




Freiräume*

**International Strategy
for Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences
2020–2030**



FH Bielefeld
University of
Applied Sciences

* The German word *Freiräume* (literally: free spaces) means flexibility, versatility, space for creativity or leeway.

Starting point

With more than 10,000 students at the three locations in Bielefeld, Minden and Gütersloh, Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences (UAS) is one of the larger universities of applied sciences in Germany. In practice-oriented study programmes and with regard to cooperations with companies and institutions based in the East Westphalia-Lippe (OWL) region, Bielefeld UAS lives and breathes diversity and equal opportunities. As a higher-education institution that is open to the world, it qualifies students for professional and executive functions. These principles, which are deeply rooted in the self-conception of Bielefeld UAS, are lived and observed throughout the whole institution.

This basis gives Bielefeld UAS the prerequisites to face the change in circumstances and challenges. Internationalisation is one of the decisive strategic pillars and gains ever more importance. In the 21st century, accomplishments in research, transfer and teaching can only be reached if academia exchanges views across national borders. For this, the university needs to create the necessary opportunities. Bielefeld UAS thus understands itself as an institution that is open to the world, which faces up to these developments:

- Innovation in technology, services, models of society and the arts emerges through international cooperation. Thus, only globally connected science and teaching can meet the university's requirements on a permanent basis.
- Young researchers, due to their previous engagements, are used to working internationally and carry this approach into the university.
- Equally, potential employers increasingly expect graduates of Bielefeld UAS to possess intercultural competences. There is a high demand for such competences in the OWL region, in particular.¹ In general, there is a broad consensus about the fact that small and medium-sized enterprises as well as family-run businesses will only be able to fulfil their need for professionals by employing international specialists.

- Universities of applied sciences receive more and more attention from politics, with an increase in funding. Dedicated, extensive programmes, in particular for improving international research performance and networking, are intended to overcome the currently prevailing underperformance in internationality of universities of applied sciences in comparison with the entirety of German universities.
- Over the long term, Bielefeld UAS will only be able to maintain its size, and thus its financial resources as well as its right to exist, if it can compensate for the projected decrease in the number of students by offering internationally sought-after study programmes.
- Ultimately, the protectionist policies which increasingly spread all over the world conflict with the concept of global action and therefore with Germany's economic and social foundation. As a consequence, Bielefeld UAS needs to sensitise and prepare its students by enabling them to gain international experience and to create *Freiräume* for all of its associates to act globally.

Bielefeld UAS as a whole has so far hardly reacted to these challenges, even though in some faculties a systematic consideration of these competence requirements has taken place. This includes the expansion of subject-specific partner networks, English-taught module offers, mobility windows and generous recognition practices. In summary, however, these activities have remained isolated and have led to only a low rate of mobility (13% among all students) and few international students (9% of all students) at the university.

In an increasingly competitive academic environment, Bielefeld UAS therefore needs to relate all internationalisation activities – apart from overriding objectives of international exchange – to its overall strategy as an institution and emphasise its own institutional interests as well.²

¹ For example, 94% of small and medium-sized businesses in OWL are internationally active, compared to less than 40% of small and medium-sized businesses in greater Berlin. Source: Natalie Bartholomäus, *Internationalisierung – neue Märkte, veränderte Strukturen*. 2018.

² This systematic connection of the overall strategy and the internationalisation activities was also the focus of the German Rectors' Conference's audit "Internationalisation of Universities", which Bielefeld UAS was able to take part in in 2017. The results of this audit form the basis for the development of the university's internationalisation activities and therefore for the present International Strategy. The preparation process of the strategy received consultative assistance from "Internationale DAAD-Akademie (iDA)".

Objectives

The overall canon of objectives for the ten years to come originates from the aforementioned starting point and is meant to serve as a guideline and orientation for the fields of action below. In general, internationalisation is of utmost strategic importance for Bielefeld UAS with all its stakeholders and in all its entities.

1. We enable all students to gain international or intercultural experience

The academic education of students is the key activity of Bielefeld UAS. In order to enable them to secure an attractive long-term employment as well as participation in society, Bielefeld UAS offers students opportunities for gaining intercultural and international experience throughout all study programmes. These opportunities need to be individually adapted to the respective study programme or model. The instruments that the university uses are made flexible in a way that students are able to gain international experience even when conditions might be temporarily unfavourable.

