university that provides physical and non-physical offerings for research, teaching, administration, digitisation and research infrastructure. From our perspective, the Unite! alliance is one of the most important institutional internationalisation platforms and tools for shaping the common European Higher Education and Research Area. The first successful outcomes from the cooperation, such as the application process for European research projects, can already be seen.



To further assist with internationalisation, TU Darmstadt has created centralised and decentralised structures across all faculties. These include the role of Vice President for transfer/xchange and International Affairs, an International Affairs directorate and the introduction of internationalisation coordinators. Alongside these changes, we have made other improvements at every level of the university, such as the introduction of services to support international students, instructors, researchers and junior academics.

As a result of the changes listed above, TU Darmstadt has become more globally connected and has gained a greater level of visibility. This provides us with a useful starting point for developing our international focus at a high level. In this process, our decentralised and autonomous organisational structure, our building autonomy and the high level of flexibility from individual academics, research units and faculties are distinct advantages. The aim is for these pillars to be supported even more effectively by other key measures.

Our core objective is to define overriding parameters for an institution with global reach to allow academics, research units, faculties and centralised units to take internationalisation forward in a way that is appropriate to the particular field, focused and needs-oriented. Doing so will help us maintain our international competitiveness and meet the societal challenges of the 21st century.

2.2 Core visions and guiding principles

At TU Darmstadt, we see internationalisation as a tool to help us achieve excellence in all areas of the university. We will achieve this primarily by actively shaping diversity in education and research. The guiding criterion is the need to secure outstanding international talent to provide an academic response to both domestic and global challenges. By taking this approach, TU Darmstadt and its significant achievements in research, teaching and transfer/exchange will become more visible and contribute to sustainable development worldwide.

We view internationalisation as a holistic and dynamic process that responds to and actively shapes societal, political and institutional developments. As a cross-cutting topic, internationalisation affects all levels and areas of the university. This means that TU Darmstadt views internationalisation through two interlinked perspectives: the world within TU Darmstadt and TU Darmstadt in the world.

Core visions

We discover and promote national and international talents.

At the core of TU Darmstadt's efforts is the need to win qualified talents as students, academics and employees, irrespective of their national, social and cultural backgrounds. We are creating a European technical university with international and regional connections for all members of the university. By doing so, TU Darmstadt is laying the foundations to address challenging tasks in a globalised world in academia, research, business and society.

We are a European technical university that is connected at both international and regional levels.

TU Darmstadt sees the European Higher Education Area as the basis for its international involvement. Especially in Europe, the past has shown how important it is to maintain international partnerships that we believe underpin academic freedom and the independence of research. Our strength as a European technical university lies in our focus on the advancement of scientific knowledge and in the close links we maintain with society and business.

In our internationalisation strategy, we are committed to upholding fundamental European values and strengthening European identity. The concept of the European university, within the framework of Unite!, underpins this aspiration. But as a European technical university, we are not just helping to improve Europe's future competitiveness, we are also working to overcome global challenges. That is why we believe it is equally important to strengthen and expand TU Darmstadt's global partnerships and networks and to continue to build our reputation internationally as an individual institution. TU Darmstadt will continue to support these international links while maintaining our existing local roots in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main metropolitan region.

Using these two core visions as a foundation, TU Darmstadt will pursue the following four guiding principles in its internationalisation process:

We evolve to be a more global university

TU Darmstadt will strive to embed European and global cooperation in research, teaching and transfer/xchange in the identity of our members and the institution, particularly by developing and expanding viable partnerships in bilateral and multilateral contexts. This will help us to become a hub of networks of international universities, research institutions, business and society. The process also involves strengthening our existing regional offices and building and expanding contacts in a targeted manner with academic, business and political figures outside Germany.

We foster international mobility

TU Darmstadt will strive to facilitate physical and non-physical mobility for all members of the university. This applies to students, academics and to our administrative staff. By increasing the number of joint degree programmes in partnerships with international universities, particularly through Unite!, and by increasing our cooperation with international research institutions, we will create new opportunities at universities and institutions around the world.

We offer an attractive, international and sustainable working and living environment

Our campus is international. This means that international, German and local students and staff live, learn and research together. In partnership with the city of Darmstadt, we will create a working and living environment that is safe and respectful and is characterised by cosmopolitanism and diversity.

