



# The U4 Network

A strategic network supporting collaboration in research, education, university management and governance



# Presentation Structure

- I. The U4 Network
- II. The governance structure and communication channels
- III. The implementation within each partner university

# I. The Network

- Founded in 2008, the network consists of four partner universities:



Universiteit Gent



Rijksuniversiteit Groningen



Georg-August-Universität Göttingen



Uppsala Universitet

- Four comprehensive research universities
  - with a similar profile,
  - similar size,
  - an excellent reputation,
  - and a long tradition in scientific cooperation.
- There is a joint website ([www.u4network.eu](http://www.u4network.eu)), a logo and a quarterly newsletter.

# Vision

The ambition of the U4 network is to strengthen the international position and visibility of the individual partner institutions through intensive cooperation in Education, Research and University Management.

The U4 network aims at

- broadening the education offer and enhancing the students' international experience,
- strengthening the research output through cooperation and joint projects,
- sharing knowledge and pooling resources in university management and governance,
- and enhancing the impact of the respective universities on the global scene.

# Network Structure

Five Clusters:

- I. Humanities (coordinated by Ghent University)
- II. Social Sciences, Economics and Law (coordinated by the University of Göttingen)
- III. Medicine and Pharmacy (coordinated by the University of Groningen)
- IV. Science and Technology (coordinated by the University of Uppsala)
- V. Institutional Management (rotating coordination)

# Cluster Humanities

- Antiquity
- Gender
- Multilingualism (ML4U Network)
- Family Ethics/Bio-Ethics (cross-cluster)
- Reverberations of Revolution
- Religion Studies
- Cultural Transfer and Transmission
- Social Interaction in Health Care
- Digital Humanities
- Taiwanese Studies



# Cluster Social Sciences, Economics and Law

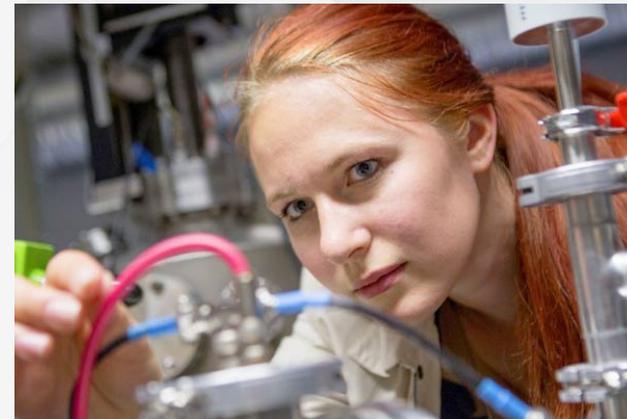


- Social Sciences, Economics and Law (SSEL)
- Legal Research Network
- Medical Law (Groningen, Göttingen, Uppsala)
- Macroeconometrics
- SoNAR – Social Network Analysis and Research (Gent, Groningen)
- Cultural Mechanisms of Inclusion and Exclusion in Contemporary Europe (CMIECE)
- Gender Studies



# Cluster Medicine and Pharmacy

- Ageing Brain/NEU4EU
- Ageing Lung
- 'Achilles'/Ageing Tendon
- OSMYO – Myopathology
- Neurosciences/Experimental Psychology
- Family Ethics/Bio-Ethics (cross-cluster)
- Antibiotics



# Cluster Science and Technology



UPPSALA  
UNIVERSITET

- Energy
- Biology
- Physics
- Chemistry
- Spatial Ecology & the Origin of Biodiversity
- Complex Oxides by Reactive Sputtering



# Research

## Workshops and Projects

- Over 40 joint events (2010-2015)
- Collaboration in 47 joint EU-projects (2010-2015)

## As an example: Project Proposals 2015

### Diversity Research

- ACCOMPLISSH
- GENOME

### Digital Transformation

- Explore

### Transregional and Global Studies

- Taiwanese Studies Programme

## 19 joint PhD-supervisions

- Some examples: Transregional and Global Studies, Multilingualism, Religion Studies and Neurosciences



# Teaching: Double/Joint Degrees and Summer Schools

## ■ 7 Double/Joint Master Degrees

- Euroculture (Göttingen – Groningen – Uppsala)
- Humanitarian Action (Groningen – Uppsala)
- International Economics (Göttingen – Groningen)
- International Financial Management (Groningen – Uppsala)
- Finance, Accounting, and Taxes (Gent – Göttingen)
- Biomedical Engineering (Gent – Groningen)
- Evolutionary Biology (Groningen – Uppsala)

