



# Niedersachsen and its Institutions of Higher Education: Open to the World

## The Internationalisation Strategy of Niedersachsen's Institutions of Higher Education

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LandesHochschulKonferenz  
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# FOREWORD

The vice presidents responsible for international affairs at the higher education institutions of Niedersachsen have formed a working group as part of the Conference Group of Lower Saxonian Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (LHK Niedersachsen) in order to promote the further internationalisation of the higher education institutions of Niedersachsen. The aims of their internationalisation efforts are, on one hand, to promote the quality of research and education at their institutions and, on the other hand, to join together in assuming social responsibility for promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between peoples and countries.

Professor Hiltraud Casper-Hehne PhD  
Vice President University of Göttingen

The working group of vice presidents responsible for international affairs of the LHK Niedersachsen considers it an important task in this context to coordinate the internationalisation efforts of the colleges and universities of Niedersachsen. They seek to create synergies, learn from one another, exchange best practices, and implement them in Niedersachsen. With this in mind, they have developed a joint Niedersachsen internationalisation strategy, which was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly of the Niedersachsen Chamber of Industry and Commerce on 9 September 2019.

Professor Esther Ruigendijk PhD  
Vice President University of Oldenburg

Speakers of the Working Group of Vice Presidents Responsible for Internationalisation,  
LHK Niedersachsen



## INTERNATIONALISATION AS A COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS

**1 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen are internationally renowned places for research and study with worldwide impact and visibility. They consider diversity of opinions and international exchange to be indispensable foundations of their activities. The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen regard the internationalisation of their colleges and universities as an essential means of developing the quality of research, education, and teaching with enormous potential for innovation on the one hand, as well as a means of assuming social responsibility on the other. They intend to further develop their internationalisation activities in a targeted manner.

**2 |** The institutions of Niedersachsen consider the internationalisation of colleges and universities to mean the process of integrating an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the purpose, functions (study



and teaching, research, knowledge transfer, administration, management) and output of the colleges and universities, their individuals and their local and global partners.<sup>1</sup>

## GOALS

**3 |** Niedersachsen's institutions of higher education are pursuing important academic goals with their internationalisation, while at the same time addressing social challenges.

**4 |** *The academic goals* of internationalisation include the scientific contribution of Niedersachsen's institutions of higher education to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>2</sup> (SDGs) and to strengthening the quality of research through international cooperation and the integration of global and international perspectives. Furthermore, the goals are to improve the quality of studying and teaching by integrating international aspects, so that both German and international students are better prepared for a globalised labour market. Internationalisation also serves to increase international visibility and thus attract the brightest minds to Niedersachsen's universities (scientists, researchers, students, and staff).

**5 |** In addition to contributing to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, the social goals of internationalisation primarily concern the promotion of mutual understanding between nations and countries as well as the promotion of European values. The institutions of higher education bear responsibility for the

<sup>1</sup> Jane Knight (2015): Updated Definition of Internationalization. In: International Higher Education, 33, 2.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

global science system and the associated development cooperation, particularly in view of current refugee movements. They also regard their international cooperations as science diplomacy, with which they contribute to securing peace worldwide.

In addition, regional development should also benefit from the internationalisation endeavours. Cross-border regional development, e.g. within the framework of EU funding, is to be supported by providing international education for students. The institutions seek to support the recruitment of skilled workers in the respective regions with professional transition management that introduces international students to the local labour market.

## OUR VALUES IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIONS

**6 |** The colleges and universities of Niedersachsen always pursue international cooperation for mutual benefit. They strive to uphold fundamental values and quality

standards: freedom of research, education and teaching, freedom of expression, the principles of scientific integrity and the protection of intellectual property.

**7 |** Cultural diversity, the knowledge and wealth of experience of international students, scientists, researchers and staff are seen as great assets and should be utilised to establish a solid international presence. The prerequisite for this is respect for central values such as tolerance, responsibility, solidarity, recognition of cultural diversity, freedom of expression and an open-minded atmosphere.