We embed functional multi- lingualism in our language strategy

We promote internationalisation at our university with an institutional language policy. As a European technical university, we will draw on this policy to support EU language policies that seek to strengthen mutual understanding and competitiveness in Europe.

We will provide opportunities for all members of the university and our visitors to take part in training to acquire appropriate basic language skills to communicate in several languages in relevant contexts. Committee and administrative languages will be adjusted to allow international visitors to also actively participate in the processes that affect them.

3. Action areas

3.1 Structure and organisation

Internationality is an integral component of our entire organization. We therefore provide all members of our university with the opportunity to engage successfully in international contexts. TU Darmstadt will develop its internationalisation processes on a holistic and sustainable basis to ensure that tasks that are defined as strategically important are firmly established in the budget.

Goals

All members of TU Darmstadt live a culture of international exchange. This means that physical and non-physical mobility are a matter of course in study, research and work routines. Our own intercultural experiences are an essential element of international partnerships and, in line with an equal opportunity approach, are accessible to all of our university's members.

We will improve our communication and participation structures to ensure that all members of our university can participate in the internationalisation process.

TU Darmstadt will develop a holistic and sustainable institutional language policy.

We will develop an international campus with strategies to increase the quality of visits, such as through innovative energy and mobility concepts and we will continue to develop our administrative structures and processes, particularly in relation to digital procedures. Doing so will allow us to respond more flexibly, rapidly and reliably to changing situations in the future.

3.2 International network and regional grounding

We see ourselves as a European technical university. Based on this strong European grounding and the values associated with it, we will expand our global university partnerships.

Goals

We will develop our international network with appropriate partner universities that meet our strategic considerations. In this process, we will establish regional focus points beyond Europe – in Asia and North America – and we will build new forms of collaboration, also with countries in the Global South.

Our satellite offices in Asia and North America reflect our global presence and are active in German networks abroad. Drawing on our concept of campus offices, the regional offices function as hubs for connecting with local partners at universities, businesses and in society.

We will deepen strategic partnerships with Tongji University, Virginia Tech University and the Graz University of Technology, and we will develop at least two further similar arrangements.

Within Unite!, TU Darmstadt will continue to develop the concept of the European university. Unite! will serve as a role model for developing innovative partnership formats in research, teaching and administration.

We will continue to be active in German and European university networks such as TU9, CLUSTER and CESAER, as well as in international networks such as T.I.M.E. This will strengthen research, teaching and transfer/xchange, as well as the role of technical/science-focused universities in Europe.

We will strengthen our regional grounding by expanding partnerships with science, business and politics in Darmstadt, the City Of Science, and locally and with other universities in the Rhine-Main area.

3.3 Study and teaching

We aim to attract the best students from Germany and abroad. With academically demanding and internationally focused degrees, TU Darmstadt provides its graduates with the best possible preparation to participate in the international scientific community and labour market.

Goals

We will provide opportunities to all of our students to gain international experience that is relevant to their degree. The aim of TU Darmstadt is for at least 50 % of graduates to have benefited from physical and non-physical offerings by the time they graduate with their Master's degree. When facilitating this, we will focus on ensuring a balanced exchange.

TU Darmstadt aims to attract well-suited students and, in particular, to lift the proportion of international Master's students to 30 %.

We will lift the academic achievement of international students by developing and implementing a consistent and holistic plan for university preparation, introductory degree phase, study support, graduation and the transition to the employment market. The aim is to make it easier for international students to complete their degree during the standard period of study.

3.4 Research and transfer/xchange

TU Darmstadt will work together with partner institutions to make essential contributions in the response to current and future global research questions. We will provide our academics with the ideal framework to establish and expand international partnerships and to prepare for an international career.

Goals

We will provide a highly attractive teaching and research environment to lift the proportion of international academic staff from the current 17 % figure to 25 % and to permanently retain international talent. The aim is to move up from our current third place and to become Germany's most international technical university.

TU Darmstadt deems international mobility of academics to be an integral component of career development, particularly for early-stage researchers.

We will establish TU Darmstadt as an international hub for start-ups and innovation. With our strong regional network, we will create a framework for international start-up and transfer/xchange activities.

3.5 Recruitment and marketing

Our subsidiary objectives will help us to achieve a level of visibility in Europe and around the world that reflects our significance as a university.

Goal

As part of our internationalisation, we will develop TU Darmstadt into a brand that all members of the university can identify with. We will become involved in an external marketing concept that will also help Darmstadt to become better known internationally as a science hub.