

The background of the entire page is a composite image. The top half shows a dark green, starry sky with a dense field of small, bright green stars. The bottom half shows a dark green, silhouetted forest line along the horizon, with a body of water in the foreground that reflects the stars and the forest. The text is overlaid on this background.

# **AURORA**

## **UNIVERSITIES NETWORK**

### **Overview of Thematic Activities**

**September 2019**

# Overview of thematic activities - September 2019

## Introduction

The overview of activities is a tool that informs various groups within and outside of Aurora Universities Network on what is happening. It is updated every 6 to 8 weeks. Suggestions for further improvement of this document are welcome.

### **New in this overview**

- Announcement of the meeting of Internal Auditors in Antwerp
- Repeat analysis to the Elsevier report at the launch
- Change of place of the Fall 2019 Biannual

Aurora has a clear focus:

1. Diversity & Inclusion
2. Societal Impact & Relevance of Research
3. Student Engagement
4. Innovation of Teaching & Learning.

Also, to these four key priority themes, “Sustainability” – or the Sustainable Development Goals – is seen as a unique expression of the core Aurora objective of matching academic excellence with societal relevance and may thus become a crucial part of the overall Aurora narrative. Moreover, “Internationalisation” seems a logical and inevitable theme for an international network of universities.

Beyond this core, we see meetings in Aurora of groups with a shared interest, meeting to learn from each other and find things to do together that fit their internal strategies. When these are not connected to one of the broader themes covered in this overview, they are styled *birds of a feather group*.

The overview of thematic activities is ordered by both the priority and scope of the activity. A table overview enlists all groups and projects with institutional coordinators as well as the university responsible for communication regarding that group. Project and other groups with little or no activity over the recent months are deleted from the list – but may return when appropriate.

Since September-October 2018, both the Vice-Rectors Research and the Vice-Rectors Education of the Aurora universities have found each other. This followed from the conclusion of the Aurora presidents that Aurora activities need to be more firmly embedded in the educational strategies of their universities. A special paragraph is dedicated to its activities.

At its meeting in Antwerp (November 2018) the General Council of Aurora has underscored that Aurora groups need adequate support of its chair to function correctly. This applies both to the thematic and project groups, and to the various groups that underpin the ongoing work of coordination and communication. Also, it refers to the group of vice-rectors Research and Education. In the coming months, the 18 groups will be identified (two per Aurora member university) for which adequate chair's support will be safeguarded.

## Vice-Rectors

### Education

The Vice-Rectors Education group had a second – virtual – meeting in March, which was mainly used to prepare for its full-day meeting during the Grenoble Aurora Biannual. The strategy of focusing on shared ambitions as a tool to monitor specific activities taking place – or needed – within the educational domain was reaffirmed and refined. In addition to \*) Diversity, \*) Future skills, \*) Student engagement, \*) Technology, and \*) Internationalisation, the group may add \*) Teaching skills as a shared concern.

At the Grenoble full-day meeting, the group will discuss in-depth two of the specific projects that seem to fit well in the overarching strategy. Also, it will have a thorough discussion on creating synergy with the Aurora students group, based on a presentation by the Aurora student president. A key topic on the Grenoble agenda will be the alignment between the Aurora-flavoured EUN-proposal (for the second Call expected in Fall 2019) and the activities in Aurora.

<u>Chair</u>	<u>Institutional Coordinator</u>	<u>Communications Liaison</u>
Neil Ward (UEA)	Richard Harvey	UEA

### Research

The VRR group held its third meeting on May 27, at the Aurora Biannual in Grenoble. At the meeting, the group received an update on the developments concerning the EUN proposal from Arthur and Sebastian, who were then working on the proposal. Sebastian reflected on discussions and some general question during the call.

The SDG bibliometric tool was also on the agenda. Maurice gave a comprehensive report on the progress with update on latest developments following a constructive debate on (1) the workload on the bibliometricians and participating academics, (2) on the strategical importance of the tool and (3) on some issues and concerns on the intended collaboration with Times Higher Education Rankings, Elsevier and DG Research and Innovation. At the meeting, the group discussed shortly proposed analyses of a supportive environment for young researchers in Aurora universities. Pim de Boer shared his thoughts on the importance of lobbying in Brussels on behalf of Aurora institutions. Finally, experts from the VU Library gave an in-depth presentation of new comparative analyses of academic strength of Aurora members. The new analyses were presented at the meeting compared to similar analyses performed by Elsevier in 2016.

