Strategy for Dalarna University
2020–2026

With the University vision as its foundation, this strategy aims to strengthen the role of Dalarna University as a responsible, forward-thinking institution of higher education. By further increasing the academic quality of its education and research, the University will become both more attractive and more competitive.

The goals for education and research that have guided the University over recent decades have largely been realised. Currently, the University provides education that very much meets the needs of society and that is accessible to students from all sectors of society. This is not least due to its leading role within the field of web-based distance education. There have been strong developments in research, and as a result of degree-awarding powers at the doctoral level, the University has successfully achieved its goal of being able to deliver higher education at all levels within a number of important academic disciplines. At present, Dalarna University is at the centre of the regional knowledge infrastructure, with an increasingly important role to play in the growth and development of both the private and public sectors.

Time for the Next Step

It is now time to take the next step forward in the University's development. In 2019, the University Governing Board and university employees held a range of discussions on the goals and guiding principles for the University's future work. The purpose of these discussions has been the development of benchmarks for the upcoming seven years. Guiding our work has been the University's vision. The vision statement – *creating open pathways to knowledge for a good society* – and its key values – *openness, courage* and *responsibility* – serve as the foundation for the new strategy.

A clear basis for a new strategy are the processes of change within society. These result in increased expectations in terms of higher education and research among politicians, the private and public sectors, society at large and the general public. One challenge that is almost existential in nature is the demand for sustainable development – the shaping of a society that can meet the demands of the present in such a way that the future is in no way compromised for further generations. A given requirement of all higher education and research must be its contribution towards stemming global warming and preventing the depletion of ecological diversity and natural resources, as well as its contribution where possible to social and economic welfare and equity.

Digitalisation, robotisation, automisation and artificial intelligence are examples of changes within society that affect universities and colleges. Through the implementation of new knowledge and education, the task is to link these processes of change in a way that supports the development of a good society. Included here is the duty to counter tendencies within society that serve to encourage resistance both to knowledge and to the questioning of facts and robust empiricism. The University will continue to protect academic freedom, to serve as a critical voice in the social debate and to stand up for democratic ideals.

Strategy Timeframe

This strategy outlines the goals and direction for development at the University for the years 2020 – 2026. It is a general document that will be broken down into concrete goals in specific planning documents. The main emphasis of the strategy is on education and research; however, the entire University will be affected, albeit indirectly. On an annual basis, management will review the implementation of the strategy and report to the University Governing Board.

Objectives 2020–2026 – Quality and Competitiveness

The mission of the University over the upcoming seven years is to increase the academic quality of its education and research, as well as its attractiveness and competitiveness. This will be achieved by way of two general goals: one, the establishment of *Cohesive Academic Environments* and two, the safeguarding of *The Hallmarks of Dalarna University*. In addition, specific measures will serve to strengthen a number of *Central Aspects of Quality*.

Cohesive Academic Environments

To safeguard and develop high academic quality, *cohesive academic environments* will be established in which education and research are each other's assets. In a cohesive academic environment, teachers and researchers work together in closely related subjects, complementing each other's knowledge and competence, always with the needs of education and research at centre. The cohesiveness of the environment will develop from the intellectual cohesiveness that exists within teams of teachers and researchers in relation to those demands posed by the programmes, courses and research.

Within these cohesive academic environments, academic leaders have a particularly important role to play in creating, developing and maintaining a culture in which questions about the academic basis and quality of education and research have a constant place. The environment should have solid and well-established national and international contacts, and well-developed collaboration with society at large. These factors will serve to strengthen and develop the quality of education and research. A cohesive academic environment is characterised by creativity and development potential, where market research and external analyses are important factors, as is a readiness to embrace development and innovation in relation to education, research and collaboration.

A fully developed academic environment – *a comprehensive academic environment* – such as this is recognisable by the fact that it offers degrees at all levels of education, including doctorate, either alone or in collaboration with other institutions of higher education. A comprehensive cohesive academic environment incorporates a high proportion of senior academics within their respective fields: together, they can support each other in their academic endeavours. Within such an academic environment, there must be enough professors and *docents* (readers) to be able to deliver a doctoral programme to an adequate number of doctoral students so as to ensure continuity over time. Furthermore, advanced-level programmes and courses must be of such quality and volume that a stable intake of doctoral students can be assured. A comprehensive academic environment is distinguishable by its sound ability to attract external research funding.