## ■ 8 joint annual Summer/Winter Schools

- Gender Studies
- Antiquity
- Hadron Collider (HASCO)
- Ageing Brain
- The Knowledge of the Curator
- Biological Psychology & Psychophysiology
- Legal Research Network Summer School
- Sustainability and Resource Efficiency



# Cluster Institutional Management (I)

## **Administrative and Academic Career Development**

- HR & Career Services
- Professional Supervision of International Doctoral Candidates
- International Perspectives in Teaching and Learning (2nd cycle)

## **Joint Development of Research Infrastructure**

- Museums and Collections

## **Recruiting the “best minds”**

- Joint Marketing & Student Recruitment

## **U4 Student Network**

- Regular Meetings
- Topics of interest: student hazing, quality assurance, cooperative learning, internationalization and e-learning opportunities

# Cluster Institutional Management (II)

## Academic Leadership training

- U4 Leadership Programme (2nd cycle)
  - Session I: 'Developing Academic Talent' (Groningen 2014)
  - Session II: 'Creating Transparency and Accountability in European Universities' (Gent 2015)
  - Session III: 'Leading Top Quality Universities' (Uppsala 2015)
  - Session IV: 'Managing Change and Preparing for the Future' (Göttingen 2016)



# Cluster Institutional Management (III)

## Benchmarking

### ■ Peer Review Sessions

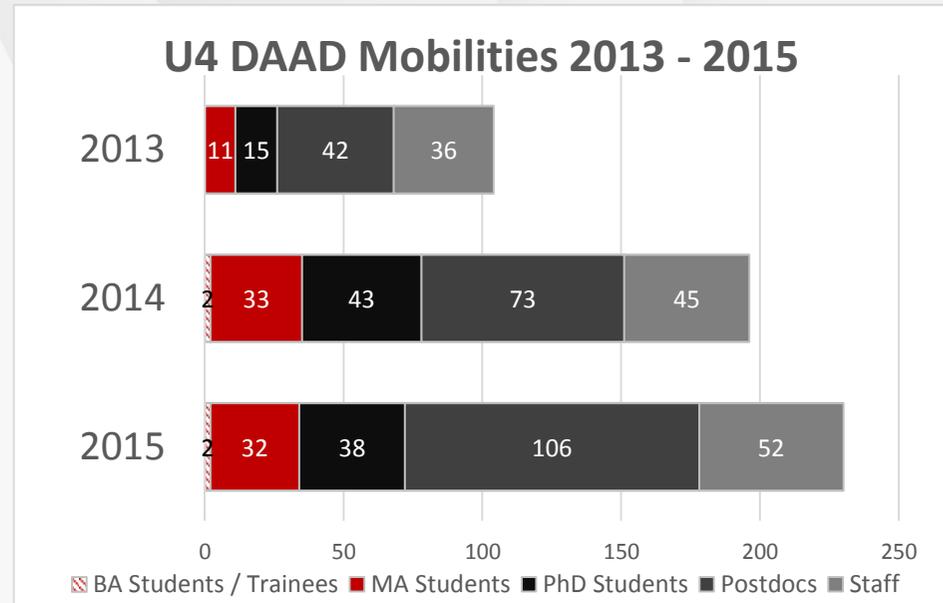
- Session I: 'Finance and Allocation Models' (Gent 2014)
- Session II: 'HR and Gender Policy' (Groningen 2014)
- Session III: 'Research Infrastructures' (Göttingen 2015)
- Session IV: 'Governance' (Uppsala/Visby 2016)
- Session V: 'Sustainability' (Sept. 2016)



# Mobility: Research/Teaching/Administration (I)

## Mobilities 2015

- 550 Mobilities overall
- 55 % Academic
- 30 % Students
- 15 % Staff
  
- 135 funded through Erasmus
- 230 funded through the DAAD



# Evaluation DAAD-Project U4

## **INCHER-Kassel Evaluation (on behalf of DAAD)**

- Close network; all partners firmly connected
- Equal structure
- Collaboration founded on trust
- Optimal communication structure
- Variety, extent and breadth of activity outstanding
- Successful support through international offices
- Great support through university leadership
- U4 developed as a brand
- Continuous flow of activities, but sustainability remains a challenge

## II. Governance and Communication Channels

### The road towards the U4 network

#### **Benefits of cooperation in the Coimbra Group and within bilateral agreements:**

Universities in a similar setting in terms of size, reputation, position in the rankings, research orientation, quality of teaching and location (in historic university towns).

