

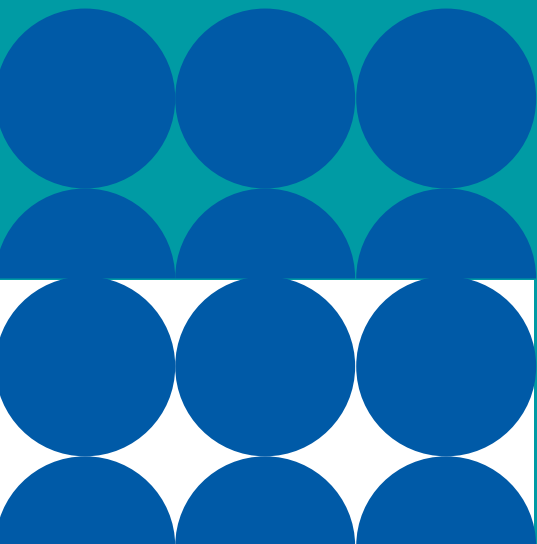


university of  
applied sciences

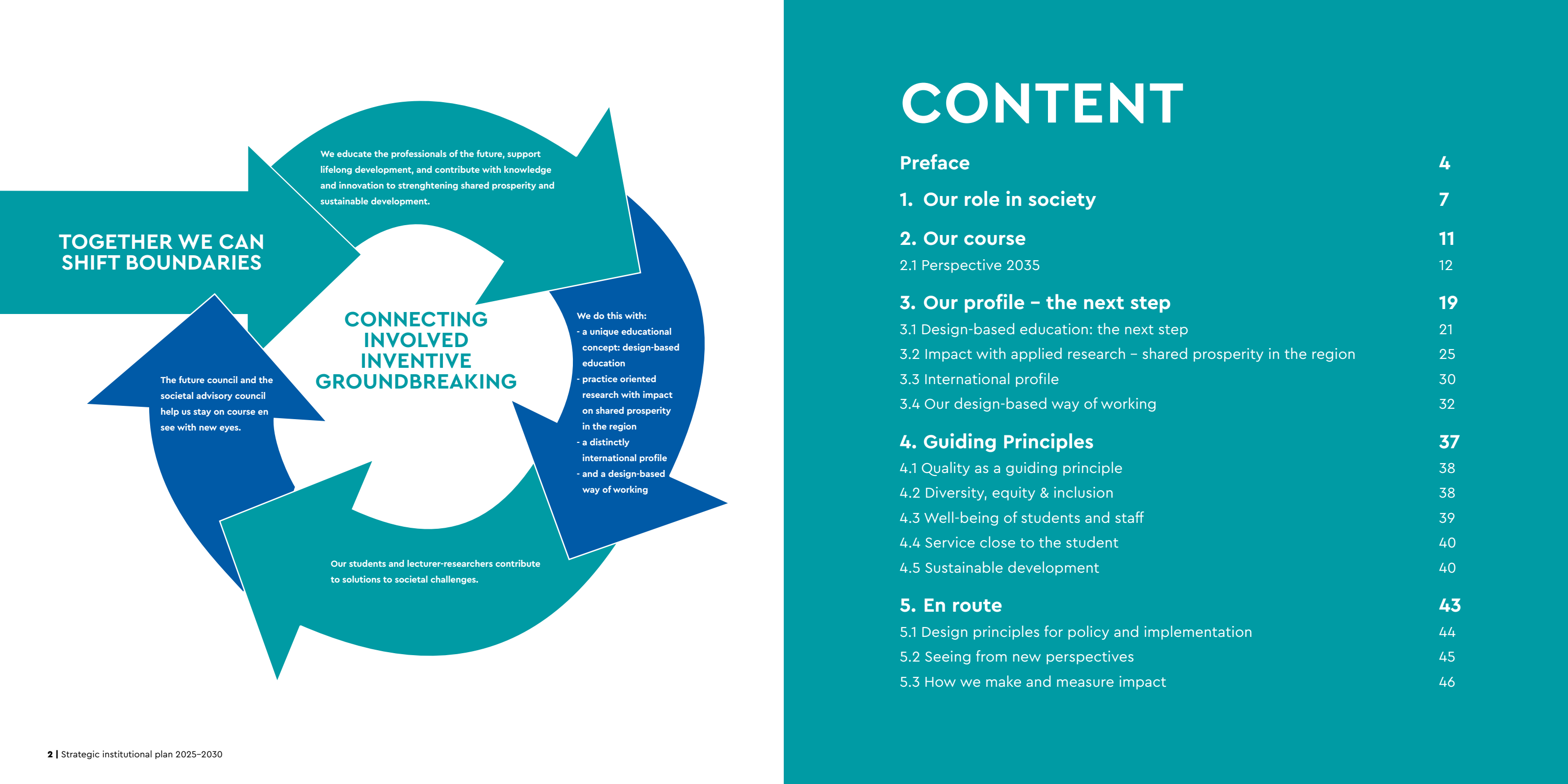


# TOGETHER WE CAN SHIFT BOUNDARIES

Design-based learning and working on shared prosperity and sustainable development



Strategic institutional plan 2025–2030



TOGETHER WE CAN  
SHIFT BOUNDARIES

CONNECTING  
INVOLVED  
INVENTIVE  
GROUNDBREAKING

We educate the professionals of the future, support  
lifelong development, and contribute with knowledge  
and innovation to strengthening shared prosperity and  
sustainable development.

We do this with:  
- a unique educational  
concept: design-based  
education  
- practice oriented  
research with impact  
on shared prosperity  
in the region  
- a distinctly  
international profile  
- and a design-based  
way of working

Our students and lecturer-researchers contribute  
to solutions to societal challenges.

The future council and the  
societal advisory council  
help us stay on course en  
see with new eyes.

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# PREFACE

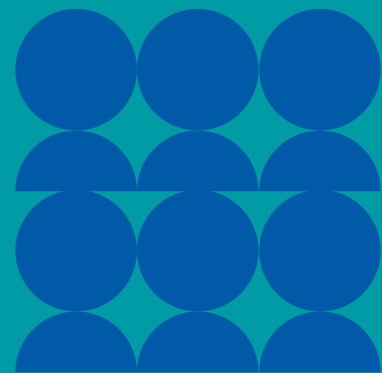
**NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences is now six years old. Back in 2018, we wrote that we were a new university with a rich history. Our story has since become even richer with a consistent top four ranking in the list of best universities of applied sciences and 23 top programmes demonstrating our quality. Every day, 23,000 students discover more about themselves, the world and their future. With design-based education as our unique educational concept and with our practice-oriented research, we make an impact and contribute to the development of people, sectors and our region. With seven locations in Northern Netherlands, we are very much present in and connected to this region. Our Grand Tour programme and cooperation in Europe via the RUN-EU network ensure a strong international anchoring.**

Our good starting position does not mean we can sit back and relax. We see major societal challenges that are also present in our region, and we see it as our task to make a strong contribution to solutions for these challenges through our education and research. In so doing, we build on the university of applied sciences that we have developed together over the past six years and focus on a number of core areas (that are explained further in this plan) in order to, jointly, create an impulse for shared prosperity and sustainable development in our region and elsewhere in the world. Wanting to contribute to shared prosperity is not unique. The concept, which involves issues such as health, education, social cohesion, environment and living environment in addition to material prosperity, is, fortunately, at the heart of more and more organisations.

