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Since I took office as Vice-Rector for International Affairs in autumn 2018, the world has undergone dramatic changes. We all, as individuals, as nations and as a global community, suddenly found ourselves in uncharted waters at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and, today, still, the outlook remains unpredictable. Each year, the consequences of human-driven climate change become more tangible. We have witnessed increasing polarization in global politics and the rise of populism. However, we have also seen more than ever how human lives around the world are tightly interwoven and that crises and injustices affect us all, no matter where in the world they occur. It has become painfully clear that it is only through cooperation and shared responsibility that we can resolve them. We have come to realize the importance of science communication and the vital role of universities as integral and accessible institutions in our societies. We have experienced an unprecedented boom in digitalization, which has opened up new opportunities – but also exposed the limits of the digital world.

Against this backdrop, we have used the last three years to review our internationalization strategy and to set new impulses. Reflecting on our role and responsibilities as a leading technical university, we have defined capacity building, sustainability and code of conduct and quality as new fields of action in our internationalization strategy. Our perspective of internationalization as a university-wide task has continued to grow as internationalization has also become more deeply embedded in our institutional strategy and other cross-cutting issues such as equal opportunities, diversity, career development for junior researchers, sustainability and digitalization.

But what exactly is it that we mean when we say internationalization? To us, internationalization is the process of opening up our institution and its minds – whatever their backgrounds – to the global circulation of people, knowledge and ideas in our everyday working lives in teaching, research, transfer and organization. Internationalization to us means cooperation on equal terms and communication and exchange across all levels of the university with our partners all around the world. It is the integration of international perspectives as we address the global technical and scientific challenges of our time, whilst also considering the worldwide implications of our actions. We will know that we have achieved this vision of internationalization, when internal obstacles to our endeavors no longer exist and we have created the best possible solutions to any hurdles imposed by external factors.

This new Internationalization Strategy provides a framework for the activities and goals addressed in the various fields of action that comprise internationalization at RWTH. Most recently during the German Rectors’ Conference “Internationalisation of Universities” auditing process completed this year, we were able to involve a broad cross-section of the university community in the development of this strategy - proving once more that internationalization lives and breathes through countless individuals at RWTH, with their various functions, organizations and tasks, all promoting a common goal. To you all, I extend my most sincere gratitude.

Yours

Ute Habel
Vice-Rector for International Affairs
As an integrated, interdisciplinary university of science and technology, RWTH Aachen University strives for a global perspective in science and education and implements a strategic, institution-wide approach to internationalization. With our ongoing endeavors, we are creating a place of integration and bringing international dimensions into every university domain.

Our pursuit of convergence as we tackle complex, global challenges for the common good, is dependent on strong cooperation with our international partners. To achieve solutions to worldwide problems, we must incorporate international perspectives, take account of the global impact of our research and respect our responsibility towards different societies around the world. However, the constant strive for internationalization and freedom of science have to be reflected against a background of policy dynamics and varying science policies in our globalized world.

Internationalization is a priority for RWTH’s leaders and thus subject to strategic steering, the development of expertise and the professionalization of supporting services for education and research. For the constant improvement in the quality of our research, education and support services, we have built our internationalization measures around three core strategic dimensions: International Profile, International Scientific Culture and International Responsibility.
International Profile

RWTH is a leading technical university with a strong focus on research and deep tech innovation. We live up to this claim and continue to enhance our profile by engaging at a local, regional, European and worldwide level. We represent a genuinely European technical university due to our unique location in the heart of Europe, and our deep-rooted cooperation with longstanding European partners. We utilize our strategic partnerships and networks to improve our international visibility, and our collaborations with excellent partners enable us to jointly address the global challenges of our time with greater efficacy.
Strategic Partnerships and Networks

The scale and complexity of the tasks taken on by institutions such as RWTH not only in research, but also in the education of tomorrow’s experts, leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs, require focused and purposeful international cooperation. RWTH has formed alliances and networks with like-minded, internationally renowned partner universities with whom we share strategic institutional objectives such as Tsinghua University (CN), the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IN), and the University of Alberta (CA). The scientific and educational profiles of these select institutions are of such nature that joining forces will yield higher achievements and better results for all parties through either the addition or complementary nature of our respective strengths and assets.

However, as we reach out to partners around the world, we continue to preserve our strong sense of European identity and values. RWTH is a key-player in the newly established EU-funded “European University” ENHANCE and the IDEA League network. These long-term partnerships are distinguished by sustained and intense collaboration at all institutional levels, encompassing research, teaching, support services, innovation and policy. Joint structures in governance, funding and infrastructure are the cement that forms long-term, institutionalized bonds.

As we focus our future efforts on profile-driven, high-impact international collaboration, our priority will be to maintain and foster our existing strategic partnerships and networks as well as to establish a small number of new ones.