Most of these issues above will be on the table in Amsterdam at the end of October. Especially with a focus on new developments and progress of the EUN proposal.

<u>Chair</u>	<u>Institutional Coordinator</u>	<u>Communications Liaison</u>
Jón Atli Benediktsson UI	Háldor Jónsson	UI

## Key priorities

### 1. Diversity & inclusion

The overall purpose of the thematic group on Diversity & Inclusion is to learn from and with each other to reach the highest possible levels of achievement in Diversity & Inclusion at the Aurora member universities; Also, it aims to show Diversity & Inclusion as a distinctive characteristic of the Aurora Network of Universities.

The Aurora workgroup on Diversity and Inclusion aims to:

- Create equal opportunities for our staff and students;
- Create a working and learning environment at our universities in which different perspectives are explicitly valued;
- Capitalise on the ability to generate creativity from different perspectives both in teaching and in education.

## Specific projects:

Project	Chair	Institutional Coordinator	Communications Liaison
Overall	Karen van Oudenhoven (VUA) <sup>1</sup>	Esmee Paques	VUA
Diversity award	Karen van Oudenhoven (VUA) <sup>2</sup>	Esmee Paques	VUA
MPQ questionnaire	Karen van Oudenhoven (VUA) <sup>1</sup>	Esmee Paques	VUA
eBook Outreach & Empowerment	Yvonne Thompson	Esmee Paques	VUA
Inclusive Internationalisation	Helena Gillespie (UEA)	Richard Harvey (UEA)	UEA

## Update on activities

### Diversity & Equality Award:

The Aurora Award will be held for the 3rd year in a row. Partner universities are happy with this development, as it sheds light on valuable projects within the area of diversity and puts forward the projects which have been set up across all Aurora partner universities.

In Grenoble, a new jury has been formed, consisting of:

- Sophie Stas (University of Antwerp)
- Arnar Gislason/Sveinn Guðmundsson (University of Iceland)
- Ydwine Zanstra (Amsterdam University College)
- Jake Goddard (University of East Anglia)
- Karen van Oudenhoven-van der Zee (Chair Diversity Group, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam).

There will be a slight adaptation of the described criteria:

- Not generalizability as the criterion, but a request for contextualization and a reflection on transferability/specificity.
- Effectiveness: evaluate based on goalsetting, and less emphasis on assessment and demonstration of effectiveness in the long run (Effect is often hard to measure, particularly in the case of new projects).

Promotion/visibility:

- More involvement needed of diversity group representatives in their institutions in liaison with the communication officers and possible also with student associations; via channels aimed at reaching students.
- Broad view: also students and projects that may not be explicitly labelled as 'diversity'; or are known on the central level.

Multicultural Personality Questionnaire: At the Antwerp Aurora Biannual, a training workshop on the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) has been conducted by Jader Franklim Pinto (KIT Intercultural Professionals, part of KIT Royal Tropical Institute). We are in the process of assessing which institutions would be interested in using the tool at their respective institutions and whether users would be limited to students only, or a possible widening of the target group to also include staff. For this, Skype calls are being set up. Due to the limited availability of some diversity group members, this is a process which is taking more time than expected. A few Skype calls have already taken place, and I hope that we will be able to provide more information in the next overview of activities.

eBook Outreach and Empowerment: At the Duisburg-Essen Aurora Biannual, the initiative was launched to create an e-book on sharing useful concepts of Outreach, and Empowerment

<sup>1</sup> Neira Becar (VUA)

<sup>2</sup> Neira Becar (VUA)

Programs aimed to enhance study success and transition to the labour market. The initiative builds on examples at both VUA and UEA of several outreach and empowerment programs giving first-generation students a head start to enhance equal opportunity in comparison with those students who are born into a family that has experienced academic life.

The idea was to create an eBook to shed light on the projects which have been set up within the topic. However, after discussing this in Grenoble, the members of the diversity group felt like an eBook might be too static to allow for changes in the projects, as there are subject to constant improvement and development. Also, all members were willing to collect stories and best practices, but at the time, it was not possible to assign a coordinator to the project. Therefore it was decided for the project to be shelved.

**Aurora Inclusive Internationalisation Project:** This project focuses on closing the gap in participation in international mobility experiences between disadvantaged students and their peers. The project seeks to better understand the reasons behind the differences in the partner universities and take action to close them. The project builds on work elsewhere in the sector, but implementing activities across our network should enable a more inclusive student exchange.

