

Strategic Vision 2038

unine
Université de Neuchâtel

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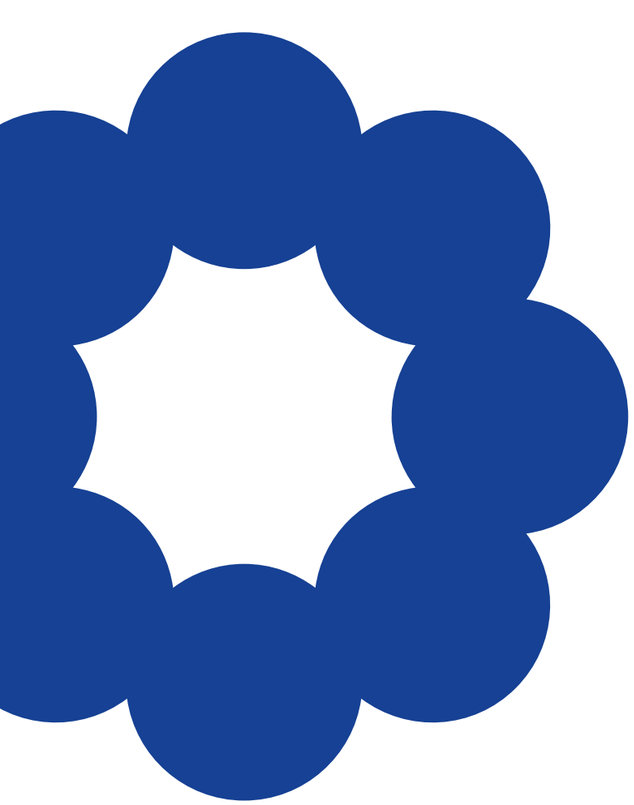
The University of Neuchâtel (UniNE) brings together a community of 4,500 students and just over 1,000 staff members, including professors, researchers, administrative staff, technical staff, and library personnel. As part of its core missions—teaching, research, and services—it offers around forty bachelor's degree programmes or bachelor's majors, around fifty master's programmes, majors or specialisations, numerous continuing education programmes, and the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies within its four faculties: Humanities (FLSH), Science (FS), Law (FD), and Economics and Business (FSE). UniNE's internationally recognised research addresses major societal challenges and contributes to innovation and development at both regional and national levels.

As the successor to the Academy of Neuchâtel founded in 1838, UniNE is, under the Cantonal Law on the University of Neuchâtel (LUNE) of 2 November 2016, an autonomous public-law institution with legal personality. In 2038, it will celebrate the bicentenary of its foundation. To strengthen its position and role in the face of the uncertainties confronting society in general and higher education institutions in particular, and to contribute to the development and visibility of the Canton of Neuchâtel, UniNE enters the coming decade with the following strategic vision:

Rooted in its values and strengths, the University of Neuchâtel educates autonomous individuals equipped with scientific analytical skills and the ability to act in a changing world. It conducts research that sheds light on major societal challenges and contributes to sustainable solutions. By placing people and their environment at the heart of its missions, it relies on agile and sound governance to foster dialogue among fields of knowledge and to build partnerships.

1 New Challenges for Society and Higher Education

We live in an era marked by profound and multiple disruptions: geopolitical instability, inequality, the weakening of democracies, climate change, demographic transformations, and artificial intelligence (AI). Science and universities have never been more essential to the construction of our societies. In this context, five major challenges emerge that are particularly relevant for higher education institutions in general and UniNE in particular.





1.1. Defending the Scientific Method Against Disinformation

Democracy is experiencing deep tensions. It is threatened by the polarisation of opinions, the rise of political extremes, the radicalisation of debates, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and various forms of pressure that may lead to self-censorship. The widespread use of selective algorithms distorts access to information sources and fuels manipulation. Within higher education, disinformation weakens institutions by reducing scientific discourse to merely one opinion among many and by fostering distrust aimed at delegitimising their mission of producing and disseminating knowledge. Academic freedom and the autonomy of research institutions are being undermined by attitudes hostile to scientific discourse, which is sometimes perceived as elitist, disconnected, or of limited usefulness.