Key measures:

**Establishment of funded programs for:**
- student and staff mobility
- research stays
- teaching collaboration

**Establishment of shared structures for:**
- governance and strategic steering
- the acquisition and allocation of funds for collaborative initiatives/projects
- digital infrastructure and teaching resources
- digital and/or physical research infrastructure

1 The other members of the alliance are TU Berlin (DE), NTNU Trondheim (NOR), Chalmers University (SE), Warsaw University of Technology (PL), Polytechnic University of Valencia (ES) and Politecnico di Milano (IT).

2 RWTH shares IDEA League membership since 1999 with ETH Zürich (CH), Chalmers University (SE), Delft University of Technology (NL), and Politecnico di Milano (IT).
Research and Third-Party Funding

We envision our university as a vibrant hub in a global scientific community where meaningful ideas are shaped and progress is driven. Research is inherently related to the free circulation of ideas and the exposition to contrasting concepts. In today’s globalized and interdependent world, scientific innovation in answer to global challenges is achieved through collaboration that transcends national, institutional, and sectorial borders. Thus, we strive to stimulate and maintain the internationalization of interdisciplinary research with a focus on areas of strategic importance, generating visibility through joint high-impact publications. External funding and proactive acquisition strategies are vital in this regard.

Key measures:
- Topic-driven selection of key partners (excellence clusters and profile areas), linked to Excellence Strategy
- Seed funding and support for the establishment of international research collaboration
- Establishment of Adjunct and Joint Professorships
- Joint international doctoral education
- Lab-to-lab collaborations (e.g. AMIBIM, Brückenprofessuren)
- Focus on high impact funding programs in terms of visibility (i.e. ERC, AvH…)
- Expand support and advice structures for international research collaboration (i.e. use of Erasmus+ projects, national agency/state funds as well as own funds for the initiation of new collaborations, etc.)
- Boost economic sustainability through self-sustaining programs, fundraising and sponsoring activities

Internationalization of Education

Excellent higher education preparing graduates for increasingly globalized labor markets demands an international dimension. The internationalization of education at RWTH rests on three pillars: international programs taught at RWTH, study abroad periods for international exposure and the internationalization of the curriculum. Across all three pillars, digitalization is an essential means of scaling up internationalization measures. As well as offering a broad and growing portfolio of English-taught international Master’s degree programs, RWTH is steadily increasing the number of courses taught in English at Bachelor’s level in order to pave the way towards English-taught Master’s programs.

Short-term, structured joint programs with partner universities as well as complete double/multiple degree programs at Master’s level and degree courses including mandatory study periods abroad, guarantee high quality, credit-earning international experience. In order to provide study abroad options for a growing population of students with diverse needs, RWTH is creating modular, customizable, credit guaranteed programs, which include virtual and blended mobility experiences.

By mainstreaming the international dimension in curricula, we can ensure the capacity of our future graduates to work, relate and reflect in international settings and in a global context. Education at RWTH is not only international, but also practice-driven with a highly entrepreneurial approach, which nevertheless places vital emphasis on the ethical and social dimensions of responsible research and innovation.

Key measures:
Create incentives for faculty engagement in order to establish
- English-taught Master’s programs in all faculties
- English-taught courses at Bachelor’s level in all programs (30 CP minimum)
- Structured programs containing fixed study abroad periods in all faculties
- Guaranteed credit-earning mobility portfolios in all faculties
- International dimensions as learning objectives and quality criterion in curricula

International Recruitment and Human Resources

Whether as a port of call or a new home, RWTH attracts talent from all over the world providing momentum for successful educational and professional journeys. International recruitment efforts therefore focus on identifying the most suitable candidates for studies, research, teaching or administration from a worldwide pool. Recruitment and onboarding processes also help to ensure the diversity of RWTH’s campus by overcoming structural barriers for disadvantaged groups.

Our aim is to achieve a quota of at least 20% international scientists at all career levels at RWTH by 2025.

Key measures:
- Utilize institutional networks abroad such as secondary schools and German cultural institutions to encourage school pupils to learn German and to prepare for studying at German universities
- Implement international networks including partner universities, liaison offices, German cultural institutions and RWTH offshore educational facilities to inform talented undergraduate students early on about opportunities at RWTH
- Provide summer schools and short-term research opportunities to attract doctoral candidates who have shown particular potential in their fields of expertise
- Cooperate with international scholarship providers such as national agencies or governmental organizations
- Reinforce the international dimension in recruitment processes for lecturers and professors
- Create digital formats to reach potential, new international students
- Establish quality assurance measures for international student recruitment e.g. testing systems
- Initiate measures to identify and actively recruit top researchers and lecturers especially in RWTH’s profile areas

International Marketing and Alumni

The objective of our international marketing activities is to further tie the brand RWTH with cutting-edge research, excellent education, alumni employability, innovation and entrepreneurship.