With our unique way of working, that is in line with our design-based education and research, we make a difference. We believe that a different way of working is needed in order to find solutions to complex issues and contribute to sustainable development. A resourceful, groundbreaking and interconnected way of working which involves working together beyond the boundaries of one's own discipline. A design-based way of working, for our students and for ourselves. In doing so, we embrace a culture of openness centred around an inclusive attitude. We leverage diversity: the visible and invisible differences between people in our organisation. We strive for equality, for fair processes and outcomes for all, so as to achieve inclusion, that everyone has a sense of belonging and can be themselves. And all this so that studying at NHL Stenden is an enjoyable time for everyone.

We strive for connection, not only within our university of applied sciences, but also with society as a whole. Our strength lies in collaboration, both internally and externally, with the aim of creating a sustainable learning and development environment, in which students flourish by combining unique perspectives, knowledge and talents. Because where different worlds come together, the best ideas grow. Together, we can shift boundaries.

## Executive Board





# 1. OUR ROLE IN SOCIETY

## 1. OUR ROLE IN SOCIETY

The climate issue, biodiversity, technological developments and digitalisation, energy transition challenges, healthcare, education, the economy, demographic developments, housing, working and social cohesion: major challenges are currently emerging on all fronts. Challenges characterised by a high degree of complexity and uncertainty. This is accompanied by a perceived increase in polarisation and a sense of distance from the government as well as a decrease in the level of trust. A comprehensive, cross-disciplinary perspective that stretches across borders, and a joint approach with respect for each other are essential to finding solutions. And a way of working that is substantially different from what we were used to. This places different demands on both the current workforce, and the new generation of professionals, current and future students.

NHL Stenden considers it its task to contribute to educating the professionals of the future, to support lifelong development, and to also, through practice-oriented research, knowledge and innovation, contribute to strengthening the shared prosperity and sustainable development of Northern Netherlands and the other regions, national and international, in which we are active.

In addition to the national and international challenges, there are a number of region-specific issues in the north of the Netherlands concerning liveability, labour market, innovation capacity; in short, shared prosperity. Local characteristics mean certain issues create specific challenges and opportunities in the region.

### Shared prosperity (brede welvaart)<sup>1</sup>

Shared prosperity encompasses everything people consider of value. Besides material prosperity, it also concerns issues such as health, education, environment and living conditions, social cohesion, personal development and safety. Moreover, it concerns not only the quality of life in the 'here and now', but also the effects of our way of life on the well-being of people 'elsewhere' (outside the region) and 'later' (future generations).

<sup>1</sup> Definition shared prosperity (brede welvaart) by Planbureau voor de leefomgeving



Demographic trends in the Northern Netherlands are particularly challenging. The number of young people (aged 15–19) is expected to decrease by about 4.5% nationwide until 2030 compared to 2022, while the expected decrease in the north of the Netherlands is well above 10% (with the province of Drenthe even expecting a decrease of almost 15%) . As a university of applied sciences, this poses challenges in the way we organise education aimed at this target group, a target group which is important to us. This is all the more so as labour market developments in the region are such that the demand for professionals is continuing to rise. Indeed, in addition to dejuvenation, there is also a very prominent phenomenon of an ageing population, which puts further pressure on the available labour capacity, not to mention the demand for new expertise and skills due to technological innovation and digitalisation, which, for example in the case of artificial intelligence (AI), has major and sometimes even disruptive implications for education and the labour market.

The organizability and execution of work is coming under pressure in many sectors. Currently, shortages in healthcare, education and engineering are already much in the news. However, these are not the only sectors facing shortages. Shortages will arise in all sectors due to the combination of outflow through ageing and too little available young talent. The international perspective, both from the point of view of intercultural competence and new perspectives, and from the contribution that international students can make to our economy and labour market, is of no small importance here.

<sup>2</sup> Centraal bureau statistiek

In short, the challenges we face as a society are immense. A lot is asked of us. The pressure of world problems can lead to feelings of helplessness and loneliness. Student well-being is under stress. Students feel under pressure to perform, especially in the face of major societal challenges. We are mindful of this and see it as our mission to help break the vicious cycle of stress by focusing on resilience and a sense of perspective and providing the tools for this.

If we are to continue to successfully fulfil our role in society, it is imperative that we are also adequately facilitated to do so for all aspects of this task. The current funding of higher vocational education is almost entirely based on student numbers. This relates poorly to the broad mission that universities of applied sciences have, especially in an environment such as that in which NHL Stenden finds itself. In this respect, funding should be less related to student numbers.

This is the context in which we will implement our institutional strategy over the next six years.





## 2. OUR COURSE



## 2. OUR COURSE

Successfully responding to the many developments coming our way requires flexibility and agility. This strategic institutional plan acts as our compass.

Our compass focuses on a vision of the future. A perspective that extends beyond the duration of this plan. We are under no illusion that we can predict what the world will be like in 15 years' time. We can, however, paint a picture based on trends, expectations and developments on the one hand and our own mission, vision and ambitions on the other. A picture that is not a blueprint for the future, but a desired image of what we would like the future of our university to look like. A clear perspective, which gives us direction and a point to steer towards. At the same time, we are humble enough to ensure the professionals in our organisation have the opportunities to find out, along with partners in the region and our students, how this course is best steered. We are flexible, adaptive and agile in this approach, drawing from the course and frameworks set out in this institutional plan.

### 2.1 Perspective 2035

NHL Stenden has developed into a unique university of applied sciences known for being a connecting factor, involved, inventive and groundbreaking. We also impart this to our students. Design-based education, impactful practice-oriented research with a positive impact on shared prosperity, and a distinctly international profile form our foundation. We have further strengthened that foundation and will continue to build on it with our design-based way of working.