A number of the University's educational and research environments already meet most if not all the criteria that characterise a comprehensive cohesive academic environment, whereas others still have work to do in this regard. Some environments may need to collaborate within the University itself in order to develop the capacity to offer doctoral studies. For some academic environments at the University where the disciplinary field is particularly specialised or predominantly at the undergraduate level, close collaboration with another institution of higher education, either Swedish or foreign, may serve as an alternative route by which to achieve the status of a comprehensive academic environment.

The Hallmarks of the University

Dalarna University has three distinctive strengths: a culture that has a holistic view of the student; innovative online teaching methods – digitalisation competence; and creative models for collaboration with the private and public sectors in terms of both education and research. Each one of these strengths reflects the essence of the vision and together form the hallmarks of the University.

Holistic View of the Student

Students at Dalarna University are expected to achieve good study results by way of diligence and dedication to their studies. These expectations are framed by a culture that works to ensure that every student is met with respect and consideration, and that they are given the best chance to grow – not only in terms of knowledge and understanding but also as individuals. What is important is the ability to have a holistic view of the student, regardless of their personal background, study background or current life circumstances. This approach is to be respected by all employees. The dedication of teachers who work to ensure the success of their students will be supported by a competent organisation where decision-making is streamlined, and where efficiency, flexibility and responsiveness are important watchwords. Students at Dalarna University feel noticed; they do not simply disappear in the crowd.

In our work to uphold this hallmark – *a holistic view of the student* – the University will provide students with attractive meeting places, physical and digital, where they can meet and thrive, both personally and academically. In collaboration with the Student Union, the University will work towards increasing student involvement in the ongoing work that aims to improve programmes and courses. Physical presence and accessibility of employees is to be encouraged to facilitate everyday interaction with students.

Innovative Online Teaching Methods – Digitalisation Competence

Dalarna University is a driving force in the development of web-based teaching methods in higher education. By integrating digital technology with innovative teaching methods, it has designed creative learning environments that allow for collaborative teaching forms, flexible in terms of physical location, in which students are active participants. The flexibility of teaching and the adaptation of digital technology have also served to stimulate campus-based education to the extent that nowadays there is little difference between it – campus-based education – and web-based education. This has served to benefit life-long learning. Web-based education opens new paths to knowledge throughout the life of the individual, be it as a means to address changes in professional competence requirements or to satisfy an individual's personal need for new knowledge and skills.

This hallmark – *innovative online teaching methods – digitalisation competence* – will be developed in both depth and breadth. The academic foundation of web-based teaching will be strengthened, which will mean clearer ties with research on teaching and didactics in higher education. The digital competence that is required to deliver professional web-based teaching will be developed and will include all teachers. The infrastructure of web-based teaching will undergo developments in accordance with the principle of comparable educational environments, campus-based and web-based.

Such development means that *digitalisation competence* as a field of knowledge and skills must be included in the University's programmes – first and foremost in those leading to a professional career. Business and industry, as well as the sectors of education, health care and social care, are experiencing digitalisation at a rapid pace, and students taking programmes in these fields at the University must have the skills and knowledge about digitalisation in their specific fields as well as the ability to reflect critically on its potential, limitations and ethical consequences. At the University, efforts will be made to build research-based capacity that will look at the effects of digitalisation in specific fields and its consequences in terms of preparing students for their professions.

Creative Models for Collaboration

The University has a well-established tradition of working closely with the private and public sectors on issues related to professional development, education, research and organisational development. Work that is carried out with different partners within society – regional, national or international – contributes to the development of each respective organisation and helps ensure that the University is able to deliver education and conduct research of high quality. Such reciprocity does not mean that the University will compromise on academic quality or on being a critical watchdog within society. Indeed, the idea behind such collaboration is that the University and its various collaborative partners, despite their different mandates, have mutual interests and goals, where collaboration contributes to beneficial social development based on academic research.