We actively nurture our relations with international alumni around the globe, who act as ambassadors and are key for networking and fundraising activities abroad. We channel our marketing activities to the relevant media for each target group (students, researchers, partners and funding agencies) in the respective national or cultural context, collaborating closely with off-shore representatives and international alumni for specific markets.

Key measures:
- Foster student identification with their alma mater from the first semester onwards through a university-wide philosophy and target-group specific concepts
- Develop and implement an international alumni strategy
- “Karman Days” - bring Karman Fellows and distinguished alumni to Aachen
- Maintain an active international media policy
- Create a strong network of international alumni by providing added value through honorary titles, high profile events, access to top scientists etc.
International Scientific Culture

We actively live an international scientific culture at RWTH by promoting international encounters and experience at all levels of the university community, integrating intercultural perspectives into our organization thus increasing diversity, permeability and recognition, and actively countering discrimination of any kind. International and intercultural dimensions are woven into the fabric of shared values that mold the university environment and the interactions that take place at every level of our university community.
Internationalization@Home

Internationalization@Home is the practice of incorporating international culture and international opportunities into the everyday learning and working experience on the university campus. All members of the university profit from internationalization@Home measures: our international students, employees and researchers are welcomed into an environment, which recognizes and responds to their needs, and German staff and students have a wealth of opportunities at their fingertips for gaining horizon-broadening international and intercultural experience for their own personal development. A successful internationalization@Home policy creates an attractive and vibrant learning and working environment for all RWTH members and places internationals on equal footing with their German peers.

Key measures:
- Foster a culture that encourages and rewards intercultural exchange at every level of the university
- Provide a physical and digital infrastructure conducive to hosting international and intercultural events
- Enhance the visibility of the activities and experiences of the international community and provide official recognition for the value of these contributions
- Support RWTH community members in acquiring the non-academic skills and expertise needed to appropriately respond to an increasingly global and international study and work environment and to play an active role in internationalization
- Create a physical and digital campus environment that is truly accessible and comprehensible to all members of the university

Welcome Culture and Integrated Services

Welcome culture specifically addresses the arrival and orientation phase for new international students, researchers and employees. Welcome culture creates optimal framework conditions to facilitate the swift integration of new internationals into the university system, empowering them to autonomously achieve their goals and fulfill their potential. Strong networks and the close cooperation between internal and external service units are the backbone of a unique and integrated Aachen-wide welcome culture. The warm reception provided to new researchers and employees. Welcome culture creates optimal framework conditions to facilitate the swift integration of new internationals into the university system, empowering them to autonomously achieve their goals and fulfill their potential. Strong networks and the close cooperation between internal and external service units are the backbone of a unique and integrated Aachen-wide welcome culture. The warm reception provided to new international students, employees and researchers is a sign of the high value that we place on maintaining a diverse, international community.

Key measures:
- Enhance onboarding support for all international target groups with tailor-made conventional as well as blended/virtual welcome service portfolios, which also address the needs of particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged groups
- Facilitate academic and scientific integration
- Enable and motivate internationals to acquire the extra-curricular skills required to successfully study and work in Germany e.g. language skills, intercultural expertise, knowledge of the German job market, general soft skills etc.
- Cooperate with internal/external service and advice centers and authorities at a local and regional level to promote knowledge exchange and to achieve solutions to structural problems.

International Mobility

International mobility is a driving factor in internationalization and an integral part of university education and the individual career paths of researchers, lecturers and administrative staff. RWTH encourages, supports and empowers all members of the university to gain experience abroad to promote their personal and professional development and enhance their abilities to interact in international, multilateral networks.

To this end, RWTH offers a variety of exchange opportunities, structured mobility programs and attractive mobility grants that are easily accessible and meet the needs of our diverse university community. RWTH facilitates sustainable mobility partnerships through attractive study options and excellent extra-curricular support.

The comprehensive implementation of international mobility for students and staff is a task that relies on the participation of many players. The International Office is a central support service for faculties and institutes providing information, advice and digital solutions, which ease the administration of mobility programs and the academic recognition of credits earned abroad. The university harnesses its strategic partnerships and international networks to promote and continually improve the mobility of all university groups.

Virtual and blended mobility as well as smart administrative processes are crucial in broadening access and providing a wealth of options.