With several attractive campuses, our university has strong roots in the northern region and combines this with an international focus. Our campus network in the north of the Netherlands helps ensure the accessibility and availability of higher vocational education across the board. We also increasingly deploy multilevel education and research as a collaboration between secondary vocational education, higher professional education and research-oriented higher education (in Dutch, mbo, hbo and wo). Good infrastructure and attractive campuses with adequate housing make the university appealing. Sustainable development plays an important role with business operations focusing on circularity and sustainability-oriented degree programmes.

- Our way of working in practice -

### Inclusive community lab

Three academies have joined forces in the Inclusive community lab Fryslân. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the academies aim to contribute to reducing persistent problems in poverty and debt. In doing so, the focus is on four themes: creating a purpose economy, inheritance of poverty, an inclusive labour market and digital citizenship.

Each semester, an average of 120 bachelor, master, AD and MBO students work in multidisciplinary atelier groups on twenty integral Sustainable Development Goals issues from professional clients.

The Inclusive community lab Fryslân received the second prize of the Dutch Education Award from the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in 2022.



The green campuses are vibrant, we facilitate social activities, and in doing so create a sense of belonging. It is pleasant to study at NHL Stenden. Students, lecturer-researchers and practical facilitators come together as they work on solutions to the complex challenges of today and the future. Students are encouraged to reflect on their personal goals and values and develop the skills and knowledge to achieve these goals, for both themselves and society. In so doing we create a context where there is engagement and attention to both limiting and protective influences on students' mental well-being. Personal contact and interaction are our strengths and our starting point.

Worldwide, NHL Stenden has a strong bond with a number of Grand Tour locations, in collaboration with partner organisations abroad. This draws from the idea that a global context is needed when tackling societal challenges. By coming into contact with other cultures and perspectives, our students and staff learn to be open to other points of view and opportunities for new cooperations arise.

Europe is a very important region for the Netherlands and for NHL Stenden, and this importance can only increase given current global geopolitical instability. Within Europe, NHL Stenden is part of RUN-EU. In this network of knowledge institutions from all over Europe, we work together to connect education and research with the context of the regions in which we are active.

The number of young people in our region has declined in recent years, and yet the demand for labour is actually increasing, in part due to an ageing population. Internationalisation is part of the solution to this. In addition, NHL Stenden is focusing on upskilling and retraining the current workforce, whereby the emphasis lies on the profession-oriented aspect of our programmes as well as the collaboration with companies and organisations on being future-ready.

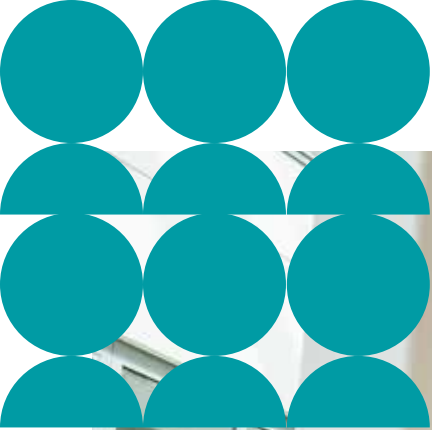
The integration of full-time, part-time and flexible education creates a dynamic learning environment. Flexibility is the starting point, with more freedom of choice being offered to students in terms of study content and sequence. To facilitate flexible education, we have committed to standardising and digitising support processes, using advanced technologies for an interactive learning experience while maintaining personal contact as a key aspect. Strong partnerships with companies and organisations also offer extensive opportunities for internships and practical experience.

We feel we are collectively responsible for our entire education and research portfolio. In sustainable partnerships, our professors, students and professional partners work on practice-oriented research that has impact. Our strength here lies in using the full breadth of the university to connect domains and disciplines (internally and externally) and using these new perspectives to create a common ground, and solutions to complex societal challenges.

Our students and lecturer-researchers contribute to answers to major societal challenges of our time and to strengthening shared prosperity and sustainable development for a vital northern region. Everything we do centres around this. Together, we are the difference: we are committed to making a positive impact on society, the biosphere, and the economy. In doing so, we help to restore and improve the earth and create a sustainably better quality of life for all. The future of NHL Stenden is a future of adaptation, innovation, and inclusion, with the university preparing students to change the world with a smile on their face.

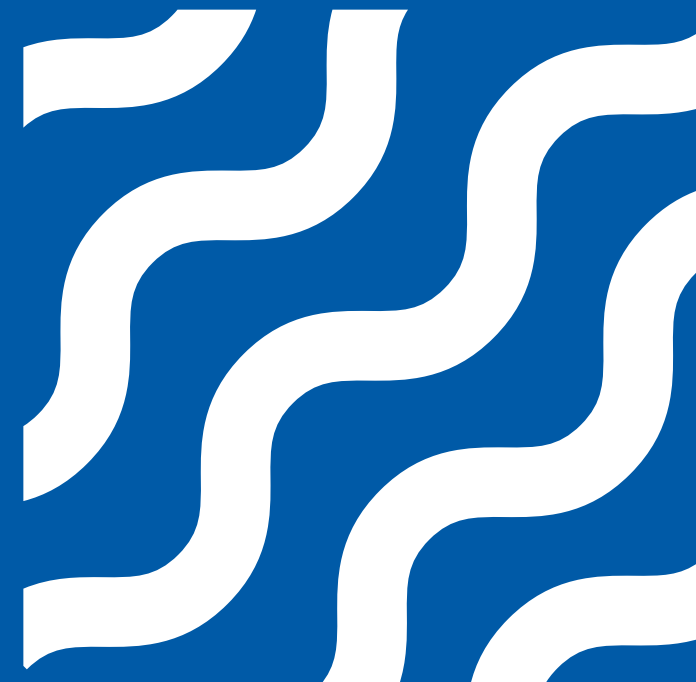
This future perspective is our course, the 'north' of our compass. In the next chapter, we describe where our focus will lie at a strategic level so as to follow this course: our profile.

**'This future perspective is our course, the 'north' of our compass.'**



### 3. OUR PROFILE

the next step



### 3. OUR PROFILE - THE NEXT STEP

"You can face the future."

This is our promise to our students. In this chapter, we describe where our focus lies within our profile so as to be able to navigate our course and deliver on this promise. It concerns:

- our unique educational concept: design-based education
- a clear focus in practice-oriented research with impact aimed at shared prosperity in the region
- a distinctly international profile
- our design-based way of working

These characteristics make our university strong and unique, especially in combination with our way of working based on our values of **connecting**, **being involved**, **being inventive** and **being groundbreaking**. After all, it's not just about doing the right things, it's also about doing things the right way.

