

## **The Swansea Grenoble Institutional Strategic Partnership**

### **Strategic Plan 2021-2026**

#### **A Strong and Strengthened Partnership for the new reality**



#### **1. The context**

The Grenoble-Swansea strategic Partnership was established in 2013, initially as a research collaboration in nanoscience, energy, and aging between University Joseph Fourier (UJF) in Grenoble, France, and Swansea University in Wales. This was expanded in 2015 when the two institutions decided to engage into an innovative model for international academic cooperation that would add value to close collaboration and academic differentiation. This new vision involved not only a wider spectrum of academic disciplines but also the senior management and administration of both Universities in the development of a growing range of joint activities such as joint research and publications, student and staff exchange and secondments, joint doctorates and masters, collaborative funding bids, a joint approach to trans-sector collaboration with industry both in the UK and France and the sharing of best practice and innovative policies.

The Partnership has since gone from strength to strength helped by a dialogue at all levels of the two institutions to deliver tangible collaborations and measurable outcomes, top-down and bottom-up initiatives that have successfully engendered a high degree of engagement together with a wide ownership of, support for, and participation in the Partnership activities and regular programmes of focused visits to initiate and expand relationships.

Different institutional structures, disparate fee arrangements, differing academic regulations and protocols have all presented challenges, which have been overcome.

Staff in both countries have collaborated diligently to understand the key differences of both institutions and overcome hurdles by sharing experiences and best practice. Joint contracts, hybrid fee structures and academic regulations that satisfy the legal and quality requirements of both countries have been developed and implemented successfully as a result.

Several financial and legal agreements have been put in place by the two universities including the development of joint doctorates jointly supervised where the students spend 50% of his/her time at each university and with a 50/50 funding. The successful students receive a doctorate from both Swansea and from Grenoble. To date, over fifty doctoral degrees have been funded by the Partnership across medicine, engineering, science, social sciences, and humanities.

The Swansea-Grenoble Institutional Strategic Partnership is now a unique institution wide multidisciplinary strategic collaboration and a major venture between a UK and French university which is widely seen as a model for international collaboration between research-intensive universities. It has become central to the two institutions strategic ambitions and for their drive for continued gains in research excellence and for enhanced presence in Europe and beyond.

The Partnership is built on a common ground of shared institutional values and missions and on a close alignment with the two universities' institutional agenda including a set of actions designed to ensure that their core purpose and values are flowing through all aspects of their day-to-day life including

- ✓ strengthening their international activities and their status as major international universities,
- ✓ growing international student numbers,
- ✓ developing an ambitious policy of international influence,
- ✓ securing their status as major research-intensive institutions who produce world-leading research and impact,
- ✓ cultivating a distinctive culture and promote an active programme of cultural events,
- ✓ developing an enterprise culture and initiatives,
- ✓ educating students to be global citizens by providing them with an inspiring international experience,
- ✓ ensuring that their international policy has strong local, regional, and national impact,
- ✓ multiplying the opportunities for students and staff to study and work abroad to increase their appreciation of other cultures and countries and
- ✓ strengthening their position as key pillars of their community with a major role in local and regional social and economic development.

To build on the solid foundations that have been laid over the past five years and develop a sustainable Partnership that continues regardless of the evolution in the needs and values of the academic world and of a rapidly changing external environment this strategic plan sets out priorities for the next five years (2021 to 2026) of the strategic collaboration's development and comprises the key objectives, means of measuring success and implementation strategy.

Both universities have, in recent months, set out their renewed ambition, vision, purpose and commitment into two key documents *Swansea University- Our vision and purpose: A second century of making waves* and *Plan stratégique 2021-2024 L'Université Grenoble Alpes: une université internationale, eco et socio-responsable*.

These documents which have a lot in common form the foundation of Partnership strategic plan.