The University's collaborative efforts aim to build different relationships that will be strengthened by way of formal networks and organisations for the purpose of creating long-term and solid partnerships over time. Therefore, it is important that the foundations be well-laid and the processes be in place within the University so that it can support the work that collaboration relating to its programmes and research environments requires. This includes support both for individual employees as well as for more formal collaborative forums. Work in the area of collaboration must be firmly rooted within the University as well as with the collaborative partners in question. Further, it will constitute a significant factor in the work towards establishing cohesive academic environments.

Collaboration in relation to the University's programmes will develop. More students will be given the opportunity to meet different types of collaborative partners during their education – for example, by way of guest lectures, placements and degree projects. Further work will be done to increase the mutual trust that the University and various collaborative stakeholders have for each other, the aim being to develop and establish long-term strategic partnerships. This includes identifying new partners for future collaboration related to education and research.

There will be measures to improve the dissemination of the University's research results. As well, there will be developments in the area of innovation, and university employees will receive support that specifically helps them develop useful ideas and innovations.

The visibility of the University within society relates strongly to collaboration. Its involvement in the public debate forms an important component in its work to create a good society. This requires commitment on the part of teachers and researchers to involve themselves in debates, public seminars and open lectures. Employees who are successful in their efforts to develop collaboration or who actively work to increase the visibility of the University externally will be given due recognition.

Central Aspects of Quality

The University is committed to its vision – *open pathways to knowledge for a good society* – and its core values – *openness, courage* and *responsibility*. Dalarna University will be a critical voice within society that examines and questions as it works to address important societal challenges. To make this possible, and to increase academic quality and competitiveness, the University must also implement changes to a number of central aspects of quality.

1. Education for the Benefit of Society and Self-Formation (*Bildung*)

Dalarna University offers academically and pedagogically developed programmes where societal benefits and self-formation are central aspects. Vocational programmes – in teacher education, healthcare and social services – demonstrate this, as do programmes in fields that intend to meet the needs of business and industry: business studies, computing/IT, engineering, political science and the humanities. These are programmes that develop by way of close collaboration that is regional, national and international, and that illustrate two of the University's core values: *openness* and *responsibility*.

The third core value in the University's vision – *courage* – describes the spirit underlying the University's courses in modern languages in which a significant proportion of the University's students are active. While language departments at other institutions of higher education are closing, Dalarna University continues to offer education in eleven languages. This is the result of a combination of professional language competence and innovative web-based teaching methods. Courage and creativity are also important factors in the development of the University's popular media programmes, as well as the relative strength that the University can demonstrate within several core subjects within the humanities.

Disciplinary Domains and Range of Programmes and Courses

The disciplinary domains that the University has prioritised will remain as they are, and the current range of programmes and courses will remain largely unchanged. However, in response to changes within society, as well as demands from students and the University's collaborative partners, the University will be prepared to make changes to its range of programmes and courses (this includes changes that require new degree-awarding powers).

Education and Self-Formation (*Bildung*) for a Sustainable Society

The breadth of competence at the University – something that sets it apart from many other universities in Sweden – readily allows for the combination of education and self-formation. Interdisciplinary components in a programme can support the development of knowledge, ability and understanding among students so that they can better manage challenges within society. Particularly significant is the ability of students to relate to and act in ways that can lead towards sustainable development. This is no simple task. Developing an ability to evaluate contradictory demands and interests as well as an ability to deal with complex problems is especially important in this regard.

This self-formation perspective is foundational in the University's vision, and the task to develop generic competencies that prepare students both to deal with different types of situations in professional life and to act as responsible citizens applies to all its programmes and courses.

Master's Programmes

More defined competency needs within important social sectors as well as increased expectations among collaborative partners require that the University be able to offer a greater number of master's programmes. Programmes at this level serve as an important recruitment base for the University's doctoral programmes and are a requirement if the University is to acquire further degree-awarding powers at the doctoral level. Efforts will be made to increase recruitment to master's programmes, a benchmark being that at least 15 percent of the University's full-time students will be registered in either one-year or two-year master's programmes.

Doctoral Programmes

All disciplinary domains that the University prioritises will extend to doctoral programmes. The number of doctoral students in doctoral programmes run by the University will increase successively, as will the number of graduates at the doctoral level. This will serve to create a dynamic research environment and to strengthen the research base of our education. The capacity to educate students at the doctoral level is important in the University's long-term plans to contribute to professional competence, while also being significant for the co-production of research.