This also includes facilitating the participation of international students and scientists in research, study and teaching as well as in self-governance. The promotion of institutional linguistic diversity is an important aspect in this context.

## ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

**8 |** In recent years, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen have contributed a great deal to creating a world-oriented Niedersachsen and to establishing diverse perspectives, plurality of opinions and international exchange as a basis for research, study and teaching at their institutions.





**9 |** The number of international students in Niedersachsen has increased by 35% from winter semester 2013/2014 to winter semester 2017/2018.

Various integration measures have been developed at the individual locations to ensure that the stay of these students was a success. This also applies to the integration of refugees into academic life. The institutions and the professors and students have been committed to ensuring that non-academic refugees are also included in everyday life in Germany.

**10 |** Many English-language bachelor's and particularly master's and PhD programmes have been established, which now attract international students from all over the world. Furthermore, the internationalisation of curricula has been successfully implemented at many institutions so that local students can also gain international experience.

**11 |** The number of international scientists and researchers has also increased. Welcome Centres/ Services have been established at many locations in order to support newly arrived academics, from doctoral students and postdocs to senior researchers, with their integration into everyday German life.

**12 |** In the field of research, the universities play an active part in European research programmes. Joint research, study and teaching projects are conducted in a wide range of institutional international cooperations and networks as well as through cooperations in border regions.

**13 |** Many degree programmes, projects, centres or other activities in research and study once again illustrate the international orientation of Niedersachsen's institutions of higher education, such as the international master's degree course in Industrial Informatics (University of Applied Sciences Emden/Leer), the International Max Planck Research School for Genome Science (University of Göttingen in cooperation with University of Heidelberg and TU Munich), Leibniz Research Centre 'TRUST - Transdisciplinary Rural and Urban Spatial Transformation' (Leibniz University Hannover), International Graduate School Hannover Biomedical Research School (Hannover Medical School), establishment of the European Exchange Platform:





Union of Theatre Schools and Academies (Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media), international bachelor of Intercultural Theology, Migration and Global Cooperation (University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology Hermannsburg), Graduate College Center for World Music (University of Hildesheim), international master's programme in Governance and Human Rights (Leuphana University Lüneburg), European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations (University of Oldenburg).

It should be emphasised that Niedersachsen, as a federal state that is open to the world, does not charge tuition fees to international students. The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen wish to continue their progress on the basis of these successes.

## NEXT STEPS - SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR AN INTERNATIONALLY NETWORKED, GLOBALISED WORLD

**14 |** The institutions of higher education in Niedersachsen seek to use the scientific potential of regional/area studies and transdisciplinary expertise on countries/regions (e.g. content/ scientific expertise on Europe, China, East Africa, Latin America) as a possible element of the internationalisation strategy in order to align the respective institution's strategies with the help of these competences.

Furthermore, they also plan to use this competence for community outreach activities (Third Mission\*) to initiate an intensive exchange with the community about global developments.



\* Translator's note: Third Mission refers to the "third mission" of the institutions of higher education, after education and research, to perform community outreach/knowledge transfer activities and educate the public.

**15 |** Niedersachsen's institutions of higher education will regularly organise a joint conference that scientifically explores global political developments and advises the institutions on their internationalisation strategy, potentially with the support and participation of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the Ministry for Science and Culture of Niedersachsen (MWK). The focus should be in particular on crisis regions, but also on so-called "difficult" partner countries. This conference should be organised for the responsible vice presidents for internationalisation, the heads of the international offices, the international student advisers and the Erasmus coordinators.

**16 |** In addition, a virtual Niedersachsen advisory portal is to be established, which will create transparency of the expertise on regions and countries available at Niedersachsen's institutions of higher education, network this expertise and make it accessible (to research, industry, politics and administration).



## EUROPE

**17 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen strive for a stronger strategic orientation towards Europe and in doing so, aim to promote cooperation in Europe and the development of European competence in research, studies and teaching. Furthermore, they would like to play an even greater role in European research and teaching programmes.