#### 3.1 Design-based education: the next step

DBE is our educational concept. The concept has received positive attention in the press and, as a learning environment, is rated positively by accreditation panels. There are many top programmes within the university (23 in 2024), and NHL Stenden also scores well overall on the NSE. In addition, our educational concept gets a lot of attention domestically and abroad. By choosing an ambitious and innovative educational concept, we are a national frontrunner.

We use the experience we have gained and the lessons we have learned over the past six years to underpin and develop our innovative education, thereby raising quality even further, while remaining a trendsetter. In the coming period, we will also focus strongly on digital innovation and flexibilization

in the context of lifelong development. This means optimising what we do and anticipating where we can and should.

#### A more recognisable profile: explicit learning outcomes

We believe it is important that our future professionals have a generic foundation. To this end, our programmes link the DBE profile of our students more explicitly to the curriculum and professional profile. In addition, learning outcomes explicitly include the DBE facets of design thinking, international and intercultural, multidisciplinary collaboration, sustainability and personal leadership. This helps create a clearer and more recognisable student profile, and aids in optimising teaching and learning, and with the ability to collaborate with other disciplines and colleagues from other cultures.

The multidisciplinary ateliers and minors are an obvious place to further develop and use common DBE language and yields. We want the pursuit of a more explicit and recognisable profile to go hand in hand with doing as much justice as possible to what is appropriate to the nature and characteristics of the domain of the programme in question and the companies and organisations within it. In this way, we continue to underpin the development of the education we offer.

#### Inner development goals

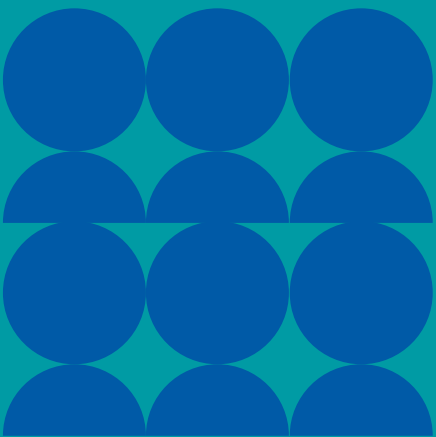
We continue to anticipate important trends in society. Our focus lies on shared prosperity, promoting inclusion and pursuing sustainability. By opting to foster inner development goals (IDGs) , we anticipate these trends and centre on student well-being and being connected to others and the world around us. The IDGs provide an essential framework of transformational skills for sustainable development. This framework encompasses skills and qualities crucial to achieving the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). Obviously, by choosing the IDGs, the sustainability facet of DBE becomes more clearly defined and applied. We use the Inner Development Goals to strongly define and apply the DBE profile and facets of DBE into learning outcomes and to adjust the design frameworks accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> [www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org](http://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org)

#### Professional identity

The uncertainty professionals face when solving complex issues and working in changing conditions means students need to develop a strong professional identity. The concept of professional identity therefore becomes more key to the design frameworks. Students with a strong professional identity can give a more certain direction to their own development and drive innovations as well as be self-confident, resilient and agile. Our students' professional identity brings together the distinctive features of the student as a person, the professional profile and the DBE profile.

Finally, in addition to introducing the IDGs and focusing on professional identity, we will also more clearly define research-based design and design-based research. Furthermore, we will give more focus in the design frameworks to development across the years of study and the study programmes.





### Deploying DBE developmentally

Design-based education and a design-based way of working are vehicles to creating a development-oriented culture within companies and organisations in the region, even more so than at present. A culture where lifelong development is a matter of course. A culture where learning and working come together, where there is cooperation based on shared values and where learning and innovating is the norm. It means we can make a major contribution to the realisation of successful ecosystems and shared prosperity. Our ateliers serve as learning and innovation environments where design acts as a natural vehicle for learning, experimenting and profiling together. We already have external learning-working environments, but, in the future, these will become environments where value is created not only for students and lecturers from our study programmes, but also for companies and organisations in the context of learning, innovation and lifelong development.

### Lifelong development requires flexibilization

NHL Stenden aims to be a home for lifelong development. To us, this means that we are an open organisation that anyone (individuals, companies, organisations and government) can approach with their development and learning questions. You are a student for life, and so we are committed to our alumni policy. We meet our learners' development needs by providing customized services based on personal learning questions and context. Each industry has specific issues regarding lifelong development, and so we work with differentiated goals and offerings per industry. At the same time, we show collective ownership of the entire education and research

portfolio and, when new market demands arise, we look at how we can meet them smartly and, where necessary, in collaboration with others. In line with industry demand, we also work with education partners in the region, including through the University of the North. Together, our principles are that we focus on flexible degree education, strengthen cooperation in the education system for secondary vocational, higher professional and research-oriented higher education, and reinforce the flow from AD to bachelor and on to master.

Our programmes are customised from within and to demand, and always result in a clear qualification such as a microcredential or a recognised AD, bachelor's or master's degree. To this end, we create flexible, modular, professional learning environments in which learners with their particular learning needs and/or research questions can engage in different settings. To enable flexibility and sector-specific ambitions, we design our curriculum to meet agreed standards and are committed to standardising and digitising central support and resolving bottlenecks in systems and processes.

### Digital innovation

Proper use of technology enriches education and can help resolve complex educational issues while keeping learning activities and the environment central. Developments in digitalisation require a different approach to teaching and testing and our DBE educational concept already provides a good basis for this. The focus of digital innovation is on its applicability within our vision of education and this necessitates a culture that nurtures innovation and good mutual coordination.

The soon-to-be established Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL) will play a role in this and we will apply Generative AI from a human-centred perspective. Within our UAS, we will therefore create an environment, aimed at professionalisation, sharing knowledge and experience, and development and use, taking into account ethical norms, privacy aspects and socially responsible behaviour. By finding the right blend (also drawing on the experience we have gained on the topic within RUN-EU) and providing appropriate digital architecture and support, NHL Stenden can create an inclusive learning environment in which students can excel. In so doing, we can ensure all our programmes are future-proof.

The digital world will look completely different in only a few years' time. Developments in Artificial Intelligence and digitalisation are disruptive and will impact all the sectors we offer education for. We address digital innovations in the field in our study programmes, also using the expertise developed in our practice-oriented research. Our aim is to educate students to become future-proof, adaptive professionals who can deal with generative AI and other digital innovations and thereby make a difference in professional practice and society.







- Our way of working in practice -

### Professional doctorate

NHL Stenden is involved in the professional doctorate pilot, a new vocational programme that trains candidates to become research professionals. The new professional doctorate offers an equivalent level to a research university PhD but has a different character. NHL Stenden is involved through two domains.