Attractive Programmes and Courses

High quality and relevance are the most important factors when it comes to the attractiveness of a programme or course, and demand a constant readiness to improve content and delivery. What distinguishes an attractive programme or course is its high number of applicants and the number of students who make it their first choice of study, evidence that it is well-regarded among prospective students. Marketing of the University's programmes and courses will intensify and improve in order to widen the recruitment base and to increase the proportion of students who are highly motivated.

Lifelong Learning

Posing a particular challenge for higher education are the changes that are taking place in working life as a consequence of digitalisation and new technological innovations. Fast-paced changes in the workplace mean changes to existing professions – some vanish and new materialise, a development that places great demands on professional development throughout a person's working life. The University will offer flexible paths to knowledge for those in employment who need to raise their level of competence or acquire skills ahead of a career change. Its large number of freestanding courses combined with its web-based teaching methods means the University is unique in its position to contribute to lifelong learning.

A Reflective Teaching Culture

Crucial to the quality of the University's programmes and courses are the teaching skills and competence of its teachers. To be able to provide education that supports students' learning, it is essential that a reflective teaching culture be maintained and developed, where the experiences of teachers come together with the theory and practice of teaching in higher education. Important to this ambition are the courses in teaching at higher education (*högskolepedagogik*) provided by the University that all teachers are required to complete, as well as the frequently held higher seminars and other opportunities for sharing teaching experience within higher education. These professional courses will be followed by advanced courses specialising in teaching within higher education and subject didactics, and will also be important qualifications for new applicants to teaching positions.

This pedagogical career path that was introduced as a way for teachers to improve and develop their teaching skills will be given more importance in the University's qualifications system. Special support will be given to teachers who want to work with projects relating to developments in teaching within higher education that test out new teaching methods or that in another way serve to develop the University's learning environments. The results of such developmental projects will be collected, systematised and shared within the University.

For students to be successful in their studies, well-functioning student support services are also required, where students can receive, for example, help with their study skills, language support, writing supervision, and knowledge about information management skills. The professional competence of university library staff will be incorporated to a greater extent in the University's programmes and courses.

2. Research for Knowledge Growth and Societal Benefit

Research conducted at the University will serve both to benefit society and to contribute to knowledge growth. It will also increase the ability to put knowledge into practical use. The majority of research is multidisciplinary and applied, and is developed in close collaboration with regional and national stakeholders, while allowing for curiosity-driven professional research with a basis in different disciplines at the University. The University will capitalise on the existing cooperation between its different disciplinary environments so as to develop innovative and cross-disciplinary research.

Every cohesive academic environment is to be allocated research funding according to principles that aim to consolidate the environment's research and its connection with education. Funding will be divided within each respective research environment in accordance with the intentions described in the strategy. The views of faculty staff will be central to these processes. Every environment will be responsible for managing, coordinating and following up on research.

The University has been working to build up several strong research areas over a long period of time in accordance with the profiles that were established in the previous strategy. These research areas will in many cases continue to be central and foundational for the University's cohesive academic environments. Strong, dynamic and relevant research environments with a bearing on programmes and courses will continue to develop.

Research Programmes and Research Groups

Research is to be conducted primarily within the research programme framework. The purpose of such a programme is to define the long-term specialisation of the research to be conducted and the way in which that research can support education. The programme may include elements of its own environment or its whole environment; it can also comprise several environments. For every cohesive academic environment, there will be at least one research programme.

Each research environment at the University has a basis in a research group comprising teachers and researchers that has acquired resources so that it can conduct research and work within the framework of one or more research programmes. The goal is to reach such a level that the groups are self-sustaining and able to compete for external research funding in line with their growing success. What this means, among other things, is that the groups must attract doctoral and post-doctoral students, visiting research fellows and collaborative partners. Every research group must have a clear connection to one or more of the University's undergraduate programmes and must work actively to ensure that students can be involved with the research group, both its activities and its environment.