**Aurora Gender Benchmark:** In Grenoble, we had a presentation of how the Athena Swan Charter on gender equality is implemented at the universities of Aberdeen and East Anglia which formed the inspiration for our thinking on the Aurora Gender Benchmark. It was inspiring to see what is possible and what has already been done in this field. For future action within the workgroup, the following approach has been set up:

- The simplified version of the Athena Swan Charter will be produced
- We will fill it out for our universities.
- See where we stand. See what it says, how to build on these pictures to develop it into a benchmark/criteria.

Nevertheless, the presentation showed that the setup of a ‘charter’ requires considerable investments, both:

- For applying universities (extensive reporting!)
- For the organization of the evaluation etc.

A follow-up of the gender benchmark project will be discussed at the next bi-annual in Amsterdam.

## 2. Societal impact and relevance of research (SIRR)

The overall purpose of focus on Societal Impact & Relevance of Research is to learn from and with each other to reach the highest possible levels of achievement in Societal Impact & Relevance at the Aurora member universities and to show Societal Impact & Relevance of Research as a distinctive characteristic of the Aurora Network of Universities.

The theme of impact and relevance of research is a crucial focus of the Vice Rectors Research group with as chair Jón Atli Benediktsson and secretary and contact person is Háldor Jónsson.

### Specific projects:

Project	Chair	Instit. Coor	Comms. Liaison
SDG analysis	Maurice Vander Feesten & René Otten	Esmee Paques	VUA
Doctoral Education	Nick Watmough (UEA)/ Sandra Hasanefendic (VUA)	Richard Harvey Esmee Paques	UEA VUA
EU Research Funding & Innovation Managers	Andreas Hoene	Petra Günther	UDE

[Update on activities](#)

**SDG analysis: bibliometrics of relevance:** Again at the Antwerp Aurora Biannual, the project was presented - with a particular focus now on the Biosphere related SDGs. The [interactive tool on the](#)

[Aurora website](#)<sup>3</sup> Now allows graphic data representation on any selection of the nine Aurora universities and the 17 SDGs. The robustness of the methodological set up is now the issue of highest concern – and will not be achieved overnight. The engagement of the vice-rectors research in this effort is crucial.

At the Biannual in Antwerp, the bibliometricians came together and discussed several scenarios for the robustness of the methodological setup. It is resulting in a collaborative workflow validating the current methodologies first, discovering its weaknesses, before creating a new classification model. This validation should be finished in February, but we faced organisational and technical difficulties at the start of the workflow chain, were the other dependent activities are delayed for three weeks.

Meanwhile, in December, we had a constructive talk with THE and Elsevier-Research Intelligence, to collaborate and create a global standard for SDG-classification in research publications. This collaboration contains that Elsevier is creating the queries and providing the data for validation. Aurora universities activities will be to contact researchers to validate the delivered data.

Doctoral education: The Vice Rectors Research group has identified a shared aspiration among Aurora universities in the field of working conditions and perspectives for "early-career researchers"(PhDs and post-docs). It has asked for a survey of current offerings of services and courses within Aurora universities that may help to provide early career researchers with an outstanding environment and experience; a proposal will be discussed at the February meeting of the group.

The group on Doctoral education has submitted a strategic partnership proposal under KA2 of the Erasmus+ programme in April 2019 (UI is the lead coordinator, VUA is the project manager). UI and VUA have met in Amsterdam in April 2019 to finalise writing the Erasmus + proposal. (with considerable help from others, and especially UEA in the final stages). All project partners who are Aurora members have also duly provided with written participation statements.

The Aurora Future Influencers Mobility Programme aims to allow doctoral students from Aurora Universities to circulate throughout the network and work in interdisciplinary settings with academic and industry actors, regardless of financial limitations and domestic responsibilities. This triple mobility will empower a new generation of socially responsible research leaders/influencers who can communicate, innovate and exert influence across national, social and disciplinary boundaries and contribute to the realisation of the Europe 2020 objective of smart, sustainable, inclusive growth. The project is based on creating mobility packages and stimulating the mobility of 200+ PhD candidates within three years.

The group has not secured Erasmus + Strategic Partnership funding in 2019. They had a very high score of 79 (from 100) and very positive reviews, yet the Icelandic Agency did not grant us the funding. We held a Skype meeting in June, where we decided to initiate some elements of the project on our own and via Aurora meetings. We intend to reapply next year with a reframed proposal, including possible contributions from each of the participating members of Aurora and by using Erasmus + third cycle mobility budgets. We are in the process of including other and new Aurora members into our group, and we aim to meet during the Aurora Biannual in Amsterdam in October 2019. During the Biannual, we will discuss the state of affairs and the next steps with the project and reapplication.