**But Coimbra Group too large** to implement projects in certain fields, e.g. governance and university management.

Decision to interconnect **bilateral partnerships of Groningen** and to build a quartet as a cooperation platform

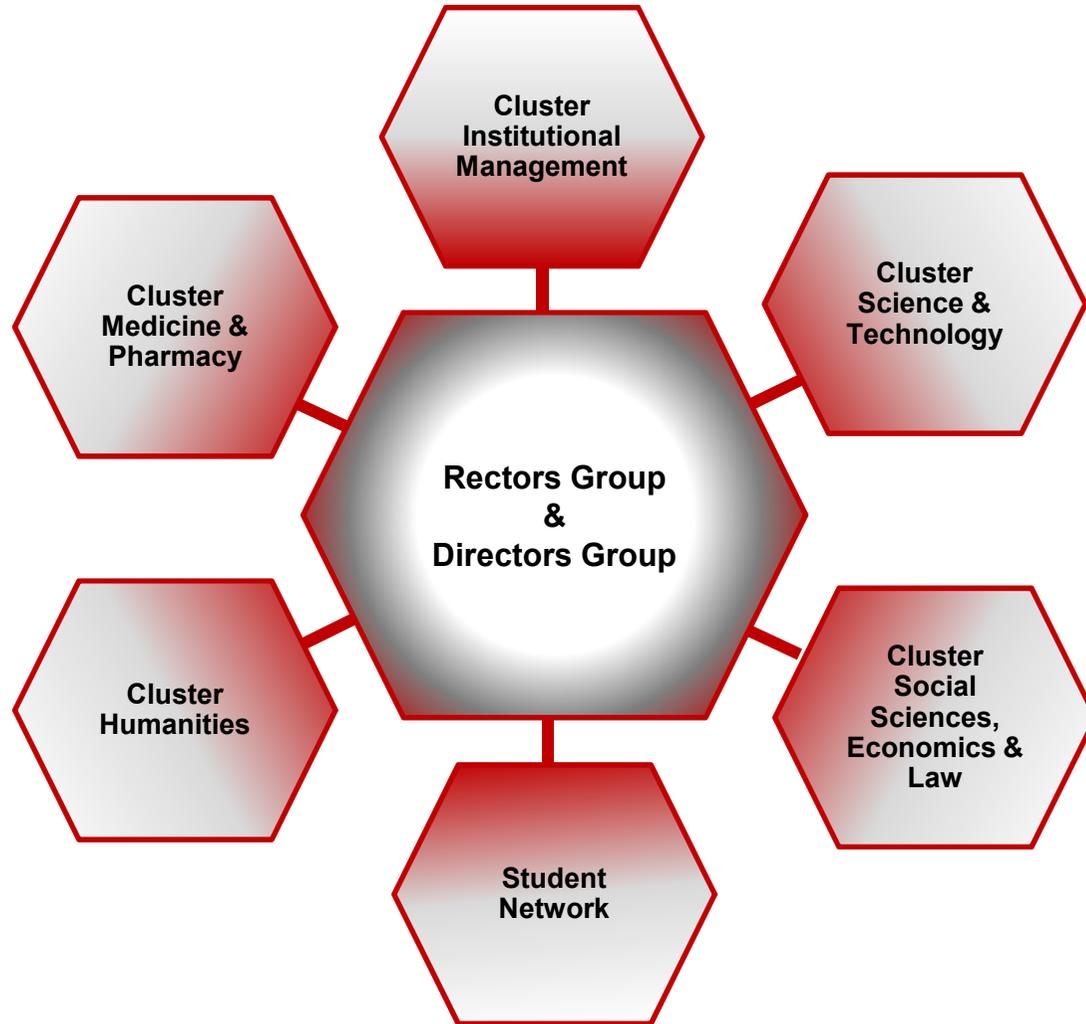
Gent, Göttingen, Groningen and Uppsala had an **established history of cooperation** with a variety of joint projects, for instance, several double degree programmes.