**18 |** They intend to strengthen their strategic European partnerships and promote student mobility within Europe. This also includes the establishment of joint and double degrees.

**19 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen also support the concept of European universities and strategic partnerships overall between European universities and colleges. The potential of border regions must also be harnessed to a greater extent.

Scientific cooperation can also contribute to maintaining bridges in politically tense situations within Europe. In this context, the universities are lobbying for the establishment of a fund by the Ministry of Science to support European cooperation.

**20 |** In addition, they would like to cooperate more closely with the representatives of the State of Niedersachsen in Brussels. Regular meetings of the representatives with the vice presidents responsible for internationalisation in Niedersachsen are to be arranged.



**21 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen also aim to enable students to learn at least two European foreign languages for communication and specialised purposes and to acquire familiarity with at least two European countries. Moreover, they should engage at a high academic level with the history and culture of Europe in the global context, the project of European unification and Europe's role in the world. Here, focus should be placed on teacher training courses, as their graduates play an important disseminator role in schools and in the young generation for the European peace project.

**22 |** Stays abroad, at least within Europe, should be an integral part of each degree programme.

## LANGUAGE POLICY

**23 |** The development or further development of an institutional language policy is important to the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen. They aim to educate multilingual and interculturally competent domestic and international university and college graduates for an increasingly international labour market. They intend to refine and implement a language

concept at their institutions that distinguishes between the languages of instruction, examination, subject and communication, which is closely coordinated with the mobility and recruitment strategies of the respective institution, takes disciplinary particularities into account and incorporates the areas of study and teaching, research and (self-)governance of the institution into the concept.



Universities attach great importance to ensuring linguistic diversity based on European languages rather than just the English language. In accordance with their language policy, the universities and colleges of Niedersachsen will offer general as well as specialist language courses. The language courses should be eligible for credit as academic achievement in the elective sections of the degree programmes.



**24 |** All in all, the institutions of higher education in Niedersachsen intend to expand their range of foreign-language courses as far as reasonably possible, especially with regard to master's degrees but also bachelor's degrees.

**25 |** The institutions of higher education resolve to support teaching staff to teach in two languages and encourage individuals with a native language other than German to teach in German.

**26 |** The institutions of higher education consider it important to introduce passive multilingualism in committees (international members of the institutions understand German, but speak English). This enables international teaching staff/students to be integrated quickly into academic self-decision-making and to contribute their perspectives.

**27 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen seek to provide their international students and doctoral students opportunities for developing their language skills in German as a language of study and everyday life. Furthermore, they want to provide all international students with courses on academic working and writing in order to ensure the success of their studies.

**28 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen also wish to help their teaching and administrative staff to learn and use English (possibly via funds set aside for this purpose). The availability of interculturally educated English-speaking administrative staff should also be ensured for international cooperation.

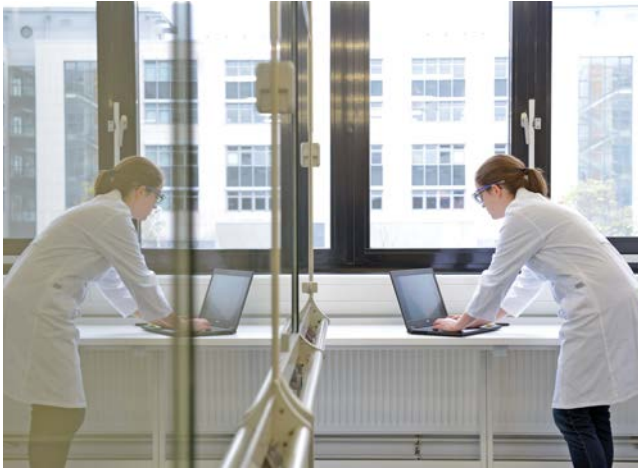
**29 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen endeavour to ensure that their websites and the documents for research, teaching and administration are available in English. They would also like the website of the Ministry for Science and Culture of Niedersachsen to be available in English.



