

Utrecht Network

Strategic Plan 2008-2012

(adopted by the General Meeting on April 19, 2008)

1. The Utrecht Network

The Utrecht Network is a representative European-wide network of universities cooperating in the area of internationalization. Though broadly-based, the network remains highly selective in its membership in order to retain a manageable scale and flexibility of action. The group is particularly committed to such areas as student and staff mobility, summer schools, the internationalization of curricula, joint curricula and double/joint degrees, while remaining open to other kinds of activities that maintain and strengthen its profile.

2. Types of activities

2.1 *Ongoing activities*

At the present time, the Utrecht Network carries out a wide range of classic student and teacher mobility programmes. Within Europe, mobility is largely promoted within the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) as well as other programmes allowing for mobility of this type with neighbouring countries. In the case of the United States, mobility takes place within the framework of an agreement with the sixteen-member Mid-America Universities International (MAUI) consortium. A similar arrangement with the Australia Europe Network (AEN) serves to facilitate mobility with that group's seven member universities.

Summer schools have become a fixed component of the Utrecht Network's activities. These receive strong financial support from the group, and draw on academics from member universities for their teaching staff; the majority of students also come from member universities, with others from partners in the MAUI and AEN consortia.

From its early years, the Utrecht Network has promoted administrative staff visits by individuals from member universities to other universities in the network. The intention has been to increase the professional expertise of the group as a whole and thus enable it to meet its primary goals more effectively.

As tools for achieving its ends, the Utrecht Network encourages the creation of special interest groups to explore new areas of activity. These may lead to the creation of specially focused task forces, which are provided with substantial long-term funding; seed money is also offered to new initiatives, especially those aimed at initiating Utrecht Network participation in new projects.

The Utrecht Network promotes itself, its members and their activities through the development of materials and tools such as its website, database, brochures, publicity materials and specialized publications as well as through participation of the group in international conferences and higher education fairs such as the annual EAIE conference and the European Higher Education Fairs.

2.2 Future activities

The Utrecht Network will continue with the activities listed above, focusing its efforts on both improving them and expanding their range. In several areas, some of them new, it will endeavour to achieve the following goals:

- a) The network will work to expand all forms of mobility between its member universities through more flexible and open mechanisms of cooperation at the institutional level, with the aim of increasing both the number of partner universities involved as well as the number of faculties at each institution.
- b) Where students are concerned, special emphasis will be placed on research-related mobility as well as on work placements.
- c) In order to enable an even wider choice for semester and year-long exchanges for students at member universities, the network will work to establish links with consortia and networks in Asia, Latin America and Canada.
- d) The network will pay greater attention to fostering academic links between member institutions, particularly in the area of research.
- e) Of increasing importance in the coming period will be the development of joint programmes. The network will seek to build on the success already achieved in this area by bringing together member institutions for this purpose as well as by working with institutions outside Europe.
- f) The network will devise new mechanisms to take maximum advantage as a group in promoting administrative staff mobility both within the new Lifelong Learning Programme and in other ways.
- g) The successful Utrecht Network summer schools that already exist will serve as a guide for the creation of further summer schools. These will be designed to widen the range of topics on offer and, where appropriate, follow new models.
- h) Task forces will be created on specific areas, for example related to improving quality in relations between Utrecht Network institutions and of the network as a whole.
- i) The network will make every endeavour to take part as a group in European programmes.
- j) The network will serve as a means for individual members to come together in participating in such programmes Erasmus Mundus.

3. Membership

3.1 New members

The network will pursue a proactive policy with regard to the admission of new members, but without excluding the possibility of its being approached by an institution interested in membership. A clear process will be devised for the selection of new members. This will include possible countries (and their relative priority) as well as details on the method of selection. In principle, no more than one new member will be admitted to the network in any given year.

Greater and more systematic efforts will be made to integrate newcomers into the network. These may include such things as special sessions prior to Annual Meetings or visits to member institutions.

3.2 Quality

The question of quality will play an increasingly important role in all aspects of higher education in the coming period. This will undoubtedly be an important issue when it comes to university networks and their perception by the wider university community. Aspects related to quality will be a major priority of the network in future, and will affect a number of areas:

- Criteria will be devised to determine how well members are contributing to the goals of the network as a whole, along with measures for improving their contributions.
- The evaluation of the Utrecht Network as such. Here criteria will be devised to define quality standards and the distinctive profile of the network.

4. Financing

In the area of financing, the Utrecht Network will have two priorities.

- The network's budget will be made more transparent through the creation and adoption of clear regulations concerning the creation of the budget (including mandatory items), the criteria for expenditures and the need for budget planning beyond the current financial year, the intention being to enable better long-term planning.
- The network will make greater efforts to obtain additional sources of funding, especially through more active pursuit of projects.

5. Visibility

5.1 Visibility within the Utrecht Network itself

The network and its individual members will develop various means of raising awareness of the benefits of membership in the group. These should be directed at all components of the university structure, from leadership and management bodies, through teachers, students and administrative staff.

5.2 Visibility outside the Utrecht Network

Current means of publicizing the network externally will be extended and new means developed. The former category includes such elements as the group's website and database, both of which will be improved, and the network's leaflet, which must be improved and regularly updated. New means of promoting the network will include the organization of sessions at the EAIE annual conference by Utrecht Network members on a regular basis; the preparation of different publicity materials (including posters for the summer schools); and academic publications by network members.

6. Cooperation with other European networks

The Utrecht Network will seek to deepen cooperation with other European networks, in particular in ways that enable it to draw on its specific areas of expertise and its strengths as a group.

7. Implementation of the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan will be reviewed at each Annual General Meeting, where a concrete work programme will be drawn up for the following year.