Moreover, there was **scope for expanding the cooperation** to other disciplines and work together in the field of governance and management.



**U4 network officially founded in 2008**

# Governance (II)



## Unique Governance Model

A good balance between top-down and bottom-up, an interaction between the academic staff, the university leadership and the administration, with a variety of communication channels, fostering a variety of joint projects, based on trustful collaboration and the equality of all partners.

# Governance (III)

## Decision-Making and Communication Channels

- Each academic cluster has a chair.
- There is an administrative coordinator at each partner university.
- The development and activities evolved due to a targeted strategy.
- Decision-making and communication has been institutionalised as follows:
  - Annual Rectors' Meetings  
Plenary with presentations from Cluster Chairs and U4 Student Network (among others), followed by parallel Rectors' Meeting, Directors' Meeting, Cluster Chairs' Meeting, Student Network Meeting  
**Key annual event for decision-taking process**
  - Directors' Meetings where suggestions to the Rectors are agreed upon
  - Bi-monthly Coordinator's Meetings or conference calls
  - Clusters: Regular communication within the clusters on a virtual level / annual Cluster Conference / subject-specific workshops
  - Meetings of subgroups, i.e. Coordinators of the U4 Leadership Programme, U4 Student Network



# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Göttingen (I)



## First five years (2008-2012)

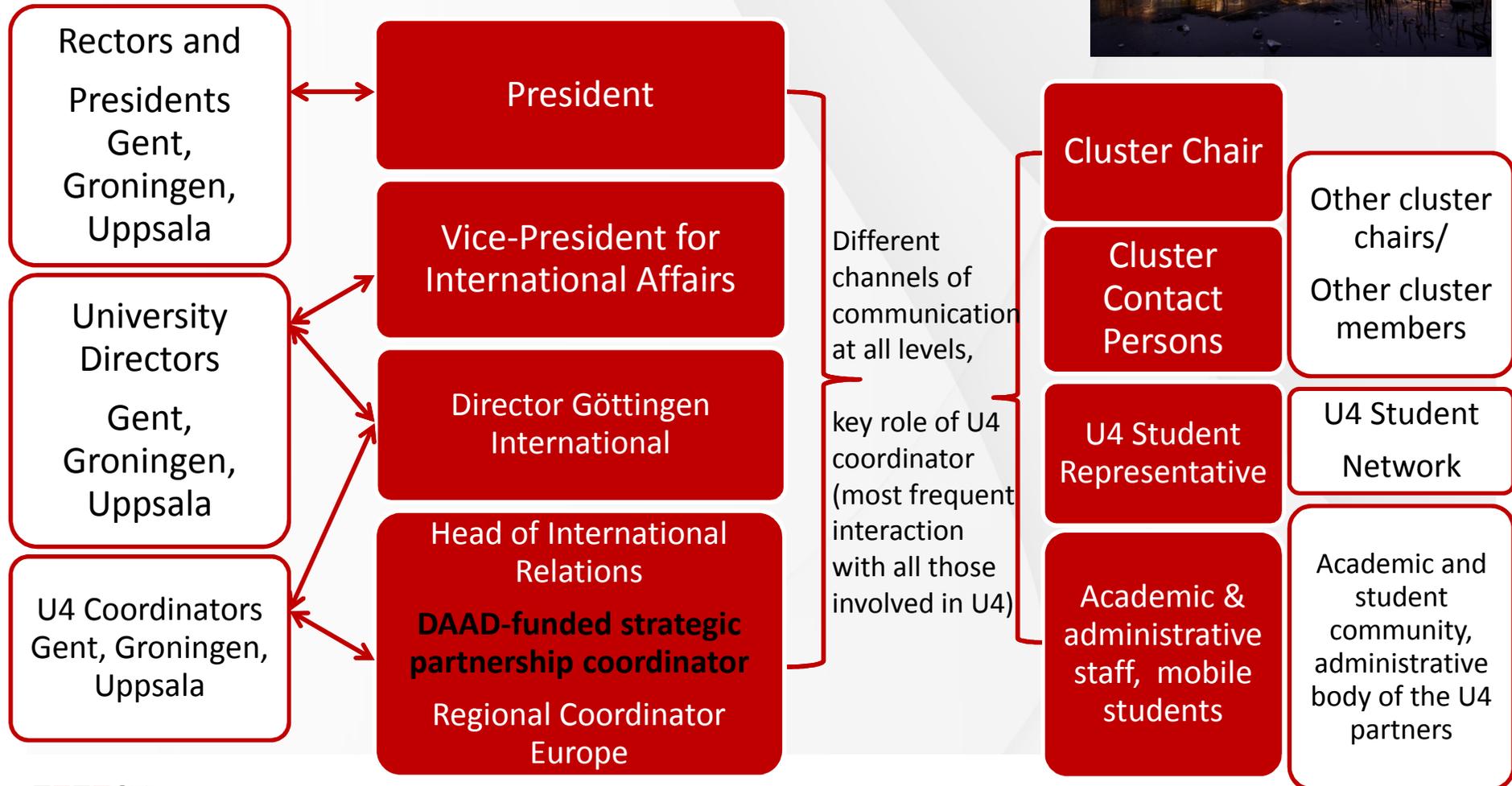
- Immediate investment to develop and promote U4:  
I.e. Part-time coordinator, jointly financed by the International Office, the Research Department, the Student and Academic Services Department
- Early challenges:
  - Making the network known throughout the university.
  - Criticism levelled at university leadership: Why strong promotion of U4?
  - Finding people in representative fields with time to devote to U4.
  - Filling roles such as cluster chair positions.