**Maritime:** The shipping industry faces major challenges in terms of sustainability and energy transition. New regulations require ships' emissions to be reduced by 55% by 2030, a requirement that demands the use of alternative fuels, smarter sailing and further automation.

**Leisure, Tourism, Hospitality:** The challenges for the Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality industry are huge. Worldwide, the industry is growing into one of the world's largest economic sectors, but this growth is accompanied by increasing impact, both positive and negative, in economic, ecological and social terms.

A PD candidate learns to innovate in this complex professional world. The professional doctorate creates a continuous learning line in professional education from associate degree to bachelor to master to doctorate.

### 3.2 Impact with applied research – shared prosperity in the region

NHL Stenden is located in the heart of Northern Netherlands. We see working with our partners to maintain and strengthen shared prosperity and sustainable development in the region as an important task and our day-to-day activities largely takes place at a regional level. Where people live and what that region has to offer in terms of, for example, work, schools and housing, but also the quality of the living environment, is of great importance for prosperity and well-being. In the coming years, we'll be facing a number of major transitions and societal challenges that call for innovation in order to maintain and strengthen shared prosperity in the region. Shared prosperity encompasses everything people consider of value. In addition to economic prosperity, it also includes aspects such as health, education, environment and living conditions, social cohesion, equity, personal development and safety and security. Moreover, it not only concerns the quality of life in the "here and now," but also the effects our way of life has on the well-being of people "elsewhere" (outside the region) and "later" (future generations).

NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences plays an important role in solving societal challenges through education, research and collaboration with companies and organisations. Professors, lecturer-researchers and students work with companies, governments, and healthcare and educational institutions to generate new knowledge and develop innovative solutions. We are an incubator for new developments and therefore an innovation engine for the ecosystems and regions in which we operate.

The societal challenges, the knowledge agenda for the region and our own expertise form the foundation of our programme "Working together on shared prosperity" and its related topics. We use these topics to set up our applied research and our study programmes. This is reinforced by the urgency of the challenges and the questions we get from companies, institutions and social organisations. We focus particularly on field-specific questions in a regional context that can also be seen at both a national and international level. Using an interdisciplinary (and sometimes even transdisciplinary) approach, we combine research themes and work to solve real-life issues. We do this in collaboration with companies and organisations in the relevant ecosystem, in a combination of mutually reinforcing networks and partnerships. It means we get to learn from other regions, such as our European RUN-EU network, working on issues that are similar to issues in the north of the Netherlands.



In recent years, NHL Stenden has invested in strong practice-oriented research groups covering various themes. In the coming period, we will further expand these strengths through a number of programmes put together on the basis of societal and transition challenges. This will lead to more mutual collaboration and add more weight to our practice-oriented research. We will also further strengthen the connection between practice-oriented research and education by focusing on increased student participation. The connecting and overarching mission is to work together for shared prosperity in the region.

**To this end, NHL Stenden has formulated four strategic programme lines:**

## **1. Attracting, developing and retaining sufficient professionals for the region:**

There are major challenges in the area of the labour market in the region due to demographic developments and shortages on the labour market and an associated demand for labour migrants. NHL Stenden contributes to solving these issues by developing knowledge on themes such as agile craftsmanship, future-proof labour market and sustainable education.

## **2. Strengthen regional innovative strength and digitalisation:**

As a catalyst for regional innovation and digitalisation, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences is an important player in stimulating the economy and innovative strength. The region is characterised by relatively many small SMEs that do not always have the time, space or financial possibilities to innovate. NHL Stenden promotes cooperation between companies, knowledge institutions and governments, and encourages entrepreneurship. Themes include smart sustainable manufacturing, digital healthcare innovation, digital resilience & cybersecurity, and human-centred innovation.

## **3. Working together towards a resilient, healthy and inclusive society:**

Our region is characterized by great social cohesion. Especially in the smaller villages, social cohesion is high and people work together to improve the quality of life. At the same time, we see that the population is ageing and the number of volunteers and informal caregivers is decreasing. This brings with it new issues. NHL Stenden focuses applied education and research on promoting social cohesion, reducing socioeconomic inequality and ensuring health and well-being. Themes include social innovation, resident participation, equity and prevention.

## **4. Building on circularity and sustainability:**

the Northern Netherlands is an important region for energy transition. Initiatives are being taken to increase the production of sustainable energy, such as the development of offshore wind farms and the use of hydrogen as an energy source. With this come various issues about the use of space. The conscious use of the environment for recreation, living and working is becoming increasingly important. Developments in the field of reuse of materials and sustainable production are becoming increasingly important. NHL Stenden contributes to the transition to a circular economy and develops technologies and knowledge for sustainable production and reuse of materials. Themes include circular plastics, water technology, ethical leadership, sustainable tourism, sustainable shipping and sustainable construction.

The programme "Working together for shared prosperity" is our guide to making impact with practice-oriented research together.

**'Working together for shared prosperity.'**







- Our way of working in practice -

### Future-proof nurses

The 'Future-proof nurses' project within the Academy of Health & Social Studies won first prize at the 2023 Dutch Education Award. Healthcare faces major challenges due to social and medical developments and retaining healthcare staff has become majorly important. To train future-proof nurses, digital simulations have proven to be of added value, and this is demonstrated in the project.

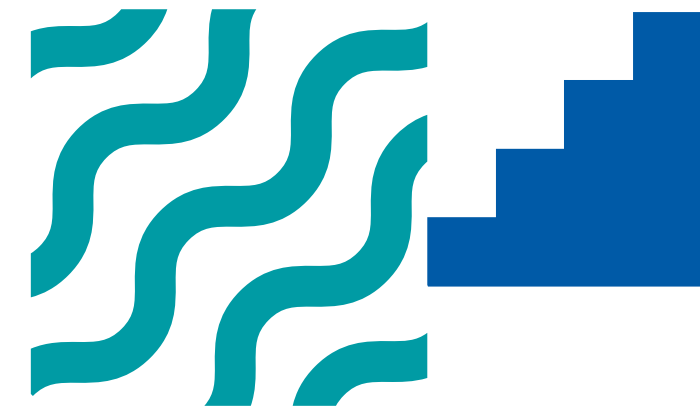
Students are able to practice scenarios in a safe environment so that they are better prepared for their internship and future work. They also improve their clinical reasoning, are trained in empathy to understand how a patient experiences their illness, and develop their communication skills.

### 3.3 International profile

The world we live in and our work environment is diverse, intercultural and internationally oriented, and so it is important to be open to other perspectives and to harness diversity. Internationalisation and interculturalisation is essential for personal and societal development and therefore for good higher education. This is our belief and we see it as a means of helping staff and students learn to relate to their own context by experiencing different perspectives, whether at home or abroad.