Key measures:
- Evaluate mobility rates among graduate students
- Implement a centralized and digital credit recognition management system/process
- Expand the central online information and application portal for all mobility programs and grants
- Increase outgoing mobility
- Promote international research projects and internships
- Establish additional exchange places
- Promote staff mobility
- Promote virtual and blended mobility

Digitalization

At RWTH, we view digitalization as a process of organizational evolution as well as a powerful instrument for excellent teaching and learning, deployed for the benefit of all members of the university. In our internationalization activities, the use of technical innovation and digitalization plays a key role for eased communication, cooperation and mobility as well as increased efficiency in administration. Whilst we seize the opportunities the digital evolution offers, data security, privacy and intellectual property rights continue to be of paramount importance.

Key measures:
- Further digitalize administrative processes
- Develop digital formats for information, support and advice services
- Enable joint teaching in virtual and blended mobility formats
- Enable peer-to-peer exchange in digital formats (webinars, conferences...)
International Responsibility

We live up to our international responsibility by considering ethical, social and environmental consequences when initiating and evaluating our research activities. Research proposals are weighed up in terms of their potential contribution to the great global challenges of our time. We also strive for a balanced global scientific system by establishing fair cooperations with emerging and developing scientific communities. We align our international relations with the university’s ethical values and democratic principles, adhering to scientific quality standards, an open science culture and the transfer of knowledge in an international context all the while maintaining and fostering our network of international relationships.
Sustainability

The term sustainability is used in the broad sense as laid down by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and in accordance with the university’s mission statement. We therefore consider various sustainability issues in terms of research and educational agendas as well as in our own Governance and Operations. Where internationalization is concerned, as a fundamentally social and interdisciplinary task, ecological sustainability in particular is a major challenge and is therefore the focal point. Mobility and the reduction of carbon emissions are inherently opposed so we must work towards smart compromises with suitable incentives.

We will utilize our partnerships and networks to accelerate our efforts in contributing to our sustainability goals and maximizing their outcomes. Local projects and initiatives within the university promoting sustainability (e.g. IGCS) will receive prioritized support.

Key measures:
- Reduce carbon footprint in mobility and business travel through
  - virtual mobility
  - compensation schemes
  - incentives/prioritization for rail travel and long-term stays despite higher costs
- Prioritize projects in internal project support and funding which work on sustainability-related research topics and feature sustainable project planning (e.g. minimized consumables, ecological sourcing, reduced energy consumption, reduced physical travel)

Capacity Building

As a leading university of science and technology with an emphasis on the integration of social sciences and humanities, we bear responsibility for innovative solutions and ethically informed, positive transformation in the face of the grand challenges facing our own and other societies around the world. By engaging in international capacity building activities in the academic and scientific realm, we are contributing to a more balanced global scientific community. Our objectives are fruitful brain circulation and the empowerment of underprivileged scientific communities through partnerships that create synergies and mutual benefit.

Key measures:
- Initiate capacity building projects/activities such as match making workshops, fact finding missions and acquisition of third-party funds with partners in the following countries: Ethiopia, Georgia, Ghana, Namibia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine
- Promote networking for internal and external stakeholders
- Initiate projects and programs at all study levels

Off-shore Activities

RWTH operates liaison offices in Beijing, New Delhi and Seoul to enhance local interaction with prospective students, alumni, researchers, partner institutions, governmental organizations and agencies. The liaison officers engage in relevant networks and conduct marketing activities tailored to the regional target groups in question. RWTH is also a member of the German Centers for Research and Innovation (DWIH) located in New York, Sao Paulo, Tokyo, Moscow and New Delhi, which are vital for networking activities with a particular emphasis on industry-academia relations.

RWTH has a global presence through a multitude of transnational research and education projects and institutions. The German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech), the Thai-German Graduate School (TGGS) and the Indo-German Center for Sustainability (IGCS) are prestigious examples of successful cooperation and knowledge transfer, which have created lasting institutions modeled on RWTH-structures in terms of curricula, research practice and governance. As well as furthering the brand “RWTH,” these institutions serve as cooperation hubs in their respective regions.

Key measures:
- Enhance RWTH’s visibility in events held by the German Centres for Research and Innovation
- Strengthen the integration of off-shore education facilities
- Incorporate faculty level off-shore institutions and activities into central university networks

Code of Conduct and Quality Assurance

In order to support all university members in their international activities and cooperation endeavors we are laying down ethical guidelines that provide orientation in uncertain or contentious circumstances. These guidelines are rooted in RWTH’s values and compliance policy.

All internationalization measures and activities are subject to regular reporting based on defined quantitative and qualitative indicators or criteria. In addition, RWTH carries out benchmarking with relevant peers. The results of these processes inform our decision-making processes in strategic planning activities and the development of key measures.

Key measures:
- Publish Code of Conduct Addendum for international collaboration
- Define of indicators and quality criteria for internationalization measures
- Implement regular reporting as part of strategy development process
- Conduct benchmarking in relevant peer groups