## **2. Overarching Goals**

### **2.1 Contribute and advance institutional strategies as part of the internationalisation of both institutions**

The Partnership contributes to both universities' role as global leaders in international education, research, education and is an essential tool for advancing campus internationalization and achieving overall institutional strategic goals. It is based on shared institutional values and missions and on a close alignment of university agendas.

The alignment with the universities' agenda and with their internationalisation strategy will be verified regularly during the performance of the strategic plan.

### **2.2 Provide incentives and support for embedding the bilateral relationship in campus activities.**

Collaborations between universities are relationships between networks of individuals so good interpersonal links are crucial. It is important to maintain and expand them especially where physical mobility is no longer possible or severely restricted. Both institutions will need to work harder to develop a sense of trust, for capacity building and to encourage belief and engagement from individuals on the ground.

Students' sojourns abroad allow them to become more independent and self-confident and more effective learners. The Partnership will aim to target outwardly mobile students, to access a significant proportion of globally mobile students and to leverage a global community of talented researchers by offering a global experience that goes beyond traditional student exchanges and joint degrees.

The Partnership will promote faculty and professional staff exchanges between the two campuses to foster a better understanding of how each university operate and how each campus lives.

Beyond the exchange of students and of faculty staff, a special effort will be made to involve Professional staff who, except if they work in an international office, may have few opportunities to deepen their knowledge about each other's universities.

### **2.3 Increase visibility and broaden influence**

The visibility of the Partnership and the awareness of the activities which are taking place, both within the institutions and externally, need to be substantially increased. This can be achieved by contributing to, and by raising, the international brand identity of each institution.

The two universities will engage with their respective stakeholders and will seek to jointly influence their respective policies, regulatory and funding environment in their respective countries and in Europe to ensure that they are favourable to both universities and their communities and create optimal conditions for both institutions. In particular they will

engage their contacts in the diplomatic missions in London and Paris, in local and central government and in local businesses, and industry.

They will seek to mobilise their respective communities to campaign powerfully together on major issues of common interest.

Each institution will facilitate the others participation in international networks.

They will engage their alumni in the activities of the Partnership to leverage their expertise and contacts.

## **2.4 Build resilience for the future**

The Partnership needs to absorb the turbulences created by crisis or changes in political context including the current virus outbreak and Brexit. It must prepare for a post-COVID 19 and a post-Brexit future and develop models to anticipate, influence and respond to future changes.

This will be done by addressing key internal and external drivers for change for example the rapid adjustment to digital delivery and the increased focus on the role of higher education in supporting economic recovery.

The priority being to ensure that the Partnership is resilient to political, societal, and economic changes and can respond to the challenges of the future drawing on its diversity and wide font of expertise.

## **2.5 Identify and exchange best practice**

Best practice exchanges will foster improvements on our Universities' main missions on training and research. In addition, these exchanges will address global major challenges including mental health, gender-based violence, hate crime and generally enhance the quality of university governance.

The Partnership will facilitate the promotion of good practices by providing for exchanges of administrative staff to ensure that both institutions learn from each other's approaches to shared challenges.

## **2.6 Broaden the reach of the Partnership**

The Partnership will identify key stakeholders beyond academia in government, national and local agencies and communities, industry, and non-governmental organisations, in both France and in the UK, who are key to its international activities. It will then strive to increase their involvement by developing a model that promotes their direct participation in policy planning and in teaching and research joint initiatives.

## **2.7 Identify and develop enhanced collaborative themes**

The Partnership will identify a small number of enhanced strategic themes on which to collaborate intensively and which are designed to encourage the institutions, their staff, and students to share and learn from current and innovative national and international practice in teaching and research and to work together to develop new ideas and models for innovation in collaboration.

