



NWU®

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
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NWU Internationalisation Strategy 2023-2027

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NWU INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY 2023-2027

1 Preamble

The North-West University (NWU) aspires to reposition itself as a competitive global intellectual leader. The three-campus model of the NWU, with each campus located in a geographically distinct area (Vanderbijlpark, Mahikeng and Potchefstroom), offers the institution a multi-pronged competitive advantage to operate in diverse cultures and economies. The internationalisation strategy for the NWU should be seen as an enabling document. It sets the tone and parameters within which the NWU promotes and infuses internationalisation at every level of its core business.

The strategy remains open and dynamic with the understanding that up-to-date ideas and implementation successes may be woven into its translation into the bedrock of the institution. Institution-wide consultative and participatory processes will underpin the processes, outcomes and monitoring of this international strategy.

2 Link to the NWU's Strategic Plan

The NWU's Strategic Plan is the key strategic plan that underpins our planning and development of corollary and complementary strategies. The Internationalisation Strategy should translate the ambition of the NWU's Strategic Plan Goals into reality and contribute toward NWU international relations. Internationalisation is of prime importance to enhance the quality and quantity of academic outcomes, cultivate and enrich excellence, and global competitiveness in teaching-learning, research and innovation, and community engagement. More importantly, internationalisation is crucial for the world to provide integrated and joint approaches to global challenges such as pandemics (as was seen with HIV/AIDS and Covid-19), climate change, food security, water, energy, and globalisation. It offers opportunities for staff and students to study and experience other countries.

3 Strategy Context

3.1 South African Higher Education Sector

Internationalisation of higher education has been ongoing for decades, prompting most international university rankings to consider internationalisation as an essential quality proxy. In South Africa, the principles and priority focus of higher education internationalisation are articulated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa (2019). According to this DHET Policy Framework, focus "*[i]n the design of internationalisation of higher education activities relating to **teaching, learning, research, and community engagement** by South African higher education institutions, priority must be given to South Africa's interests*". In terms of the geographic regions, the Policy Framework encourages, where possible and relevant, the prioritisation of "*the SADC states, the rest of the African continent, BRICS, the global South and emerging economies, and the world beyond*". Additional principles provided by the DHET Policy Framework include:

- Academic freedom and national interests.
- Legal compliance.
- Compliance with South Africa's quality assurance regime.

- Ethics, Mutuality, Value Creation, Quality and Funding.
- Complementarity of current and future collaborations.

3.2 The NWU context

The NWU boasts several active collaborations and partnerships across the world. The NWU supports and facilitates internationalisation activities whilst demonstrating excellence, equity, and innovation in pursuing internationalisation in higher education. It also intends to promote a culture of global awareness and appreciation for international perspectives and cultural diversity at the NWU.

The NWU is already on track to becoming a truly internationalised institution of higher teaching in learning and research. Through its quality of offerings and services, it attracts excellent international academics and students from across the globe. As a result, the NWU enjoys an extensive and visible national and international profile and may lay claim to the following accomplishments:

- diversified, enriched teaching and learning environment which benefits both international and South African students alike and the nation as a whole;
- research and scholarship symbolic of both national and international standards of excellence;
- substantive representation of students who are connecting worldwide while versed in global and local knowledge systems and who demonstrate cross-cultural sensitivity;
- substantive representation of staff who are internationally recognised, innovative, and who have global and local knowledge as well as cross-cultural sensitivity;
- existing successful levels of international engagements and projects;
- innovative intellectual resources that guarantee, preserve and improve the nation's socio-economic, scientific, and technological systems of the nation and, thereby, the competitiveness and global ethical standing of South Africa; and
- respectful endorsement of diverse identities creating a rich diversity of people and ideas that celebrate a harmonious and multicultural staff and student population as well as work environment.

3.3 Institutional Interpretation of Internationalisation

The DHET Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa (2019) guides and provides context for a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that the NWU will follow. However, it is accepted that it is not possible to define internationalisation in its broader contexts as, by its very nature, it is a constantly evolving phenomenon. Therefore, the definition proposed by the DHET Policy Framework also applies to the NWU: *“Internationalisation of higher education” means an intentional or steered process to incorporate intercultural international and/or global dimensions into higher education in order to advance the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education and thus to enhance the quality of education and research.*”

In summary, the following intentions are identified for internationalisation at the NWU:

- Strategically organise and promote value-driven internationalisation at the NWU.
- Promote a culture of global awareness of and appreciation for international perspectives and cultural diversity at the NWU.
- Expand and intensify NWU strategic partnerships with prominent international institutions of higher learning, including the possibility of collaborative degrees, academic and support staff and student exchange programmes and research collaborations.
- Enhance internationally relevant research, teaching and learning, and community engagement, striving to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by sharing expertise at the NWU.
- Establish, develop, and intensify international educational and research opportunities for staff and students of the NWU.