## The Strategic Partnership Programme (2013-2016)

The successful application to the DAAD made an important impact. It provided

- funds for more projects and mobilities,
- funds that were advertised university-wide (websites, mailing lists, posters, newsletters, word of mouth) which made the network more widely known,
- means to market the network and develop U4 as a brand (website, newsletter).

# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Göttingen (II)



# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Gent (I)



## Integration of U4 in internal organisational structure

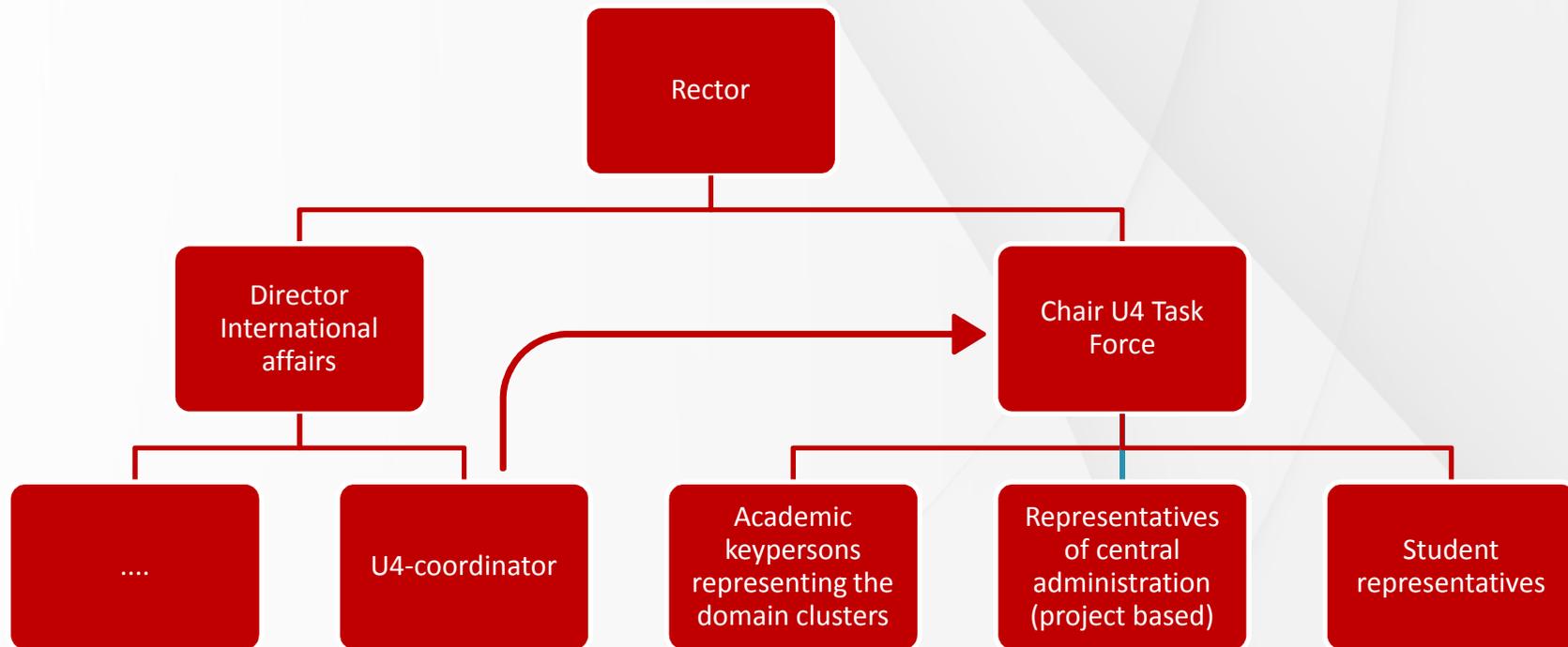
- U4 as a strategic partnership embedded in internationalisation policy
- Participative commitment of the university and faculty management
- Positions of central U4 chair (academic) and U4 coordinator (operational) installed from the very start
- U4 taskforce: internal coordinating body
  - with a dual function: **(1)** dissemination; **(2)** advisory body to the Rector
  - representatives of all faculties and central administration → broad embedding