EU Research Funding & Information: The EU Research Funding & Information Managers will meet in Grenoble for the second time to compare current practice and share knowledge/expertise in supporting applicants, strategies and networks for EU applications, and in the preparation of universities for the upcoming Horizon Europe research funding programme. Emphasis will be on better understanding organisational structures and processes of individual EU grant offices as well as thematic focus areas and research strengths of the individual AURORA universities.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://aurora-network.global/project/sdg-analysis-bibliometrics-relevance/>

Apart from exchanging research support work procedures and best practices in research support, there have been ongoing activities to initiate, synchronise and harmonise actions regarding Horizon Europe and FP9 programmes. Among others, the group have been in touch with the AURORA board to consider the pros and cons of a concerted effort to position AURORA in the call of experts, which will advise the European Commission on missions in Horizon Europe. Furthermore, group members have teamed up with other university networks and stakeholders given societal impact and citizen involvement and provided input for the AURORA contribution to the university advocacy for the new Horizon Europe and ERASMUS programmes.

### 3. Students' engagement

The Aurora Universities Network attaches great weight to student involvement, both within universities and as a network. That is why the 'students engagement' is one of the four key priority themes of Aurora. 'Student engagement' is a broad concept, which may cover i.a:

- Ideas initiated by the student representatives in Aurora for joint Aurora activities
- Views of student representatives on the overall vision & mission, strategy, and operations of Aurora
- Active participation in the various thematic and project groups by students with a particular engagement with that topic
- Activities to strengthen the profile and practice of Aurora universities as institutions that offer their students an engaging education with a lasting impact on their personal development.

Students are excited to be an integral part of the network and aim to be a driving force in shaping and achieving its ambitions. Aurora Student Council consists of two elected student representatives from each university, who collectively decide on student priorities for their own Aurora activities and student priorities for the network. They are actively involved in the network's activities and ensure Aurora's continued student focus.

The elected chair of the Aurora student group participates as an observer in the General Council and Board meetings.

Students' current top priorities for the network are:

- Collaborative Learning – Aurora universities should make their digital learning resources accessible for all Aurora students and staff (see the [Open Educational Resources Portal](#) here). The team of different Aurora universities should collaborate in creating education; both for lectures and entire courses;
- Summer school – Use our diverse cultures, perspectives, and educational specialities for a remarkable and inclusive summer programme, including great courses and topical debates on societal issues.

Some member universities can offer structured support of a Student Ambassador.

#### Specific projects:

<u>Project</u>	<u>Chair</u>	<u>Instit. Coor</u>	<u>Comms. Liaison</u>
Aurora Open Educational Resources Portal	Anke Petschenka (UDE)	Petra Günther	U Duisberg-Essen
Aurora Student Handbook	Elísabet Brynjarsdóttir	Friðrika Harðardóttir	U Iceland
Joint Sports Event	Nils Van de Velden	Willem Bruyndonx (UAntwerp)	
Aurora Mental Health Strategy	Elísabet Brynjarsdóttir	Friðrika Harðardóttir	U Iceland

Aurora Student Newsletter	Elísabet Brynjarsdóttir	Friðrika Harðardóttir	U Iceland
Aurora Student Strategy Plan	Elísabet Brynjarsdóttir	Friðrika Harðardóttir	U Iceland

### Update on activities

Open Educational Resources: See under “Innovation of Teaching & Learning”.

Aurora Student Handbook: The new student president Elísabet Brynjarsdóttir has taken the initiative for an Aurora Student Representative Handbook as a tool to help incoming new student representatives to get their bearings in Aurora quickly and efficiently. The Handbook offers information on Aurora's fundamental character, history, governing structure, working groups as well as the student involvement. The handbook is updated at least once a year and was last updated on July 2019.

Joint Sports event: In the context of the Aurora Sports Days (Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, Antwerp), a workshop “AURORA collaboration in the domain of Sport” was held with professionals from the sports offices of AURORA member universities on the same day. Heralding the start of the AURORA Sports Days programme as part of the PCU Games 2019.