NHL Stenden's ambition is to provide an environment in which students are confronted with themselves, others and the world in order to broaden their horizons. And to learn valuable skills that help them understand, respect and appreciate diverse perspectives, as well as be curious towards others. We encourage gaining international and/or intercultural experiences at home or abroad, which means each programme makes internationalisation part of its curriculum, making choices that are applicable to its context and purpose and uses the diversity offered by the local environment.

Our educational concept of design-based education (DBE) offers several perspectives for internationalisation. First, diversity as an underlying value of DBE and a catalyst for innovation; second, international experiences as part of personal and professional development; and finally, internationalisation of the discipline in an increasingly "glocal" world. In this way, we provide opportunities for internationalisation and interculturalisation for all students regardless of any financial or other constraints.



With our global network approach, NHL Stenden offers opportunities around the world, including the Grand Tour locations (South Africa, Thailand, Bali) and through exchange options with partner universities. We are further expanding these opportunities, and they offer possibilities for both our own students and other international students. We consider this reciprocity in internationalisation of great importance. We are also part of the Erasmus+ programme and the flagship for the European University Alliance RUN-EU. This alliance is a catalyst for making internationalisation more accessible, inclusive and sustainable. RUN-EU is a cooperative network of European knowledge institutions in regions with similar characteristics and issues.



- Our way of working in practice -

## **RUN-EU**

The Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) is a European University co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme. NHL Stenden is part of this, along with 8 other higher education institutions from all over Europe.

Together, we aim to secure the sustainable, economic, social, cultural and environmental progress of European regions and stakeholders. For NHL Stenden, this is the north of the Netherlands.

We do this by providing our students, researchers and academics with green, digital and inclusive skills, for example by:

- creating programmes with stakeholders from the regions
- providing mobility opportunities for students, lecturers and staff
- creating double or joint degrees between universities
- carrying out joint research projects and taking part in the RUN-EU research colloquium
- creating a joint educational academy and innovation hubs

These activities help students develop future and advanced skills needed to deal with the challenges of the regions. The activities help improve the regions, reduce existing regional development disparities in the EU and increase the competitiveness of the regions in comparison with urban areas.

Internationalisation is in flux, shifting from a global to a more "glocal" approach to meeting the global sustainability goals (SDGs). This shift challenges us to focus more and more tangibly on intercultural diversity and specific SDGs, and the contribution we make to shared prosperity through internationalisation. We acknowledge that there is tension between internationalisation and sustainability and we make this discussable as well as use our knowledge (from practice-oriented research) to contribute to possible solutions.

Internationalisation opens doors around the world for faculty and researchers to work together on improving education and research, and it therefore has a positive impact for the region. Welcoming perspectives offered by international students leads to a broader perspective overall and more innovative solutions. This intercultural competence is becoming increasingly important, including within the Netherlands. In addition, international students make an important contribution to our economy and labour market, especially in the shortage sectors, and hence to maintaining broad prosperity. Here, language skills in both Dutch and English are important for success and reason for our attention.