The first of these themes is resilience which will be initiated during the execution of the first 18-month implementation plan. The reason behind this strategic choice is that a focus on resilience:

- ✓ resonates with research themes and strengths in both Universities including Circularity, Vulnerability, Equity & Justice, and Habitability.
- ✓ could facilitate the construction of multidisciplinary programmes with research teams drawn from a wide range of disciplines in engineering, sciences, medicine, social sciences, and humanities.
- ✓ offers a good opportunity to develop a major bilateral activity and to structure it around a joint bilateral organisation/institute.
- ✓ is adapted to dynamic systems and to rapid change and as such fits very well to a fast changing economic, social, and natural environment and to the host of issues which have been raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✓ fits with the core strategic priorities of both institutions.
- ✓ is directly relevant to the universities' strategy to build resilience in the students to enable them to better master their learning environment and to better cope with the mental health fallout of COVID-19
- ✓ can be relevant to help the universities to adapt to the multiple challenges presented by the impact of the pandemic on the academic world.

## **2.8 Plan and execute international joint initiatives in teaching and research**

### **Teaching and students**

Both institutions want to grow their market share of international students and prepare students to be true global citizens by increasing their international mobility, fostering a positive attitude towards culture and people, and providing for international career development.

The internationalisation of the student experience can be achieved in several ways such as through curriculum, experience of studying in a culturally diverse environment, student exchange, international mentoring, professional development activities, language tuitions.

Up to now the most visible part of the Partnership activities has been the development of a substantial joint doctoral programme. This has necessitated a great deal of effort to harmonise the two universities doctoral procedures and to interface the two national

regulatory frameworks applicable to doctoral degrees, but all necessary agreements and procedures are now in place to increase the number and breadth of joint collaborative PhDs and to develop a true international network of joint doctoral candidates.

Similarly, several joint master's degrees have been developed including an MSc on computer science and an MA on translation. These will be expanded into a fuller portfolio of joint master programmes.

In addition, the two institutions will explore how they can develop a small number of targeted joint degrees at bachelor level primarily aimed at international students.

Within the context of their respective fees regulations and guidance, the two universities will fix, on a case by case basis, the level of fees to be applied to each of their joint degrees.

### **Research collaborations**

One of the Partnership *raison d'être* is to facilitate the development of new research collaborations and thereby to grow and diversify the international research income of Grenoble and Swansea.

The Partnership will promote the exchange of research data in the form of research priority plans, research databases, survey of research facilities.

It will create and develop a small number of joint research hubs in promising research topics and will structure their available research data into joint databases.

The Partnership will aim at expanding its community-based research portfolio in particular in the health and artificial intelligence fields.

## **2.9 Assess resources and set financial targets**

Adequate operational and financial support to develop and sustain the Partnership is essential and needs to be provided by the institutions.

Resources required in terms of staff time, funding for travel assistance to help foster relationships with partners, to develop new grants and new programmes, and to incentivise programme development and/or participation in joint activities will need to be assessed.

We will work together to identify and target external sources of funding. By joining forces we have the ability to react quickly and effectively to emerging opportunities.

A procedure for easy and rapid access to financial support when funding opportunities are identified will need to be put in place.

Partnership activities will have to be prioritised in the annual implementation plan and resources allocated effectively and efficiently through the operational plan procedure.

## **2.10 Promote international cultural exchanges**

Attempts have been made in the past by Grenoble and Swansea to engage in one another's cultural events. They have been made with mixed success although they have always raised interest across their respective communities.

The Partnership believe that intercultural exchanges are important not only for the personal development of its universities' staff and students but also for building a favourable environment for all exchanges between the campuses.

It will aim to establish a joint programme of cultural sport and art events and will encourage cross-participation in cultural and sport events organised and/or sponsored by one another.

This will become even more important in the coming years as it will allow both universities to help in mitigating COVID-19 impact on the arts and on international art events in their respective national and regional contexts. The Partnership will establish a regular programme of such events.

### **2.11 Undertake periodic reviews of the Partnership's performance**

To ensure that the plan remains relevant and appropriate over time and that it generates relationships that continue to serve the best interests of both institutions the Partnership will schedule periodic reviews and updates, timed to correspond to the finalisation of each 18-month implementation plan. This will ensure that existing collaboration activities are still aligned with, and contributing to, institutions institutional internationalisation strategies and that established procedures and policies are yielding the desired results.