Representatives from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the University of Duisburg-Essen and the University of East Anglia presented their institutions’ sports offices policies and activities. The hosting University of Antwerp presented the Project “STICK” (Sport and Academic Talent Integration Through Exchange Programmes in Hockey), supported by the EU through the Erasmus+ programme. The presentations and discussions were seen as useful forms of exchanging information and experiences.

#### Participants:

- Jürgen Schmagold from the University of Duisburg-Essen
- Adam Garford from the University of East-Anglia
- Jan Snellen, Mariëlle Spekreijse and Jolanda Seijger from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- Peter Verboven from the University of Antwerp

Aurora mental health strategy: The Aurora Student Council hosted a student workshop on mental health in 2018. The students found it of the utmost importance for the network to emphasize mental health, share best practices in student support and eventually form a mental health strategy.

Aurora Students mental health video: The Aurora Student Council has produced a video on mental health for students. The video will feature a message from students within Aurora regarding mental health, and the object is to raise awareness on the matter.

Aurora Student Newsletter: The Aurora Student Council is working on a newsletter which the students will then publish. The purpose is to bring attention to work students do, what the network does, and try to reach and raise awareness about the system amongst other students at our universities.

Shared aspiration and strategy for next years: The Aurora Student Council is currently working on a shared Student Strategy for Aurora. It will cover the structure of the Student Council, revise how students participate within the network and what the student’s priorities are for the coming years within Aurora. At the next biannual in Amsterdam, the students will finalise the strategy plan and vote on it.

## 4. Innovation of teaching and learning (ITL)

The aim of the focus in Aurora on Innovation of Teaching and Learning is twofold. Primarily, to exchange innovations in pedagogy and tools amongst the partners and to implement promising ones our programs. Secondly, ITL aims to develop shared resources and joint educational modules on key themes of the Aurora Universities Network such as Sustainability, Health and Life Sciences etcetera.

Since the UGA chair of the group has retired and the Vice Rectors Education have formed their own Aurora platform, it is now considered that the vice-rectors will assume responsibility for the ITL theme as well. The Vice Rectors Education has asked for new activities connected to the shared aspiration which they identified.

### Specific projects:

Project	Chair	Instit. Coor	Comms. Liaison
e-Assessment tools & practices	Milou de Smet (UAntwerp)	Willem Bruyndonx	U Antwerp
Open Educational Resources	Anke Petschenka	Petra Günther	U Duisburg Essen
Positive teaching culture & teaching quality standard	Silvester Draaijer (VUA)	Esmee Paques	VUA
Aurora Sustainability Lectures series	Tavis Potts (UAb)	Stephen Hill	
Aurora Collaborative Online International Learning module	Sabine Sainte-Rose (UGA) / Silvester Draaijer (VUA)	Sabine Sainte-Rose / Esmee Paques	
Learner analytics	VUA/UGA		
'Learning incomes'	Aurora office		
Connecting Research in HE pedagogy	UEA		

### Update on activities

**e-Assessment:** This group keeps on working together. Further collaboration is expected on innovative support of students' writing processes, using text analysis tools developed at the University of Antwerp (Inputlog). UAntwerp is in the lead. Within the new VU Network for Teaching & Learning, a further start-up by setting up experiments is expected. The group will meet at the Bi-annual in Amsterdam to discuss new initiatives.

**Open Educational Resources (OER):** Since November 2017, the Aurora website has a dedicated [Aurora open educational resources portal](#).

The group met at biannuals in Essen, Antwerp, and Grenoble and will meet again at the Amsterdam Biannual at the end of 2019. The project group conducted a series of webinars "Open educational resources as an enabler for building an inclusive university community". The following three webinars have already been offered: 1) National and international initiatives concerning OER", 2) Supporting structures and teaching scenarios for Open Educational Resources at the University Duisburg-Essen (UDE) and 3) The creation of Open Interactive Textbooks and added value for education (VUA). These webinars have been recorded and are provided on our webpage. New activities will follow soon. The [event webpage](#) and [project webpage](#).

**Positive Teaching & Learning Culture (PTLC):** PTLC did not meet in Grenoble and missed the opportunity to discuss their positions paper in Amsterdam in October further. The heavy workload of the two VU is causing a delay as the VU started their VU Network for Teaching & Learning. Activities are expected to be resumed at the end of 2019.