## COOPERATION IN RESEARCH

**30 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen resolve to accept and tackle global scientific and societal challenges in cooperation with international partners. To this end, they have set themselves the goal of further expanding their cooperation in world-class research networks.

**31 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen also intend to participate in even



more international calls for research funding, such as the funding programmes of the European Union.

**32 |** Since international cooperation is increasingly a prerequisite for participation in internationally oriented funding programmes, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen endeavour to further optimise the circumstances for successful funding applications from institutions based in Niedersachsen (targeted information, strategic advice and active support in fundraising and project management).

**33 |** Furthermore, in order to improve the quality of research and to incorporate an international perspective into research, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen seek to continue to attract outstanding early career researchers from abroad for temporary or permanent positions at German institutions. To this end, they strive to create optimal conditions at universities and colleges (Welcome Centre, international calls for proposals, etc).

**34 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen endeavour to improve their public perception and public awareness of the universities of Niedersachsen and Niedersachsen's research abroad. They are developing the appropriate means to this goal.

**35 |** They also seek to demonstrate the strengths of the German science system in its complexity with its federal structure, a differentiated higher education landscape and diverse career paths.



## INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

**36 |** "Internationalisation at home " is a central element of the internationalisation of the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen, with the aim of enabling all students and staff to gain international experience, even if they do not have the opportunity to spend time abroad. The institutions are also committed to assessing the extent in which their institutional "national

identity" affects their internationalisation efforts, so that the diversity of international perspectives can be put to good use in all areas of their organisation.

**37 |** This also includes recruiting international academic and non-academic staff.



**38 |** It naturally follows that the institutions of higher education always advertise all vacancies internationally (in two languages or even more if necessary). Where suitable, this is also done for recruiting non-academic staff, if international recruitment is appropriate or may prove advantageous.

**39 |** During recruitment, greater attention should be paid to international experience, language skills and commitment to internationalisation.

**40 |** German and international students should be involved in the further development of the internationalisation strategy; particularly international students should be enabled to participate better at the university. This includes the expectation that international students and academics are willing to learn German.

**41 |** Learning groups should be nationally and culturally mixed, e.g. in the international classroom or in summer schools. These international groups are taught and supported in order to increase their learning success. In addition, universities and colleges should offer sufficient courses in foreign languages and intercultural competence. They should also use and develop the international experience and language skills of their staff.

## INTERNATIONALISATION ABROAD

**42 |** Mobility at the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen is well developed. However, there is a need for quantitative and qualitative improvements that the institutions resolve to address.

**43 |** For students, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen plan to make stays abroad a more frequent compulsory element in their curricula; at the very least, they intend to develop and expand appropriate fixed mobility windows that are tailored and adapted to specific disciplines. They will support forms of facilitated (if possible, automatic) recognition of academic achievements. The universities and colleges also seek to expand the information and advisory services on existing funding options for more mobility. It is to under discussion whether a virtual platform serving all of Niedersachsen should be established for this purpose.

**44 |** The institutions of higher education intend to promote mobility especially for students on teacher training courses, so that they can gain European or worldwide experience and pass this on in the future to the younger generation at school. This is also in keeping with the social responsibility of institutions to educate globally concerned citizens in universities and schools who are committed to a peaceful and just world.

**45 |** The institutions of higher education plan to use adapted mobility formats for non-academic staff.

## INTEGRATION

**46 |** An urgent challenge of internationalisation is the adequate supply of student housing and guest houses. Universities and student unions need additional resources for this. In cooperation with the Niedersachsen student unions, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen will develop concepts, define common goals and measures in a Letter of Intent and support the implementation.

**47 |** In addition, the institutions of higher education intend to step up their efforts to optimise the academic success of international students. To this end, they will evaluate the already wide range of language and subject-specific preparatory courses available in



Niedersachsen, develop best-practice examples and make them transparent so that the institutions can learn from each other.

**48 |** The institutions of higher education resolve to continue to support the integration of refugees and vulnerable students and academics into the German higher education system.