These periodic reviews, which will be in the form of a report to the Strategic Board, are aimed at adapting rapidly the Partnership's strategy to significant changes in circumstances.

There will also be enough flexibility built into each of the 18-month implementation plans to enable them to respond to changing context and emerging external opportunity and challenges.

### **2.12 Improve communication across the two campuses**

The Partnership relies on a complex web of communities of university staff who need to sustain research, teaching, administration collaboration across geographical distances and a multidisciplinary environment and students who engage in international learning relationships.

Top communication will be of paramount importance in the future and more importantly post COVID-19 where international mobility is restricted, and direct personal contacts are being limited.

The Partnership will seek to fully exploit the two universities digital educational tools and approaches and their capacity to develop and implement innovative digital technologies and will be aiming at working increasingly across the "phygical" (physical and digital) environment with a mix of physical face to face contacts and of digital meetings and an increase use of virtual exchanges.

## **2.13 Enterprise and entrepreneurship**

Both institutions are highly active in developing student entrepreneurship throughout the curriculum and at exploiting commercial opportunities with a host of activities such as providing professional training and skills, sponsoring events and commercialising their research through licensing and the creation of start-ups.

The Partnership will explore how Grenoble and Swansea can coordinate their enterprise and business support strategies, collaborate in expanding their regional, national and international business contacts and ensure that their staff gain valuable experience and skills from the world of industry and commerce in particular through sabbaticals and secondments.

## **3. Implementation strategy**

The implementation strategy is designed to bring to life the strategic plan and to identify the critical steps necessary to put the institutions agreed strategic objectives into practice. It allows for both planning and monitoring of progress.

Each 18-month implementation execution phase will be preceded by a 3-month preparation phase to allow for the evaluation of results, a discussion as to the changes to be made and for the preparation of the next implementation plan.

The timetable below details the successive phases during the Partnership strategic plan.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Period</b>
<b>Preparation/Evaluation</b>	1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020
<b>Implementation 1</b>	1 January 2021 to 30 June 2022
<b>Preparation/Evaluation</b>	1 July 2022 to 30 September 2022
<b>Implementation 2</b>	1 October 2022 to 31 March 2024
<b>Preparation/Evaluation</b>	1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024
<b>Implementation 3</b>	1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024

## **4. Core Objectives**

These objectives represent what the Partnership will need to do during each phase of the 5 years strategic plan. They are detailed below together with the benchmarking, which will be used to measure success. Quantitative and qualitative Key Performance

Indicators, (KPIs) will be detailed in the Implementation Plan developed between October and December 2020.

#### **4.1 Develop the resilience theme**

Resilience is highly relevant to a society such as ours in which rapid environmental and technological transformations occur; a world which is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA). Resilience can capture the dynamic properties not just of ecosystems but others as well as including the socio-ecological, the economic and the social.

It has a broad appeal for both natural and social sciences and for ecological and social systems and as such appears in a growing number of published works in a growing and diverse range of disciplinary fields including psychology, archaeology, defence, construction and built environment, IT, ecology, health, sustainable science, engineering, and ecology.

Resilience appears where discipline bridging and integration are central themes and offers an opportunity to connect and to coordinate data and analytical tools from different disciplines and opens a transdisciplinary field of research with high societal importance.

*KPIs:*

- *Identification of relevant sources of funding linked to the resilience topic.*
- *Preparation and submission of an externally funded proposal for a major truly multidisciplinary research program focused on resilience with a major involvement from both Universities.*
- *Incorporation of the theme in both institutions' teaching, knowledge development and governance.*

#### **4.2 Set up a common management structure for the Partnership and broaden the scope of the Partnership**

Establish a strong and sound structure for the joint management of the strategic Partnership with all necessary management, academic and administrative links within each institution.