2. We provide academic education to international students

For the university, attracting, welcoming and educating students from abroad is not just the objective of internationalisation, but also a decisive precondition. It focuses on the international students' academic success with regard to their employability in an internationally connected job market.

3. We position ourselves as an institution that is open to the world by building international networks in all of the university's areas

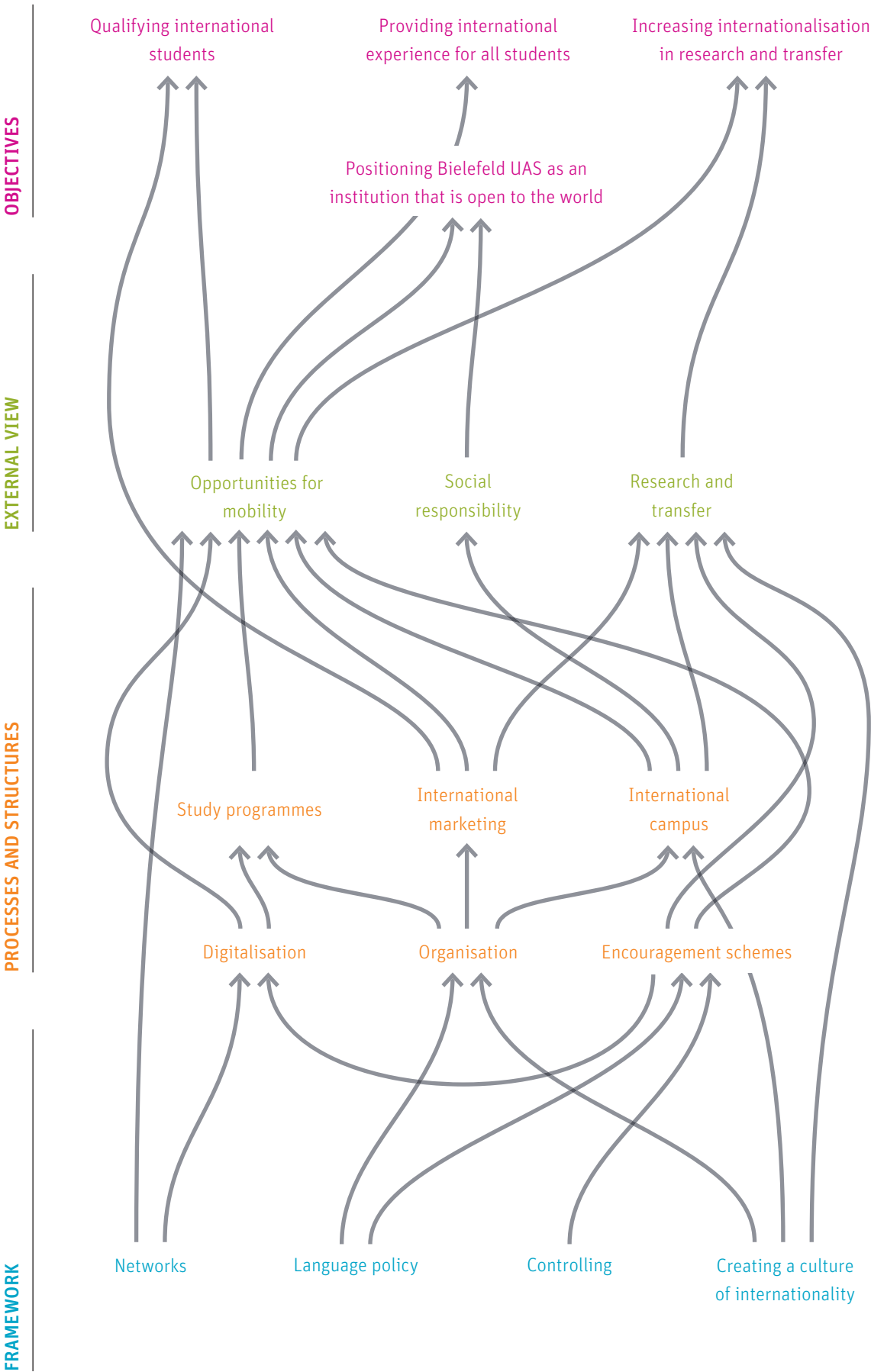
The commitment of Bielefeld UAS towards being an institution that is open to the world means more than just acting in a tolerant way. In fact, all areas of the university should participate in the global exchange of knowledge. Gaining international and intercultural experience will thus also be made possible for teaching staff, researchers and administrative staff. Therefore, innovative and digital forms of cooperation, too, will be developed and used.