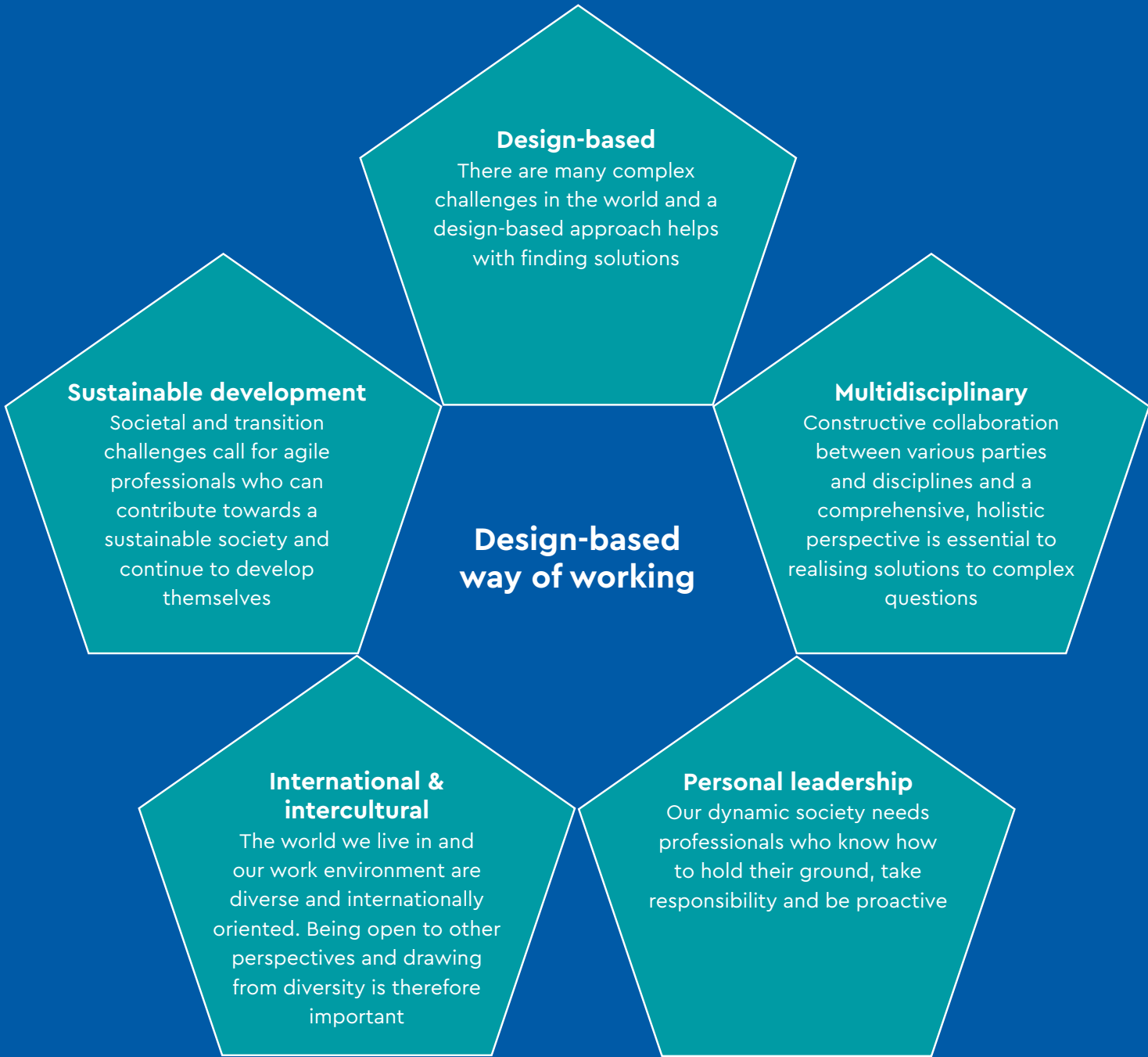
### 3.4 Our design-based way of working

We are convinced that the present time, with all its complex societal and transition challenges, calls for an inquisitive, design-oriented, reflective, self-aware attitude and collaborations beyond the boundaries of one's own discipline and domain. We need professionals with an open mind, capable of finding solutions to complex problems and contributing to regional and international changes. To train our students to become such professionals, we have developed our educational concept, design-based education (DBE). Not only for our students, but also for ourselves, a design-based way of working contributes to the successful implementation of our strategic course. This means it not only colours what all our students learn, it also has implications for how professionals advance education and research and what that requires in terms of organisation. DBE requires educational and organisational development that is cyclical, systemic and iterative and based on research-based design. DBE demands design-based working.

A design-based way of working is not a new or additional organisational concept, but a translation of the facets of DBE into the way of working at NHL Stenden. At all levels in the organisation, from education, research and services to management and governance. A translation that is reflected in structure, systems, processes and, above all, behaviour. The inner development goals, as a framework of transformational skills for sustainable development, can also have a place in this.

We aim to achieve a congruent policy of leading, cooperating, learning & development in the organisation, in fitting with our DBE educational concept and supporting our ambition.

A new way of working does not happen by itself, even though we notice how much positive energy this topic gives when we talk about it with each other. It involves a change in behaviour and the creation of an environment that facilitates it. In this regard, we focus on professionalisation, team-oriented work and team development. We very much realize that as a university of applied sciences we operate in an environment in which we are (partly) bound by rules, procedures and systems, for example when it comes to visitation and accreditation of programmes. There needs to be a balance between working in such a context and wanting to be able to constantly respond to changes. Acknowledging together that this pressure exists is the start of the conversation about how to handle it appropriately. There are enough areas in which we have more freedom to organise and work with more flexibility and agility, as well as collaborate across the boundaries of one's own organisational unit. To this end, we will work out a transition path together in 2024 to make our unique way of working a success.







## 4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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In order to fulfil our ambitions regarding design-based education, practice-oriented research focused on shared prosperity, internationalisation, and our design-based way of working, a number of guiding principles are important.

### 4.1 Quality as a guiding principle

By quality we mean more than just 'meeting the legally required criteria'. We see this ambition reflected in our educational concept of design-based education and in our way of working with which we actually demonstrate what we also want to teach students, namely finding solutions to complex problems and thereby contributing to regional and international transformation challenges. It is then that we can truly speak of quality. Quality is in our DNA and for us it comprises a quality culture and a quality system. In our vision of quality, we elaborate on this through different perspectives. Our system of quality is based on two principles: responsibilities low down in the organisation and attention to development and accountability. The employees create the quality: the quality system and the culture help our employees and us as an organisation to achieve our ambitions. Our way of working contributes to this.

### 4.2 Diversity, equity & inclusion

At NHL Stenden, we want people – anywhere in the world and regardless of their visible and invisible differences – to be able to be themselves, to feel safe and welcome, and to have fair opportunities. We are convinced that a way of working in which we emphasize what unites us, in which differences are valued, respect is the norm and people feel safe, contributes to the quality of our education, research and employment practice. We facilitate organisation-wide attention to this theme by embedding DE&I in our education, research and support, by providing clear information to students and employees, by facilitating them in engaging in dialogue and by increasing their repertoire of actions (including through our professionalisation offerings).

### 4.3 Well-being of students and staff

The challenges we are facing as a society are immense. A lot is asked of us, as students, as professionals, as human beings. We are mindful of this and good mental health and thus the well-being of students and employees is of great importance. There are four key areas: sense of belonging, prevention, expanding knowledge and skills and strengthening cooperation with the external care system. We focus on the well-being of students and staff by offering a broad range of activities aimed at health, vitality and sustainable employability. On our campuses, we facilitate coming together and social activities and create an enjoyable learning, working and living environment. In education, for example by working with the inner development goals, we give well-being a place in the curriculum focusing on skills that are valuable in the context of well-being and by supporting students in their development into autonomous adults with self-knowledge and resilience.

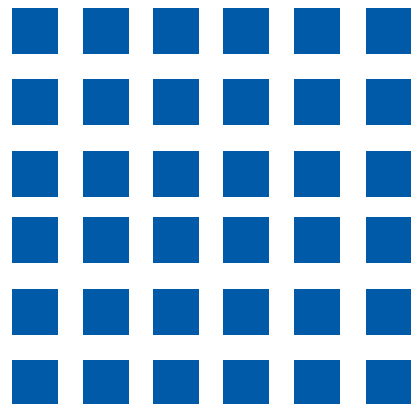
#### 4.4 Service close to the student

NHL Stenden is a multicampus university with several campuses in Northern Netherlands (Leeuwarden, Emmen, Terschelling, Meppel, Assen, Groningen and Amsterdam). Each campus has unique characteristics and contributes to our collective commitment to quality higher education and research. We believe in the importance of providing a uniform base of services at each campus. At the same time, we understand that the needs of each location may vary. Therefore, we continue to engage with each other to continuously improve and tailor these service offerings to the specific needs of the students and staff on each campus. Through this approach, we ensure an inclusive and supportive learning environment at all NHL Stenden locations.

#### 4.5 Sustainable development

We want to be good ancestors. Together, we are the difference: we are committed to making a positive impact on biosphere, society and economy. In so doing, we help to restore and improve the earth and create a sustainably better quality of life for all. Sustainability plays an important role in everything we do: we educate students who have a positive, meaningful impact on the world; in our operations, we work towards the sustainable development goals (2030), aim to be Paris proof by 2040 and energy-neutral by 2050.

Green thinking is our way of thinking and doing, always asking ourselves three questions when making our choices. What is my impact? Is there a more sustainable option? Is the choice feasible and affordable? Thus, we make sustainable choices regarding waste policy, CO2 emission, procurement policy, energy, catering, biodiversity, water consumption, social sustainability and mobility.



- Our way of working in practice -

#### Green Wave

Green Wave is an initiative and movement by staff and students at NHL Stenden who together make a positive impact on a sustainable university of applied sciences. This positive impact starts with the movement itself and then spreads out to its immediate surroundings.