- Increase and augment the prevalence of prominent international academics, world-class researchers, innovators, and postgraduate and undergraduate students at, or associated with, the NWU.

The spirit of the strategy is not to undermine local initiatives and efforts but rather maintain a balance of globally competitive yet locally relevant internationalisation agendas.

3.4 Philosophy Driving our Strategy

While the Strategy values co-creation, the philosophy that drives our internationalisation should be about “**partner for greater impact and mutual benefit**”. While partnerships would ultimately increase our international exposure and the NWU global footprint, the approach should not be a random and non-strategic engagement. The key question is, “how do we derive competitive advantage from partnerships?” e.g., addressing global challenges such as the SDGs, increased access to international research funding, improved global rankings, etc. Those who spearhead the process of fostering partnerships and collaborations should leverage on existing successful and impactful partnerships or engage new strategic partners to increase our global competitiveness. Thus, our global expansion shall follow a multi-dimensional approach using measures that home in on selective, focused, and serendipitous engagements with strategic international partners. A multi-tiered (considering the human development pipeline of excellence in higher education) and multi-faceted approach (across the university’s full mandate) ensure success through harvesting the higher education landscape’s multigenerational expertise.

3.5 Purpose of our Strategy

To forge sustainable, mutually beneficial, enduring, successful and impactful partnerships.

3.6 Scope of Engagement

The global connections and partnerships leading to increased visibility and more significant impact are not only limited to universities and institutions of high learning. They should also target Research and Development (R & D) organisations and industries.

4 Internationalisation Strategic Themes

In the context of the preceding internationalisation mission elements and our intentions, the following vital strategic themes have been prioritised to make our strategy more focused and likely to succeed:

- International Strategic Agreements and Partnerships.
- Research and Innovation.
- Enriched Teaching and Learning.
- Engaged Scholarship
- Open Access and Digital Scholarship.
- Internationality of Staff and Student Profile.
- Enhanced Access to International Funding.

4.1 International Strategic Agreements and Partnerships

As articulated in our purpose and philosophy that will drive internationalisation, our approach would be to “establish number of strategic, broad, value-adding and active collaborations and partnerships through agreements that are likely to be impactful”. To this end, it is imperative that the NWU enters multi-disciplinary initiatives encompassing a wide range of activities across teaching-learning, community engagement and research and innovation.

The NWU aims to expand and intensify its strategic partnerships with prominent international institutions of higher learning, including the possibility of collaborative degrees, academic and support staff and student exchange programmes, and research collaborations. The NWU’s strategic direction will ensure that sustained, meaningful collaborations fortify its international involvement in

the interests of world-class research related to teaching and learning, and beneficial community engagements through mutual, “living” partnerships creating excellence and prominence for the research teams and students.

The conventional and long-established method of international collaboration is bottom-up. Most meaningful and sustainable partnerships between institutions occur because researchers and educators independently find a common purpose and obvious benefit for mutual interaction. However, the NWU recognises the need of a multi-tier approach that encompasses bottom-up and top-down initiatives, as well as other management and administrative levels, would best serve to ensure the achievement of a holistic international partnership profile. The top-down approach can assist in visualising and stimulating partnerships that may leverage existing stakeholder relationships with the university, such as government, alumni, and industry partners. A top-down viewpoint envisions and conceptualises prospects that are more difficult to perceive from a single part of the institution, for example, through matchmaking. It connects staff members who may not know or even consider working with each other. It conceives partnerships using national and international frameworks, agendas, and positions and aligns partnerships with the institution’s strategic plan. The intermediary approach aims to bridge gaps between the activities of management and academics and to support and align them. It ensures a balance that will benefit the institution and individual researchers.