**Aurora Sustainability Lectures:** This Sustainability series will showcase to the broader University community the expertise available around sustainability challenges that affect all of us, framed

using the UN SDGs. We want to invite all students and staff, both academic and non-academic, and the public to join the conversation during 18 events hosted in nine European countries. We will hold 18 events around the nine institutions over the next 18 months. Each institution will host two events over three periods (May-June 2019 - phase I; Nov-Dec 2019 - phase II; Feb-Mar 2020 - phase III) never hosting more than one in each period. The host institution will be at liberty to choose the format of the event (talk, panel, debate, etcetera.). Four events are planned to take place before Summer 2019.

Aurora Collaborative Online International Learning: After initial talks and meetings with teachers of UGA at the VUA, unfortunately, no actual project was developed. It turns out to be really tough to win teachers from one or more universities for setting up a long or even short virtual exchange. A mismatch in the timing of courses and heavy workload on the side of teachers inhibits progress. A more significant impact is still expected within the Aurora-flavoured proposal for a European Universities Network focussing on Social Entrepreneurship & Innovation. This proposal, virtual/online learning and collaboration, is expected to be an essential part design and delivery. UGA has announced that it will assume leadership for this project. The topic of COIL will be one of the working group meetings at the bi-annual in Amsterdam in October. The aim will be to focus on the next steps towards facilitating these digital classroom collaborations and encouraging academics to take on the practice. Following VU's initiative, UGA also held a workshop on June 2019 to raise COIL awareness among its academic staff.

Furthermore, two language classes from the University of Aberdeen and UGA set up a COIL collaboration, with students working together on practical uses of English and French in context. The project was successful in creating a motivating learning environment and meaningful interactions between students around subjects such as international relations and tourism. Previous staff mobility enabled the professors to meet and create a synergy that benefits both groups. Indeed, the collaboration is to be renewed this year.

Learner Analytics: At the vice-rectors meeting of 30-31 October 2018, it was agreed to start collaboration on the theme of Learner Analytics. Both Student Analytics and Learning Analytics. An insightful presentation of Theo Bakker of the VUA showed possibilities for a systematic approach of and developing relevant research/policy questions and data collection methods (with privacy in mind), analysis and presentation possibilities. UVA and UGA are in the lead.

Promulgation of 'learning incomes': At the vice-rectors meeting of 30-31 October 2018, it was agreed to start collaboration on the theme of better conceptual understanding of innovative ways for admission of (international) students to bachelor and master programmes. Underlying to this approach are the concepts and procedures developed within the E+ project MasterMind. This initiative has not been actively pursued in recent months due to the focus on the Aurora-led proposal for a European University alliance.

Connecting Research in HE pedagogy: At the vice-rectors meeting of 30-31 October 2018, the vice-rectors voiced the idea that the educational research units of the Aurora Universities should be connected, knowledge exchanged and collaborative projects possibly started and also trying to tap into EU grants. Iceland and UEA agreed to take the lead.

**NB** in all probability, two of the last three initiatives will be discussed in-depth in the full-day meeting of the Vice Rectors Education in Grenoble (May 27<sup>th</sup>).

## Other activities with active broad steering groups

The Aurora universities want to focus the leadership attention on a few key strategic priorities. These four priorities are listed above.

This focus does not preclude or hamper further activities in other fields where participants see a benefit in working together, sharing visions & strategies, compare practices, and develop projects

for reciprocal and mutual learning. Indeed, in various other horizontal themes and broad global challenges areas, experts from Aurora universities have found each other and are working together.

## 1. Sustainability

The Sustainability group aims for Aurora universities to:

- Operate and build sustainable universities that balance the four pillars of sustainability which are governance, environmental management, learning; research and social policy
- Create a working and learning environment at our universities in which sustainability is valued and measured.
- Capitalise on the ability to generate creativity and solutions from different perspectives both in our practices and education.

As a strategy, it aims to promote good practice, stimulate joint activities, and develop benchmarks to monitor progress at individual institutions and collectively as Aurora.

The Sustainable Development Goals have gained significantly in prominence in Aurora. As work to prepare a submission for European Universities Network (EUN) funding continues, the network may wish to consider the transformation of the "Sustainability" theme into a broad "SDG" theme within and as one with the EUN proposal.