4. We consistently incorporate internationality in the university's research and transfer activities

Throughout all three of the university's key areas (studies and teaching, research, transfer) internationality is taken into account as a matter of course. Consequently, international aspects will have an influence on the university's transfer offers and activities, such as further education, realisation of projects, local actions in society as well as funding of start-ups.

Reaching these strategic objectives for internationalisation will succeed through interlocking components of implementation on a university-wide scale. The basis for this is the creation of a **framework** that boosts internationalisation and reduces barriers. Building upon this, internationalisation must be considered in the university's **processes and structures** that are affected. These, in turn, have an immediate effect on the university's **external view** as well as the aforementioned objectives. In summary, 13 fields of action for the internationalisation of Bielefeld UAS stem from this structure.

Overview of the fields of action – Strategy Map



Creating the basis – Framework

Establishing an open culture throughout the university – Creating a culture of internationality

For internationalisation activities to succeed, we require a high level of cooperation among all involved units from inside and outside the university, their flexible and pragmatic actions towards concerned parties as well as the conviction that a global exchange of knowledge and international experience are of utmost importance for the university's students and researchers and for the institution itself. For this, Bielefeld UAS needs individual initiatives as well as interdisciplinary cooperation from a number of its areas. In order to create a culture that is oriented towards internationality, all levels of university governance, especially the entire Executive Board, the deans, the heads of departments as well as the student bodies will continuously emphasise the importance and the objectives of internationalisation and carry this understanding into the whole organisation. Anything that hinders cooperation and processes will be resolved together swiftly and without resentment. Aside from explicit encouragement schemes, creating this culture of internationality is of utmost importance for the orientation and success of the university's internationalisation activities.

The institution will create *Freiräume* for the exchange of ideas and knowledge so that success stories on internationalisation efforts can be communicated not only across faculties, but also across all central units of organisation. Furthermore, *Freiräume* for pilot projects will be created so that international activities can be established across all areas.

Building reliable partnerships and creating simple processes – Networks

International research and excellence in teaching require strong partners. Therefore, a key factor in forming the basis for internationalisation is to expand global networks with a focus on quality and to sustainably maintain them. In analogy with the regional partnerships in terms of work-integrated studies, Bielefeld UAS will build a global network aiming on the enhancement of its international profile, focusing both nationally and internation-

ally on the development of new perspectives for research, students' acquisition of intercultural competences as well as the qualified education of young researchers. In particular, there is great potential in the cooperation projects within the scope of Campus OWL, transnational education projects, participation in funding institutions, cooperations with preparatory institutions as well as partnerships with globally active businesses and institutions in the region.

The university's network of partner universities consisting of more than 160 bilateral agreements is the basis for institutional cooperation and academic mobility on all levels. There is a further distinction between partnership, cooperation and exchange agreements – graded by intensity and expansion of the connections. Within the scope of an active partnership management, these agreements are continuously assessed according to a defined set of criteria and consequently promoted or consolidated. For Bielefeld UAS, partner universities with cooperation across all faculties, a comparatively high level of mobility and agreed recognition catalogues or double degree programmes are particularly important. A possible cooperation in the area of management is currently under review.

Furthermore, the question whether universities for closer partnership projects might be acquired and in which focus regions or countries is being examined. Possible schemes include cooperation projects specific to disciplines or study models. Strategic partnerships are aligned by content, demand as well as focus regions, which include Europe, South East Asia, East Asia, North America and Latin America. Suitable cooperation projects are expanded over the long term. Networks as well as opportunities arising from these partnerships will be transparently presented to students, researchers and staff and thus form the basis for the individual orientation of members of the university.

Building upon existing partnerships, we aim to establish an institution-wide, powerful network of universities as an alliance that teaches transnationally and cooperates at all levels, including management.

There will be *Freiräume* for students, researchers and staff, to allow an active exchange at all levels within the established networks and establish reliable long-term cooperation. For this, windows of mobility will be established and programmes that promote regular exchange will be created.