## Allocation of U4 Funding

- Incentive funds: centralised U4 open call for small-scale joint U4 initiatives: seminars, workshops, initiation of projects, development of joint/double degrees and new forms of cooperation
- Funding of joint PhD research: earmarked U4 call within central research fund (BOF)

# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Gent (II)

## Internal Organizational Structure of the U4 Governance



# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Gent (III)



## Added Value

- U4 is anchored in policy on an institutional level
- Cooperation based on mutual commitment and trust
- Sustainable cooperation based on operational results and short-term deliverables
- Institutional support for small-scale initiatives and new forms of cooperation
- Extended capacity by pooling of resources
- Platform for transdisciplinary research

## Challenges

- Better balance between top-down and bottom-up dynamics
- Dissemination of the U4 concept and the opportunities of U4 within the academic community
- Funding transparency
- Funding in the post-DAAD era

# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Groningen (I)



## Urgency since 2002:

- BA-MA-PhD introduction and research masters in NL: need for sound international networks;
- ERA: look for institutional wide profile and focus in research (FP7 and Horizon 2020).

## 2002-2008 bi-lateral with Uppsala, Ghent, Göttingen

- Intensive long lasting bonds through: ECTS pilot groups, Coimbra Group,
- Joint masters Erasmus Mundus: Euroculture, Network Humanitarian Action (NOHA), Biomedical Technology (CEMACUBE), Evolutionary Biology (MEME),
- student exchange Erasmus and joint projects in curriculum development,
- Joint training of PhD's in Physics (*Phantom* international graduate school).

# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Groningen (II)



## To Do's

- Make U4 visible university-wide: Common Roadmap & central coordination at ISR-office,
- Keep key actors (Board members, Deans (incl. U4 cluster contacts), Management units) informed and put it on the agenda at relevant strategy meetings,
- Mainstream U4 goals with strategic goals of the university: make visible where the added value is,
- Involve the right people (that contribute to the goal); quality above quantity,
- Involve students and student bodies in events.

## How to deal with criticism?

Stay positive. Ask why and go back to basics; stress urgency and common goals.

Combine U4 seed money for meetings and preparatory trips with other internal funding mechanisms.

# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Uppsala (I)