4.2 Research and Innovation

International research collaboration is already encouraged and measured by the number of formal active research agreements with international universities and facilities. Internationalisation of Research and Innovation is currently governed by Strategic Goal 2, “Conducts research and innovation with a strategic focus on global impact”. Research and innovation across borders require the commitment of intensive programme cycle management that ranges from identifying the opportunity to budgeting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and sustainability planning. The NWU invests in state-of-the-art research infrastructure facilities and equipment which can serve to attract research collaborations with strategic international institutions and industries. The NWU promotes and fosters innovation and utilizes international best practices in technology transfer and innovation support. Research collaborations leading to the development of innovations and intellectual property (IP) with international partners are encouraged. Where possible, globally relevant innovations are protected through patent filings in international territories. This is to facilitate commercialisation in international markets.

The NWU and its researchers seek to focus on research partnerships that are symbiotic and mutually beneficial, with earmarked institutions exhibiting shared and complementary research areas and strengths. The NWU highly promotes collaborations, allowing staff and students to visit research facilities, universities, and industry abroad. In this context, sabbatical and study leave are encouraged and monitored, as international exposure of researchers is vital. The NWU encourages and supports international conference participation, especially in delivering research findings, academic papers, monographs, etc. International conferences also provide opportunities for honing scientific presentation skills and networking at a global level. The NWU encourages their staff to organise and host international conferences in South Africa and globally.

Our research leadership, comprising Research Chairs, National Research Foundation (NRF)-rated researchers, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, Executive Deans, Deputy Deans for Research and Innovation, Research Directors, Research Professors, Leaders of international research networks, Members of International Expert Committees, and the entire research community from and outside Research Entities, are invaluable assets to NWU. Institutional and Faculty research themes proactively address SDGs, blue sky research and 4IR, and collectively achieved excellence in addressing global challenges such as energy, food, water, climate, and health, as evidenced by our thriving Centres of Excellence and other leading Research Entities. The existing NWU research programmes already operating as regional or global authorities shall be leveraged to position NWU as a worldwide leader. We shall endeavour to identify thematic areas with the potential to enable NWU to pioneer and lead nationally, regionally, and globally. For example, the NWU aspires to be a digital research and innovation leader to support Africa’s growing digital society and economy.

The NWU strives to enhance the profile of its research activities to increase international visibility. The institution aims to improve research productivity through excellence and global leadership. Researchers are encouraged to lead in generating publications either as first or primary (senior) authors and correctly affiliate with the NWU in every publication. Similarly, our international partner institutions and Extraordinary academic staff are highly encouraged to co-affiliate with the NWU in their publications as far as practically possible. The NWU actively stimulates and supports international guest researchers coming to NWU. Integrity and ethics in research are embedded in the institutional culture.

4.3 Engaged scholarship

Community engagement in research is a long-standing element of the NWU, and the university acknowledges its obligation to the communities it serves. Where international partnerships are implemented within community engagement, adherence to the NWU 's Community Engagement principles of mutuality and reciprocity with ethical clearance should be followed. As the university values and monitors its impact in and on our communities, the ultimate contribution to positive change can be monitored through the contributions of our experts, as well as through our experts featuring in compiling international accords and policy briefs.

4.4 Enriched Teaching and Learning

The NWU seeks to develop focused programmes and devise suitable models to attract international students with academic excellence at both graduate and postgraduate levels. Students will also benefit from enriched teaching and learning curricula and the expertise of excellent visiting and local scholars. As a strategic priority, training in global competency becomes part of the culture of the NWU. In this regard, disciplines and research areas consider global competencies from their own distinctive angle. Consequently, each academic unit is encouraged and supported to determine the appropriate means by which they might optimally transform staff and students into truly global citizens and leaders who can elucidate globally relevant issues within the context of their specific disciplines. Faculties and schools must foster international work-integrated learning and service-learning opportunities where applicable and affordable and to develop appropriate collaborative degree programmes with identified universities internationally. The NWU would prioritise international recognition of programmes, and the number of internationally recognised programmes would be carefully monitored at both campus and institutional levels.

4.5 Open Access and Digital Scholarship

The ever-increasing global adoption of Open Science is establishing a “global commons for science and innovation”. The NWU is proactively inculcating the ethos and principles of open science. These include establishing a supportive research infrastructure and environment and expanding the catalogue of research services to make resources and collections available through e-Research and Open Access practices. The prioritised services encompass developing a dedicated portal for e-Research and Innovation, promoting Research Data Management, fostering data literacy skills, increasing the digitisation of print-born information resources such as old theses and dissertations to enhance research visibility, monitoring publications as well as citation indices in Scopus and Open Access journals, assisting academics and students to register for ORCID iD, and the promotion of Open Access publishing through transformative agreements, to mentions a few.