Enhancing language skills among students and university staff – Language policy

The foundation for all of the university's internal and external activities is a common language. Therefore, university staff who take part in an exchange with a partner university, work together with one within the context of projects or are involved in intercultural activities need sufficient language skills.

Bielefeld UAS will thus support staff and students in obtaining these skills according to their needs. In some professional fields, individual intercultural and language competences may be necessary, so that students will also be provided with opportunities to develop these.

The same holds true for international guests who spend a study or research visit with us. They are supported through cultural and language-training opportunities. Nevertheless, the university's external presentation and internal administration will be designed in a bilingual and welcoming fashion in order to establish a positive external image of the university over the long term. Moreover, the faculties will make their course offer more attractive and accessible for German and international students through English-taught modules or study programmes, which prepare students for the international labour market.

In addition to English, information will be provided in other languages that are relevant for students and applicants. Learning foreign languages will also be promoted.

As the preparation and support of international students become more important and language skills are generally a requirement for mobility, Bielefeld UAS is exploring the possibility of bundling its language-learning offers in a language centre of its own. Any additional language skills

for specific purposes will be taught within the study programmes, which will also define a necessary level of language skills as an entry requirement.

Granting students, researchers and staff *Freiräume* will enable them to integrate obtaining language skills and intercultural competences into their studies or work routines.

Actively steering and monitoring success – Controlling

Within the scope of this strategy, the international activities of Bielefeld UAS will be promoted and expanded in a target-oriented way. In order to reach quantified objectives and to verify the effectiveness of measures, it is necessary to define measurable indicators. For this, relevant data need to be gathered, prepared and measured against the objectives. The performance indicators, their definition, the necessary raw data as well as the application of indicators for controlling the International Strategy can be found in the appendix.

Active implementation at Bielefeld UAS – Internal processes and structures

Agile and enabling operational and organisational structures

For students, orientation in, organisation of, entry into and completion of a course of study involve considerable needs for information and advice. These needs are even more extensive and individual for study-related international mobility due to the distance as well as language and cultural barriers. The same holds true for researchers who want to build networks or participate in communities: what seems difficult nationally is fraught with a significantly higher number of obstacles in an international context. Even more challenging are external and thus unchangeable circumstances, such as different academic calendars, necessary lead time for filing applications, which require process participants to act in an agile and tolerant way. Therefore, internationalisation cannot be expanded without adapting the university's processes to the special requirements and needs of those involved.

Bielefeld UAS will regularly review and, if necessary, adapt its internal processes both on individual occasions and in a systematic way. In particular, digitalisation options, developing international and national process standards, academic and didactic concepts as well as stakeholder orientation play decisive roles:

- All processes of the student journey, especially support in orientation, planning, application and registration, recognition, change management as well as financing
- Connection to and process harmonisation with external networks and platforms such as uni-assist, the Erasmus network, Hochschulstart and the Platform for International Student Mobility
- Virtual mobility opportunities with special requirements of smaller formats, e.g. micro-credentials, performances that are detached from the study plan and other cost structures
- In international research funding programmes and other extensive reporting obligations and shareholding structures
- Language and intercultural skills are promoted across all faculties.

By analogy, the organisational structure of

Bielefeld UAS will be reviewed according to the requirements of the aforementioned processes and adapted if necessary.

Freiräume allow for reflection, so that internal processes can be screened for obstacles and adapted in an agile way. Furthermore, administrative procedures will be reviewed and simplified in order to create *Freiräume* for mobility.

Targeted facilitation and promotion of internationalisation through creation of encouragement schemes and removal of obstacles

In order to finance its internationalisation activities, Bielefeld UAS is highly dependent upon third-party funding. Therefore, the university actively promotes securing such funding: In the faculties, they have a DBV effect and serve as relevant incentive. A similar model is in place for the central units.

Depending on university funding, there is a regular review as to which encouragement schemes are actively promoted.

All members of the university can participate in exchange programmes and training schemes abroad.