After the resignation of Professor David Lusseau (UAb) as Chair of the Sustainability Group in early Spring 2019, colleagues Andre Niemann (UDE) and Pieter Van Beukering (VU), Ivar Maas (VU) and Ilka Roose (UDE) coordinated the preparation for and running of the Group's meeting at the Grenoble Biannual. Their efforts in so doing are very much appreciated, particularly by Aberdeen as these allowed time to source a new Chair for the group, Dr Tavis Potts. Tavis took over the Chair from June after a very successful meeting of the Group in Grenoble which prepared a detailed note of recommendations for consideration by the General Council and Board. Since the Grenoble meeting, the new Chair has been establishing contacts with existing members of the Group, making arrangements for the next meeting in Amsterdam in late October and organising the Aberdeen Aurora Sustainability Lecture to be held on 16 October. At the time of preparing this update, the Chair is also considering the developments regarding the EUN submission, notably the identification of "Green Aurora" as one of the main 3 themes.

### Specific projects:

Project	Chair	Instit. Coor	Comms. Liaison
Overall chair		Stephen Hill	University of Aberdeen
SDG analysis	Maurice Vanderfeesten (VUA)	Esmee Paques	VUA
Aurora Sustainability Lectures series	Tavis Potts (UAb)	Stephen Hill	

### Update on activities

SDG analysis: See above (SIRR)

Aurora Sustainability Lectures: See above (ITL)

## 2. Internationalisation

In an international network of universities, it makes sense to explore opportunities to learn from and with each other in the field of internationalisation. This may also offer opportunities to involve academics in Aurora activities.

After a few brainstorming sessions, it has become clear that the main focus needs to be on concrete projects run by separate project groups, with the thematic ‘internationalisation group’ as a strategic liaison between the projects and the Aurora leadership.

### Specific projects:

Project	Chair	Instit. Coor	Comms. Liaison
Overall chair	Richard Harvey & Frans Snijders	Richard Harvey & Esmee Paques	UEA & VUA
Inclusive Internationalisation	Helena Gillespie	Richard Harvey	UEA
Structured mobility	Frans Snijders (VUA);	Esmee Paques	VUA
Improved student exchange agreements	Frans Snijders (VUA); Alex Cole (UEA)	Esmee Paques	
MPQ questionnaire	Karen van Oudenhoven (VUA)	Esmee Paques	VUA

### Update on activities

Internationalisation: The internationalisation activity consists of several subsidiary activities including work on international mobility, inclusive internationalisation (covered elsewhere) and a select group on Africa, (who have not met recently). As Aurora itself is an extensive and wide-ranging internationalisation project, most participants within the Internationalisation group, who are also Institutional Co-ordinators, are reasonably busy.

International mobility presents an exciting challenge in that, in principle, it is widely supported, but in practice, the successes are negligible. We have completed an audit of mobility between the partners, and we have now signed agreements for mobility between partners, even when an Erasmus+ agreement does not exist. It is quite possible that either a no-deal Brexit or the Macron proposal may precipitate improved mobility, but I am confident that, given time, mobility with Aurora will help. It is worth noting that it can take a staggeringly long time for information about Aurora to propagate into a university - I met a Professor recently, at an institution who shall remain nameless, who claimed to not know Aurora at all - despite being an expert on European policy. In that regard, the Aurora Brief Reviews is very helpful as it is attractive to Academics who are one of the hard-to-reach groups. We will reconvene in Grenoble to assess progress but the co-scheduling with NAFSA, the world’s biggest mobility conference, is not ideal in that regard.

Improved student exchange agreements: Ahead of the second biannual held in Iceland in spring 2017, we undertook an audit of mobility between the partners and presented a report that spring. We then collated updated data ahead of (and provided three further reports at) UEA that Autumn, Essen in spring 2018 and that Autumn in Antwerp. The group also convened in Seville (during EAIE) in September 2017 and at VU a year later, to discuss enhancing mobility across the network partners to support feedback from the students’ group, namely to offer short skills-development courses and summer schools. During this time, we monitored growth in exchange mobility (semester and year-long) across the Aurora partners, eventually achieving signed agreements between the original nine institutions. A network-wide agreement further supported this, about a willingness to enable mobility where the desired form of mobility does not exist within the bounds of the signed Erasmus+ agreement (as referenced). Upon reaching this milestone, a decision was taken to no longer convene as a group to only discuss exchange but for discussions to continue under the Structured mobility theme, aiming to advance collaborative curriculum developments across the partners. Regardless, targets to increase outbound mobility, certainly in the UK, Australia, across Asia and North America, have seen growth and positive outcomes. Prevalent changes relate to demand increased for shorter periods of mobility (short course, summer and semester) in favor of a traditional year abroad. The discussions in Seville intended to progress these short course opportunities for partners’ students across the network, but thus far, there was limited interest from across the network, and the lack of financial support prohibits development.