Establish clear coordination at institutional level, define decision making roles and responsibilities.

Identify a small number of key industrial stakeholders in the United Kingdom and in France who are willing to advise the partnership and who can make a useful contribution to its development.

*KPIs:*

- *Partnership joint management structure is operational*
- *Industrial stakeholders are involved as part of a Stakeholder Advisory Board*

### **4.3 Develop the Grenoble- Swansea Centre in Human centred Artificial Intelligence and data systems**

In 2019, the two institutions decided to build on the complementarity of their talents, facilities, and stakeholders, by establishing a joint AI and data research centre centred on AI and data systems. In contrast to many such centres in the world it was further agreed that the new centre will be founded on the ground breaking idea that it is possible to do the highest quality AI and data research while being focused first and foremost on societal and economic needs.

*KPIs:*

- *Launch of the Centre*
- *Positive responses from stakeholders to the launch of the Centre*
- *Identification of major sources of internal and external funding that will enable sufficient and substantial resources obtained to finance doctoral and post-doctoral projects at both institutions*

### **4.4 Building on past successes, develop a shared methodology to identify research topics**

Carry out an inventory of the topics that have been the subject of common collaborations and identify subjects that have been the most successful.

Inventory and analysis of past joint publications and establish a centralised database of joint publications

Compare the institutions priority research areas for 2021 and beyond.

*KPIs:*

- *Establishment of a database of past Partnership collaborations with qualitative analysis of their subjects and success rate.*
- *Establishment of a database of past joint publications with rankings*
- *Reporting to the Strategic Board comparing Grenoble and Swansea future priority research areas*

### **4.5 Joint teaching and research activities**

Establish a student exchange programme and an exchange schemes for faculty and for professional members of staff.

Grow the existing joint doctoral programme in particular by securing outside funding.

Put in place joint masters and bachelor's degree programmes.

Prepare a large research initiative that is in line with the research priorities post 2021 identified by both institutions.

*KPIs:*

- *Student exchange programme is up and running with good take up*
- *Joint doctoral programme has expanded and has attracted external funding*

- *Joint master programmes and a joint bachelor's degree are in place with a good level of student participation*
- *Large joint research project is funded and up and running*

#### **4.6 Exchange of best practice on adapting to COVID-19**

Nearly every aspect of normal life is being affected by the COVID-19 health emergency. It has in particular had a massive and complex impact on higher education and has obliged universities to reimagine how they can carry on delivering an engaging learning experience for students and provide a safe environment for them and for the staff.

While the crisis has presented major challenges, it also offers new opportunities for creating new modes of operating and of learning and for taking full advantage of new technologies.

The crisis has been managed in different ways by the United Kingdom and by France and by the two institutions and some lessons can already be drawn from these contrasting practices.

The Partnership collaboration presents a unique opportunity to review the analysis and forecasts which have been published on the possible impact of COVID-19 on higher education and to put this in the context of the measures which have been taken by both institutions to manage the impact of changes on their activities and in particular on teaching, learning, assessment, finances, management of space and facilities, communication with staff and students, international exchanges and mobility.

A report will be prepared for the Strategic Board to review what has been done across the world, the measures taken by the two institutions and based on best practice to propose some future actions.

*KPIs:*

- *Reporting to the Strategic Board with proposals for future actions*
- *Rate of take up of the proposals made as to future actions for change to mitigate the impact of the health emergency on the two institutions.*

#### **4.7 Mobilise resources to carry out the implementation plan**

Identify and mobilise potential internal and external sources of funding to deliver the implementation plan. The Strategic Plan is ambitious, setting out substantial, transformational work. During each of the Preparation phases we will detail and negotiate the financial investment possible from both Grenoble and Swansea University. Effectively, this will involve a business case being presented to the Board for consideration.

*KPIs:*

- *Achieving the necessary resourcing*
- *Demonstrable impact potential from both institutions' strategic investment*