It encourages Green Thinking, which means that every step, no matter how small, is one towards a more sustainable world for the next generation. Green Wave is committed to realising meaningful solutions for society together with students, lecturers, researchers and partners from business and organisations.





## 5. EN ROUTE

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Successfully fulfilling our societal task and responding to the developments coming our way requires flexibility, agility and resilience, and this strategic course acts as our compass. In this way, we provide both direction and room for implementation. The strategy is implemented through policy, action and implementation plans. By using various perspectives and monitoring implementation, we ensure that we stay on the right course towards the 'north' of our compass.

## 5.1 Design principles for policy and implementation

Existing policy will be comprehensively reassessed based on this strategic institutional plan and in the run-up to the institutional quality assurance test (ITK). This includes our education policy, research policy, elaboration of the vision on and system of quality, internationalisation policy, HRM policy, etc.

We will test new policy and implementation plans against this strategic institutional plan so as to ensure that our policy is in line with our way of working and at the same time provide specific tools to put our way of working into practice. In so doing, we facilitate the development of professional identity and personal leadership with appropriate support. Of course, the condition is that policy and implementation plans are feasible, effective and mutually consistent.

## 5.2 Seeing from new perspectives

With our substantive course and our way of working, we have a clear direction and framework for the coming years. We also want to ensure that we continue to use different perspectives in the implementation of our strategic course so as to determine whether we are still on course, whether we are taking sufficient account of the interests of our stakeholders and to be able to identify in time whether the course itself needs modifying. In order to obtain sufficient relevant perspectives, we are launching two new bodies to work along the regular bodies such as the participation council, supervisory board, study programme committees and work field advisory committees. These two new bodies are future council and the societal advisory council.

### Societal advisory council

The societal advisory council consists of leaders from companies and from institutions in the public domain, from industry to science, from healthcare to education. We aim for a broad reflection of society, and what binds these people is that they look beyond today or tomorrow and dare to think in terms of the collective long-term interest. We will organise an annual meeting with this advisory council in which we reflect on how we are progressing as an organisation and what dilemmas and issues we are facing, and harness the power of the diversity of expertise and perspectives.

### Future council

To ensure that when making choices we are not only focused on the demands of today and tomorrow, but also future-oriented, we work with ambassadors of the future. We have set up a university-wide future council, consisting of students and school pupils (vo, mbo and hbo), which helps us weigh up the perspective of future generations in our strategic decisions on, for example, portfolio, form of education, and the like. A future council can also be formed at domain level.

Through the future council, we listen to the issues that concern the new generation, ask for their vision of our course and how we are heading. The future council meets at least annually.

### 5.3 How we make and measure impact

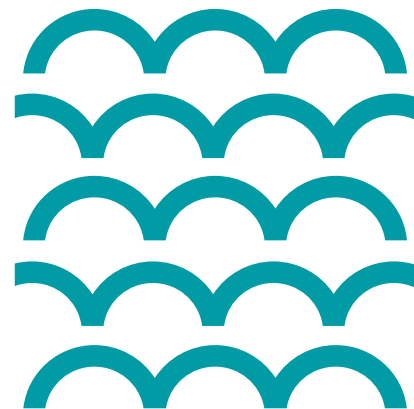
We create impact with our 23,000 students and the way we educate them to become future professionals and with our practice-oriented research. We define impact in both outcomes and in the role/position we take to enable impact (process-oriented). For example, with regard to shared prosperity: it is not up to NHL Stenden alone to strengthen shared prosperity and the level of shared prosperity as an impact indicator cannot be linked one-on-one with NHL Stenden's performance. However, we can indicate what role and position we want to take in the ecosystem to increase the chances of a higher level of shared prosperity. That too is impact.

Our strategy is a comprehensive entity that we operationalise according to a design-oriented approach. To this end, we prepare implementation plans in several areas. Every year, we set specific priorities in our policy framework letter that are linked to this strategic institutional plan and the resulting policy and implementation plans and translate them into indicators that guide us in our implementation. In addition, we also use indicators aimed at monitoring the progress of the national governance agreement and policy focused on higher education and research. These general indicators combined with specific indicators for our institutional strategy make up our dashboard. We therefore make the connection between our design-oriented approach and the plan-do-check-act cycle and are thus able to monitor whether we stay on track.

Specifically for 2025 and 2026, the implementation of our strategy emphasises:

- The transition to a design-based way of working
- The further elaboration and implementation of the 'Working together for shared prosperity' programme
- Digital innovation: developing a centre for teaching & learning and a development/experimentation environment
- Lifelong development: using standardisation and digitalisation to enable flexibility
- The implementation of the policy on diversity, equity and inclusion
- The organisation of the future council and the social advisory council.

In addition to this, in autumn 2024, we will start updating our governance philosophy and the implementing the necessary adjustments to ensure that governance is also in line with our design-based way of working.



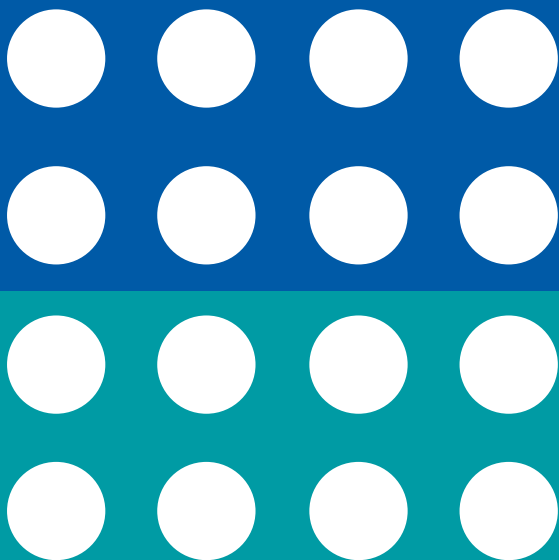
- Our way of working in practice -

#### Greenwise campus

Greenwise Campus is an initiative of NHL Stenden, University of Groningen, Drenthe College, the Municipality of Emmen and the Province of Drenthe. Close cooperation between business, education and government drives knowledge development, innovation capacity and educational innovation in the region. This provides companies with new knowledge and insights and new talent, and helps education to innovate and connect to the latest developments in the work place. Greenwise Campus is one of the flagship projects of the University of the North, the partnership between RUG, all universities of applied sciences and ROCs in Northern Netherlands.

Greenwise Campus aims to find answers to issues in the field of sustainability (e.g. circular plastics), energy transition (e.g. hydrogen), smart manufacturing (e.g. robotics) and health (such as healthcare technology). This helps give direction to a smart and sustainable future in a vital region.





university of  
applied sciences