## *Strengths*

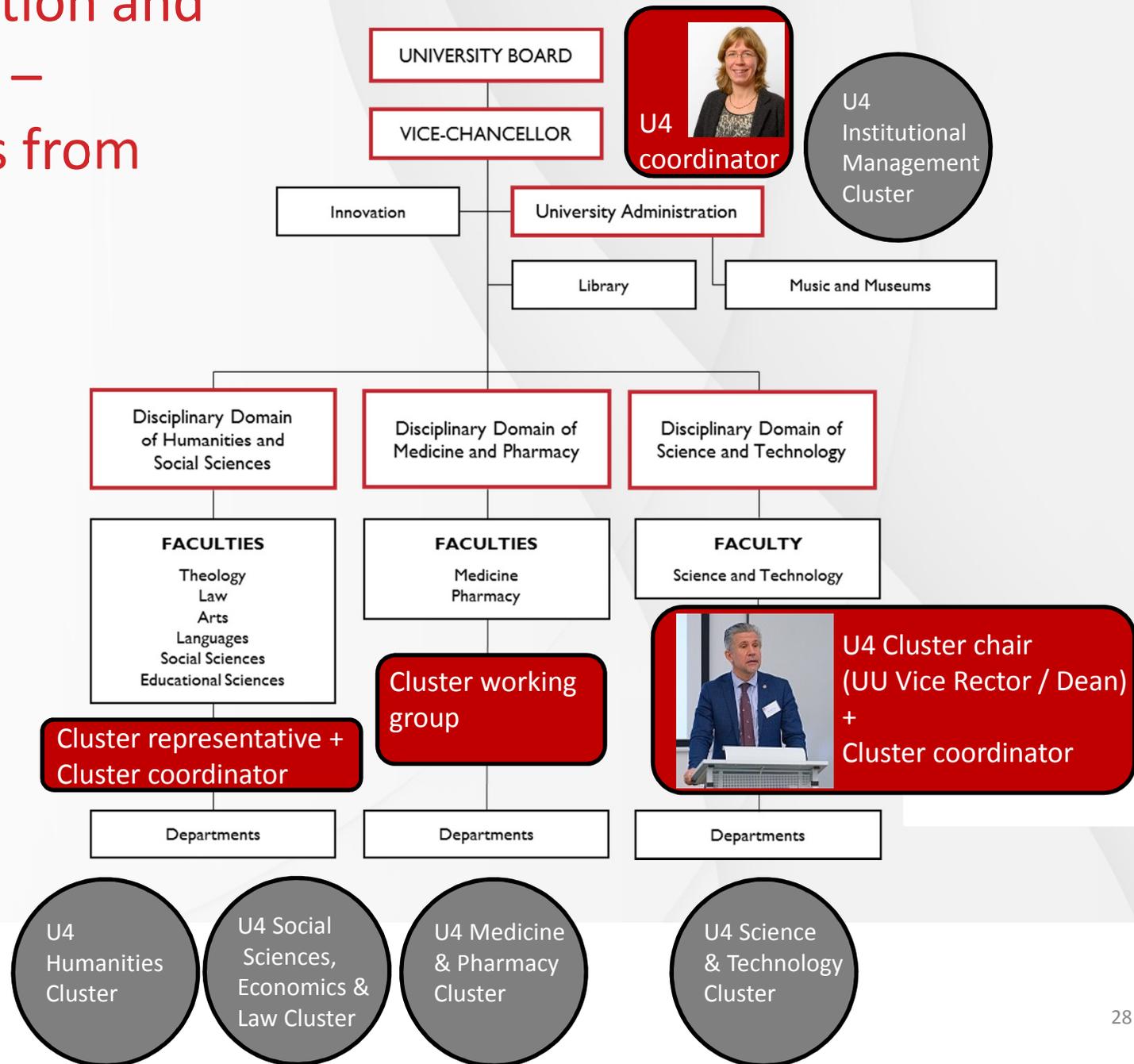
- Bologna process, internationalisation
- Strong support from the leadership
- Advantages with a small-sized network
  - Easy ways in
  - Exchange at leadership level
  - Commitment from coordinators
- Learning from friends that are similar
- Pooling of resources
- Platform for EU projects
- Staff development /exchange of experiences
- "Free ride" to third partners
- International networking for students



## *Challenges*

- Long start-up time
- Sustainable funding
- Fine line "top-down" / "bottom-up"
- Incompatible legislation and financial systems
- Internal communication
- Unbalanced student mobility

# Implementation and Governance – Perspectives from Uppsala (II)



# U4: Perspectives for 2020

## **U4: Best Practice for a sustainable strategic network**

- Continuing expansion of cooperation in research, promotion of young researchers, teaching, administration and governance
- Intensifying cooperation in research infrastructure
- Intensifying U4 cooperation on E-/Blended-Learning offers
- Intensifying U4 cooperation on management – Benchmarking
- Empowering the U4 network for finding solutions to global challenges



Rectors Conference, Uppsala, 2015