A Dynamic Research Culture

To strengthen the research culture at the University, research must be given increased importance when it comes to specific questions that concern the future development of the whole university. A stronger research culture requires dynamic higher seminars; it also requires an increase in the number of senior academics. This means both encouraging academic staff to attain higher qualifications and recruiting more senior lecturers, *docents* (readers) and professors. Affiliations will be made with skilled and knowledgeable researchers, and visiting research fellows will be retained as visiting lecturers. A strong research culture can also require the establishment of positions that provide opportunity for academic promotion so as to meet the need for particular competence.

Alongside their teaching and administrative duties, all teaching staff at the University will conduct research or in another way be involved in research activities. *Docents* (readers) and professors have an important role in the establishment of research environments, and they are expected to take a leading role in the development and expansion of the University's research culture. Senior lecturers can do this by affiliating themselves with the University's research programmes, or by successfully securing external research funding. Senior academics will be given good opportunities to attain research funding. Lecturers, who have an important role in the University's vocational programmes because of their profession-specific knowledge and experience, will be given opportunities for professional development and courses preparing them for research. They will also be encouraged to embark on doctoral studies.

Research groups will strive both to publish their research results and data openly, and to attain a comprehensive and qualified level of publication within their respective disciplines. Increased emphasis on research and doctoral studies will also mean that the infrastructure and support functions will be improved so that a stronger research culture can be established.

Education and Research

There will be a close connection between education and research, which requires that teaching be research-based and that students adopt an academic approach to their studies. The most important requirement for this is the connection between teaching and research – that is, teachers must be actively involved in both. There must not be an unofficial division of work duties between colleagues who teach and colleagues who conduct research: teachers who receive research funding will always be involved in teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level to one extent or another.

Research Funding

The continued expansion of the University's research environments and doctoral programmes demands increased resources. In parallel with efforts to convince the Government to increase research funding, work will intensify to increase such funding from external sources as well.

The University has been successful in obtaining external funding from different financial sources, not least at the regional level. The aim to have a broad base of funding bodies, including private funds, foundations, organisations and businesses, will be maintained and developed. In parallel with this, the University will work diligently towards increasing funding from research-funding authorities and government research foundations, as well as from international research-funding bodies. Furthermore, efforts will be made to increase the University's involvement in programmes associated with the Swedish Knowledge Foundation and EU framework programmes.

To assist teachers in the demanding administrative work that comes with large-scale research applications, the infrastructure and support services for external research funding will be expanded and professionalised.

3. Quality Structure – Responsibility and Trust

A well-developed quality system for the whole organisation can ensure the maintenance and development of high-quality education and research over time. The objective of the University's quality assurance work is to uphold a quality-conscious culture where responsibility and trust are key. Both the faculty at large and the individual teacher are responsible for ensuring and maintaining a high level of quality in education and research, at the same time as teachers' professional skills and dedication are to be recognised as the most important factors when it comes to quality.

A quality-conscious culture is characterised by a constant will to review and improve, and is founded on transparency, questioning and dialogue. The University will ensure that the work conditions of teachers are such that they can both deliver high-quality teaching and research, as well as take an active responsibility for quality and development.

Systematic procedures and models for follow-up and review are also important components in efforts regarding quality assurance. The University has a well-developed quality system that was highly rated in a review by the Swedish Higher Education Authority. The purpose of this system is to allow for regular identification of possible shortcomings in the central organisation and the management of these. The quality system must be developed further so as to consolidate follow-up and checks on education and research with the goal of supporting ongoing quality improvement.

4. Faculty Staff – Increased Responsibility and Influence

The significance of strengthening the research culture and the link between education and research will mean increased authority and responsibility for academic staff. The University is an organisation in which line management has a clear responsibility for administrative activities and duties, while faculty staff will be given increased responsibility and influence with regard to academic operations. It is important that the role and level of authority of line managers and faculty staff are made clear as this will allow for a system of management where both parties work together. The forms of such work may differ depending on the level within the University but will be founded on the principle that all issues that concern content and development of education and research will be addressed in a context in which academic management has a central role. Professors are expected to take a position of greater responsibility among faculty staff.

The involvement of teachers and researchers in positions of leadership at the University (as with positions of responsibility among faculty staff) often impacts their research and teaching. Teachers who have had responsibility for this type of duty will be recognised and rewarded for their efforts, and their dedication will be of merit in their continued academic careers.