4.6 Internationality of our Staff and Student Profile

The NWU is home to international academic and support staff from across the globe and diverse backgrounds, and the growing number of staff members continues to be recruited internationally. The NWU supports a diverse culture of international staff and attracts international staff as per institutional recommended targets. The NWU values strive to accommodate international staff and build a reputation as South Africa's foremost university, celebrating and championing a multicultural and cosmopolitan society.

The institution strongly supports and promotes both inbound and outbound staff mobility, strives to attract a significantly increased number of excellent scholars from around the world and exposes

NWU academic and support staff to excellent development opportunities. The establishment of staff-exchange programmes is set as a priority. These include staff studying abroad and formalised academic exchange programmes such as research visits and sabbaticals. In addition, the NWU encourages and supports international conference participation, especially for delivering academic papers, monographs, etc. The NWU continues to prioritise and increase international postdoctoral fellows.

Best practice indicates that a university with a well-established internationalisation footprint has a relatively large proportion of international students from many countries at both the graduate and postgraduate levels. The NWU attracts many talented international students for study and research at NWU. The NWU establishes several exchange programmes to enrich the student experience and facilitate mobility. The NWU supports and promotes both inbound and outbound student mobility to promote a multicultural student cohort that is globally aware and exhibits intercultural competency and cultural intelligence. The NWU seeks to enhance the students' international experience by offering a culturally-diverse environment that prepares them for global citizenship and employment.

4.7 Enhanced Access to International Funding

The partnerships should leverage our collaborative funding efforts and increase opportunities for international collaboration. Limited local funding from science councils and funders for research and innovation and other academic projects in the South African higher education sector is actual. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the economic pressures globally; the situation is more pronounced and dire in the developing world.

Thus, our internationalisation project would strive to capitalise on existing partnerships, collaborations, and international extraordinary appointments at NWU to identify additional key international funders to enhance our prospects of accessing funding through collaborative and non-collaborative grants. It is also expected that in-kind support, such as joint supervision and knowledge exchange, will naturally flow from symbiotic and mutually beneficial partners having a shared vision and sustained relationship with the NWU.

5 Monitoring and Evaluation

As internationalisation is a complex, continuously evolving process, the implementation of the strategy will require close monitoring and the development of appropriate Performance Indicators (cross-cutting and domain-specific) to measure success over short-, medium- and long-term on the seven (7) identified strategic themes of:

- International Agreements and Strategic Partnerships.
- Research and Innovation.
- Engaged Scholarship
- Enriched Teaching and Learning.
- Open Access and Digital Scholarship.
- Internationality of Staff and Student Profile.
- Enhanced Access to International Funding.

6 Overall Long-Term Impact

The strategy is designed with the intention of achieving impact in or on local and international development targets with the NWU as a partner of choice. NWU will realise its vision, mission, and dream by leveraging an aligned internationalisation strategy. As a result, there will be a significantly improved scholarly stature of NWU researchers, academics and students, recognised as global intellectual leaders, and through diverse attainments that include, but are not limited to: Centres of Excellence, appointments as Research Chairs, Leaders of International Consortia and Networks, NRF rating, publication in high impact journals and improved citation indices, international grants, enhanced teaching and learning as well as evidence-based, globally connected community engagements, etc.

There will be an enhanced international footprint and global competitiveness with increased global connections and partnerships, increased visibility, networks, and joint activities (increased benefit sharing from partnerships), sustained, long-lasting and mutually beneficial partnerships established and a concomitant improvement in global rankings.

7 Conclusion

This strategy aspires to partner with strategic international partners likely to add value to NWU based on shared vision and mutuality. In summary, the NWU reaffirms that internationalisation:

- leads to innovation through augmented collaborations, enhanced cross-pollination of ideas and concepts, and mutual intellectual enrichment;
- develops systems of science and innovation for the global public good;
- strengthens networking, value creation and international influence in an interdependent global village;
- increases collaboration for a more significant impact - many actors share common interests and priorities;
- accesses the best talent globally and allows the NWU to grow and position itself as a global player;
- supports the continuing professional development of staff (support and academic) and students;
- improves the quality of education and research, stimulates academic staff and student mobility, fosters community engagement and innovative thinking and prepares both staff and students for local as well as global citizenship; and
- enhances international footprint and global competitiveness.

The NWU will capitalise on existing partnerships, collaborations, and extraordinary appointees who have shown to be trusted and reliable partners and identify additional vital international stakeholders. All our actions will ensure strategic alignment with NWU's Strategic Plan and Goals.