The increase in secured funds is used, in particular, to financially support student mobility, inbound as well as outbound. However, an extensive reduction of obstacles is necessary and intended:

- Expansion of solid, study-programme-related mobility structures with general recognition at reliable partner universities
- Exchange of international experience and skills within the status groups, e.g. reports on stays abroad by students for other students or involvement of mobile staff in information events for that status group
- Support in finding internships at partner companies and institutions in Germany and abroad
- Support in finding accommodation for exchange students, researchers and lecturers
- Consequent reduction of structural mobility obstacles in curricula, exam organisation and administrative processes

- Creation of university-wide, generous – ideally general, transparent and administratively simple recognition practices through workshops and guidelines, as well as a digital platform for partner universities for the exchange of data and recognition
- Active promotion of the need for internationalisation for all status groups of the university and provision of corresponding offers
- Development of practices for recognising employees' international activities in the context of personnel development, e.g. through certificates
- Composition of study programme committees and peer groups to include international members.

Freiräume will be created for students, researchers and employees to exchange their international experiences. Moreover, programmes and services will be developed for which the corresponding recognition is guaranteed from the outset in order to create *Freiräume* for international activities.

A naturally international campus

International guests are an asset to Bielefeld UAS. Involving them into study and research routines enhances students' personal and intercultural competences and enriches researchers' professional and intercultural basis. In order to enable and ensure the integration of international students into programmes and administrative processes of Bielefeld UAS, processes that are adapted to the respective global target groups are needed, especially in administration and exam organisation. In addition, opportunities and requirements of an ongoing internationalisation have to be taken into account:

Consideration of internationalisation in personnel development and administration

- Recruiting international academic and non-academic staff and translating the necessary forms and contracts
- Equipping the campus with a consistently bilingual signage system
- Providing translations of regulations, forms and system access for all relevant study programmes

For all university members

- Expanding extracurricular encounters in and outside the university
- Actively making use of competences of international students (also of those who were educated in Germany) and other international university members as well as promoting their visibility

Overall, the development of a culture of natural internationality is promoted. In order to achieve this, *Freiräume* for a change management will be created, so that international students and academic staff are integrated into all areas of university life.

Individual perspective on study programmes

Bielefeld UAS regards academic teaching as its main duty. Therefore, it offers a wide array of study programmes and formats that are continuously developed. The internationalisation of studies and teaching is thus implemented individually to fit the requirements of the respective study programmes. Hence, it requires preparation and implementation with adequate options within the context of quality management of study programmes, but not the application of standardised, university-wide measures, with the exception of mobility windows. For instance, in individual modules, international references can be created in content (also virtually) or through excursions to intercultural institutions. Nevertheless, projects and study programme structures of influence on the entire institution are welcome and promoted:

- English-taught and internationally advertised Master programmes for further education
- English-taught study and certificate programmes
- Double degree programmes with partner universities from abroad
- International study projects with students from a number of universities
- Summer schools with a high number of participants and thus visibility within the university
- Measures for internationalisation in non-traditional study programmes.

Freiräume make international activities possible in the respective study programmes and enable lecturers to design the content of these activities.

Promotion of international encounters and orientation through digitalisation

Digitalisation can contribute to reaching the goals pursued by this International Strategy in a number of ways and support the aforementioned measures. Therefore, Bielefeld UAS will review and, if possible, implement the following systems or offers:

- Transparent electronic module catalogue with English module descriptions across all faculties
- Joint English-language module catalogue for all faculties provided to exchange students
- Linkage of internal workflows to systems for the exchange of core and mobility data that are necessary for participating in programmes (European Student Card, Erasmus without Papers, Emrex, grade conversion etc.)
- Digitalisation of support processes and offers for incoming, outgoing as well as degree-seeking students, in particular application procedures and recognition workflows
- Development and expansion of English-language OER and e-learning offers as well as promotion of their publication
- Easy access to platforms for supporting international virtual student project cooperation
- Open-space study rooms for international student groups and networks
- Preparation and follow-up of stays abroad for all status groups.

Freiräume for international encounters are created by simplifying international and intercultural exchange through digitalisation.

Global marketing and recruiting of students and staff

International measures are less effective when not visible. Therefore, the following activities are required in order to achieve the internationalisation goals:

Prerequisites and general conditions

- Active participation in relevant networks (e.g. GATE-Germany, Studienbrücke, signing the National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students at German Universities, EURAXESS, Groningen Declaration, German Centres for Research and Innovation, etc.)
- Development and maintenance of a complete English-language website also comprising Studies, Research and Transfer for interested parties from abroad
- International advertising of professorships
- Composition of committees, peers, reviewers and bodies to include international members
- Ongoing adjustment of tools, materials and communication channels.