5. Global Perspectives and Intercultural Understanding

A central aspect of quality is internationalisation. This is important in the work towards increased understanding of other countries, international relations and common challenges. In terms of education, internationalisation gives teachers, students and administrative staff the opportunity to develop within a cultural context that stimulates comparisons and new perspectives, while benefitting personal growth. Within research, this requires active involvement in international research communities, collaboration with researchers and research groups in other countries, and collective research projects.

In the upcoming period of operations, work in this area will be intensified so as to increase international collaboration in education and research in both physical and virtual spaces for both students and employees.

The proportion of international students and international teachers will increase, and efforts will

be made to encourage international students to remain in Sweden – and the region – upon completion of their studies. The University will develop as an international workplace by way of improved services and an expanded support organisation for students and teachers/researchers from other countries.

All programmes at the University will be designed to include elements that contribute to an increased global perspective and increased intercultural understanding. To achieve this, every cohesive academic environment will work towards establishing strategic, long-term partnerships with relevant institutions of higher education abroad.

6. Proactive Organisational Support

The quality of organisational support is decisive when it comes to the capacity of the University to carry out its mandate in terms of education and research. Well-functioning support systems can ensure and improve the long-term development of the University. Legal assurance, efficient administrative processes and clear decision-making procedures are important characteristics of a well-functioning support organisation, as is a management culture that can promote collaboration while countering tendencies towards tunnel vision within the University. The arenas for dialogue that exist between support services, teachers/researchers, and students and managers shall be enhanced so as to benefit the proactive function of support services.

The University has made great progress when it comes to the digitalisation of various administrative functions. Work towards simplifying organisational processes and reducing administrative workloads for both university employees and students will be of highest priority. The goal is that the University will be Sweden's most and best digitalised institution of higher education insofar as the digital environment contributes to increased quality in all sections of the University.

The support services at the University are greatly valued by students by virtue of their accessibility, their professionalism and their respectful treatment of students – we will work to ensure this continues.

7. An Attractive Workplace

Forming the foundation of the University's operations are the competence and creativity of its employees. The University must be an attractive and stimulating workplace to the extent that each individual employee looks unhesitatingly forward to the next working day and potential colleagues seek employment here. The physical and social dimensions of the work environment will be of the highest quality, with premises suited to their purpose, and with pleasant and stimulating meeting places for dialogue and exchange.

Openness, friendliness and consideration are important in the University's relations to students as well as internally between colleagues. The view that the creativity of each individual employee is central to the organisation and that each individual employee needs to develop and grow in their professional capacity must be the guiding principle for the University as employer. The University will work actively to increase equality, diversity and equal opportunities for employees as they pursue their careers.

8. A Robust Institution of Higher Education

The University will maintain its distinctive character and will continue to be a dynamic and innovative institution of higher education. This will happen by way of an approach characterised by openness, courage and responsibility, and by way of safeguarding and developing the

University's hallmarks. Dalarna University is to be an institution of higher education:

- Where cohesive academic environments offer attractive programmes and courses within relevant disciplinary domains; where education and research are closely related; and where a wide variety of subjects offer education from the undergraduate level to the doctoral level.
- Where interdisciplinary approaches naturally figure in programmes and courses, and where there is an increased number of programmes and courses at the master's level.
- Where the student is at centre; where digital competence is key; and where flexible forms of education are offered that are characterised by a well-developed pedagogy for both campus-based and web-based education.
- Where self-formation, education and internationalisation are the focus so as to increase knowledge and readiness when it comes to facing important societal challenges.
- Where research is dynamic and relevant to today's society, with strong research groups within a number of research fields.
- Where faculty staff have a central role and where a well-developed culture of quality exists that is based on responsibility and trust.
- Where organisational support is relevant and efficient.
- Where positive and mutually beneficial collaboration with society is a cornerstone.
- Where the high quality of the physical and social working environments can strongly contribute to the attractiveness of the institution and the work satisfaction and enjoyment of its employees.

Upon the implementation of this strategy, Dalarna University will stand strong as an institution of higher education, well-prepared in the face of future challenges and ready to meet the high expectations placed on it while delivering in the face of a changing and growing mandate.