Once we know if the UK will continue to be part of the Erasmus+ programme we may wish to reignite this conversation. Resulting in meeting student demand with the potential to tap into Erasmus funding, particularly to widen access to mobility for those from widening participation backgrounds (see Inclusive Internationalization, which does concern as a group at the Amsterdam bi-annual later this year).

Aurora Inclusive Internationalisation Project: See under Diversity

The internationalisation activity consists of several subsidiary activities including work on international mobility, inclusive internationalisation (covered elsewhere) and a select group on Africa. As Aurora itself is an extensive and wide-ranging internationalisation project, most participants within the Internationalisation group, who is also the Institutional Co-ordinators, are reasonably busy.

## Other activities

In many fields and subjects, members of the academic communities of two or more Aurora members have identified a shared interest and a collective desire to see if they can work together. Where these not sufficiently broad enough to be a full steering group and not sufficiently specific enough to become a project group, we will use the term “*Special Interest Group*”.

### 1. Birds of feather meetings

#### Internal audit – Autumn 2019 – University of Antwerp

5 Aurora universities confirmed their participation: UAntwerpen, University of Duisburg-Essen, University of Iceland, VU Amsterdam and Université Grenoble-Alpes. These five universities will be represented by their internal auditor (or another relevant person). The University of Aberdeen will be attending the meeting virtually. The University of East Anglia will probably not be participating since an external accounting firm conducts its internal audit.

The session will focus on the following items:

- How is the ‘internal audit’-function organised in the different Aurora universities? What is the legal framework? What is the exact position and responsibility in the institution? What are the underlying protocols and methodologies used? What works well, what are obstacles encountered?
- What are the possibilities for cooperation? Exchange of ideas, data, etc.? Potential role of Aurora member internal auditors in activities in other member universities? Are they helping each other to find experts on specific topics?

## Institutional coordinators

The Institutional coordinators play a key role in ensuring alignment between the various activities in the network:

- They have a joint responsibility to advise the Board, the General Council and their president on the overall strategy and policy of Aurora.
- For groups chaired by a member of their university, they have a specific responsibility to liaise with that chair and with their Communication Officer on the work of that group.
- Also, they liaise with their Communication Officer on the overall Communication policy: to enhance the visibility of Aurora within their university and to disseminate relevant information on their university through Aurora.

**Chair**

**Sabine Sainte-Rose UGA**

## Communications

The position and role of the group of Communications Officers are distinct from the thematic steering groups – within and outside the key priority areas. The Comms group serves the network as a whole and simultaneously has a responsibility to those steering groups and projects that have been given priority by the leadership of Aurora. In its network function, the Comms group works intensively with the central Aurora office.

Specifically identified tasks and targets:

- Each university will submit a minimum of three high-quality pieces of content a year to the Aurora secretariat for onward transmission.
- Each university will submit a minimum of 15 high-res images representing their core activities related to the values of Aurora to the Aurora secretariat for onward transmission.
- Conveners of each priority steering group and project group to work closely with communications officer from the host university chairing the group.
- Content checklist and templates for all universities to ensure content submissions align with Aurora themes and values.
- Develop a succinct “boilerplate” that all Aurora members can use to encapsulate Aurora’s mission and values.
- Clarify and create consensus on Aurora branding and endorsement within the member universities.

Chair	Institutional Coordinator	Communications Liaison
Jon Örn Gudbjartsson UI	Friðrika Harðardóttir	UI

## Aurora Brief Reviews

After some delay due to both HR and technical challenges, the first issue of the “Aurora Brief Reviews “(ABR) was distributed on January 8<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile, eight editions have been published. Work on the online accessibility of the archive of the ABR and its predecessor VU IN&R is ongoing. The ABR biweekly identifies relevant data-driven reports and studies on a wide variety of aspects of higher education and research.

The intention is to have a second content editor next to Kees Kouwenaar; technical editing has been taken up by the central office communication officer, Anna Klas.

## Key contact persons per group

Key priority steering groups	Lead contact
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Birds of a feather groups	Lead contact
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The "Overview of Thematic Activities" of Aurora is regularly updated by the Aurora central office, on the basis of information provided by the various groups.

The most recent version is available on the website:

[aurora-network.global/project/overview-of-all-aurora-thematic-activities/](https://aurora-network.global/project/overview-of-all-aurora-thematic-activities/)

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