Studies and teaching

- Definition of target groups, especially focus countries or regions as well as subject domains (a diversification of the international student body is sought)
- International communication addressing specific target groups, in particular distinguishing between study applicants, students, researchers, professors
- Adequately prepared participation in the U-Multirank ranking
- Ongoing updates of relevant international information portals for students (Anabin, Higher Education Compass, uni-assist, myGUIDE, etc.)
- Cooperation with agencies, institutions and partners for focus regions to recruit and prepare students
- Participation in presentations, projects and exhibitions abroad
- Participation in international education and research fairs
- Marketing to be focused on the close support and guidance of students in teaching as well as practical experience

- Regular address and information for international students after their stay at Bielefeld UAS, so that a global alumni network can be expanded and valuable international disseminators and ambassadors are gained
- Promotion and expansion of digital international collaboration in studies and teaching.

Research and transfer

- Promotion of the international research reputation through funding of publications, especially Open Access
- English-taught postgraduate qualification as an additional offer
- Participation in international conferences, exhibitions and project presentations
- The potential for learning and utilisation offered by the region's globally acting businesses is put to use.

Freiräume in studies and teaching as well as in research and transfer enable the integration of international activities and global exchange in university operations.

External view of Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences

Mobility as a central element

The most effective and sustainable method of supporting the university's strategic internationalisation objectives is to extensively expand mobility of all university members as well as their interactions with guests from all over the world. Thus, in 2030 it will be a matter of course for every student of the university to collaborate with exchange students and to contemplate a physical or virtual study-related stay abroad as an enhancement of their own spectrum of competences in the context of their studies. Due to the low level of administrative, organisational and financial obstacles, as well as for sustainability reasons, virtual mobilities should be considered.

Indicators and objectives for 2030

- Proportion of international students > 20% across the university
- Proportion of international graduates (dropout rate of international students <= dropout rate of the whole cohort)
- Graduates with study-related stay abroad > 25%
- Exchange students (incoming) > 300 p.a.
- Students at partner universities (outgoing) > 300 p.a.
- Guest lecturers > 20 p.a.
- Teaching exchanges of lecturers of Bielefeld UAS > 20 p.a.
- Mobility of non-academic university staff > 10 p.a.
- Annual International Week at Bielefeld UAS > 50 international participants p.a.

International research and international transfer

As a university with strong regional roots focusing on application-related cooperative research, the expansion of participation in international research projects is a challenge. As cooperation partners are often globally operating companies and interculturally acting institutions, internationalisation of research and transfer will be an opportunity for researchers of Bielefeld UAS to improve their renown and knowledge. This, however, can only be achieved successively and requires lectures at international conferences and hosting such conferences at the locations of Bielefeld UAS. Therefore, the university will support preparatory missions for research cooperations and thus application processes for international third-party funded projects.

Indicators and objectives for 2030

- Proportion of participation in calls for proposals for international projects in relation to participation in all calls for proposals > 20%
- Proportion of third-party funds from international programmes in the research and transfer area in relation to all third-party funds > 10%
- Conferences with international guests at Bielefeld UAS > 2 p.a.

Internationalisation as social responsibility

Internationalisation is not an end in itself, but an expression of the avowal of Bielefeld UAS as a university that is open to the world, that shares the responsibility for its members in a pluralistic society. This self-conception constantly takes effect by picking up socially relevant challenges in research and teaching. It therefore also comprises social perspectives³.

In general, internationalisation contributes to strengthening global cohesion, as manifold effects result from it:

- Global challenges will only be overcome by global cooperation.
- Due to common experience, internationalisation improves communication between countries and their societies.
- As part of the global science system, assumption of responsibility in the area of development cooperation.
- In Germany, internationalisation promotes securing locations and skilled employees. In addition, it is a decisive driving factor in the integration of people with migration background into social participation.

Aside from personal exchange, which contributes to better communication between people, regions and states and can help overcome global challenges, the economic perspective, too, becomes relevant. One example is meeting the demand for skilled employees. In general, within the context of implementing the International Strategy, there will be an emphasis on projects that have or strive for a discernible social impact in the aforementioned sense.

³ Indicators and objectives are not used here, as they are not measurable in quantity.