**49 |** Together with industry, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen intend to further develop and implement concepts for sustainable transition management (from academia to the labour market) so that international students can also enter the local labour market after their studies. In order to integrate students and academics into the higher education system and the German labour market, the institutions plan to work closely with the local authorities and the local business community.

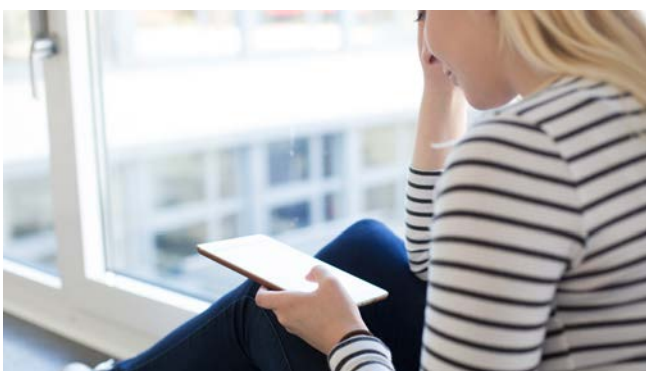


## DIGITALISATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION

**50 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen intend to use digitisation as a strategic tool for the internationalisation of teaching, research, knowledge transfer and infrastructure services. Curricula are to be internationalised, which also includes the digitisation of the curricula, as this will enable even students who are unable to go abroad to gain international experience.

Among other things, the institutions intend to expand blended learning programmes and digital teaching formats to support the "international classroom". Digital teaching formats are also to be made available for development cooperation, for example through access for refugees. Virtual mobility measures can also serve to promote physical mobility, as they help to break down barriers. At the state level, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen will work towards the establishment of funding programmes for virtual mobility.

**51 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen are aware that digitisation offers many opportunities for internationalisation, such as open access, research information



systems, Open Education Resources (OER) or the European Student Card.

## COOPERATION IN INTERNATIONALISATION

**52 |** In the future, the institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen plan to cooperate more closely in the field of internationalisation, for example with regard to sharing and access to resources, networks or specific cooperations.

## INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND MARKETING

**53 |** The institutions of higher education in Niedersachsen resolve to jointly strengthen the public perception of Niedersachsen's academic research abroad. To this end, they intend to use strategic branch offices, their partner universities, Niedersachsen-based institutions, partners from Niedersachsen abroad and international partners in Niedersachsen and border regions (e.g. Representatives of the State of Niedersachsen to the EU in Brussels, Anhui Province Representative Office in Hannover, Niedersachsen Representative Office in Shanghai, Niedersachsen Representative Offices Warsaw and Moscow, US Business Representative Office in Atlanta, USA) to promote Niedersachsen.

**54 |** Overall, they are striving for an even stronger integration of Niedersachsen's science and higher education landscape. Joint promotional material/activities are to be developed which can be used by the institutions of higher education for international contacts.

**55 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen are planning to exchange information material and, if appropriate, display such material at international conferences at which the universities and colleges of Niedersachsen are represented.

**56 |** A special focus should also be on a joint presence in Brussels, which can be run through the State Representatives.

## FINANCING INTERNATIONALISATION

**57 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen have become much more international in recent years. At the same time, the financial scope is extremely limited. Internationalisation activities are often financed from project funds, which jeopardises the sustainability of many measures. Internationalisation should not be financed primarily through temporary projects in the long term. The institutions are committed to ensuring that the state of Niedersachsen provides adequate basic funding in this respect.

**58 |** Internationalisation has been included as a performance area in the target agreements between the state and the institution of higher education. The institutions of higher education

of Niedersachsen will ensure that it is sufficiently taken into account in the agreements.

**59 |** Tasks related to internationalisation often require a higher level of remuneration for the academic and non-academic staff involved. This should also be taken into account when the state allocates funds to Niedersachsen's institutions of higher education.

**60 |** The institutions of higher education of Niedersachsen agree to the implementation of this strategy over the next two years.



## IMPRINT

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