In the years ahead, UniNE will work to support academic freedom and the autonomy of the members of its community. It will play an active role in the creation of knowledge, the defence of the scientific method, the promotion of scientific integrity and transparency, and the dissemination of knowledge and open access to it. It will foster analytical, reasoning, and critical-thinking skills among members of its community, providing them with the tools needed to create meaning and coherence in a fragmented world. It will promote scientific rigour and emphasise the time required to generate new knowledge. It will value the ability to challenge established assumptions, open new avenues of research and discovery, and embrace serendipity.

1.2. Social Transformations: New Expectations, New Timeframes, New Audiences

The obsolescence of knowledge is accelerating, while labour market expectations and the nature of jobs are evolving. Educational and life paths are increasingly characterised by change and unpredictability rather than linear progression and stability. Individuals are expected to adapt, evolve, recover from setbacks, and even reinvent themselves professionally. Job profiles, employer expectations, and the factors required to build successful businesses are changing ever more rapidly. For higher education institutions, the content and structure of degree programmes (bachelor's and master's) must adapt in response to the risk of obsolescence. While universities have traditionally designed their programmes primarily for young secondary-school graduates, the growing number of individuals seeking education while employed requires study programmes to become more flexible, relevant, attractive, and economically sustainable. Private companies and organisations are also developing their own training programmes, thereby positioning themselves as competitors to universities. Tertiary education now serves a larger and more diverse student body, differing in educational backgrounds, socio-cultural experiences, and specific needs. Universities must therefore develop innovative solutions capable of responding to accelerated societal changes, growing inequalities, and increasingly urgent sustainability challenges.

In the years ahead, UniNE will continue to provide a strong foundation of knowledge aligned with labour-market needs. It will develop study pathways and learning methods capable of meeting the growing diversity of profiles and trajectories while remaining the preferred destination for students transitioning directly from secondary education. It will expand its continuing education offer to meet the needs of employed professionals and individuals seeking career change through formats, rhythms, and assessment methods different from those used in initial education. UniNE will also leverage the strong links between teaching and research and continue to promote scientific research. It will further develop research on economic, social, and environmental transformations while strengthening partnerships at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

1.3. Thinking With, Without, Thanks to, or Despite Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, represents both extraordinary opportunities and significant risks for student learning and scientific research. AI can translate, summarise, analyse, and generate large volumes of text; extract and process vast datasets; simulate complex environments; and even autonomously generate new scientific advances and knowledge. However, the reliability and long-term accessibility of these tools cannot be guaranteed, particularly in the context of energy or geopolitical crises. The pace of technological acceleration exceeds human capacity to assimilate information flows and make sense of them. In the labour market, certain skills may rapidly become obsolete, while expectations regarding university graduates' competencies will continue to rise. For higher education institutions, the emergence of AI requires the reconfiguration of teaching and assessment methods as well as the development of new tools and frameworks enabling students not only to use AI but, above all, to critically evaluate the results it produces. AI is already transforming scientific research by generating an explosion of publications whose evaluation raises questions regarding scientific integrity, source diversity, and the tendency to focus on recurring popular themes. Finally, AI raises fundamental issues related to intellectual property, data protection, privacy, ethics, scientific responsibility, and the preservation of democratic values.

UniNE is committed to integrating technological developments into its missions of education, research, service, and governance. In the coming years, it will adapt its educational offer, teaching and learning methods, assessment practices, research activities, and governance models in order to prepare students, early-career researchers, and all staff members for a constantly changing world. It will ensure that teaching content and assessment methods ensure mastery of fundamental knowledge in every field while developing the capacity of its community to use AI tools critically and evaluate their outputs independently. In research, the integration of AI will foster new opportunities through the rapid processing of vast quantities of data and sources and, especially, through the production of novel AI-generated findings that researchers will be challenged to assess rigorously.



1.4. Hyperconnectivity and Isolation

The digitalisation of activities and processes has led to hyperconnectivity. Paradoxically, however, it has weakened social bonds, diminished face-to-face social skills, and increased feelings of loneliness. The exhaustion and loss of meaning associated with hyperconnectivity place additional burdens on individuals and heighten psychosocial risks. Within universities, opportunities for remote teaching and work—such as recorded lectures, videoconferencing, and teleworking—are changing how campuses are used and altering social interactions among students and with other members of the university community. Mental health issues are becoming increasingly prevalent across society and affect students especially strongly. While some individuals benefit from the flexibility offered by remote participation, others learn better and remain more motivated through in-person engagement.

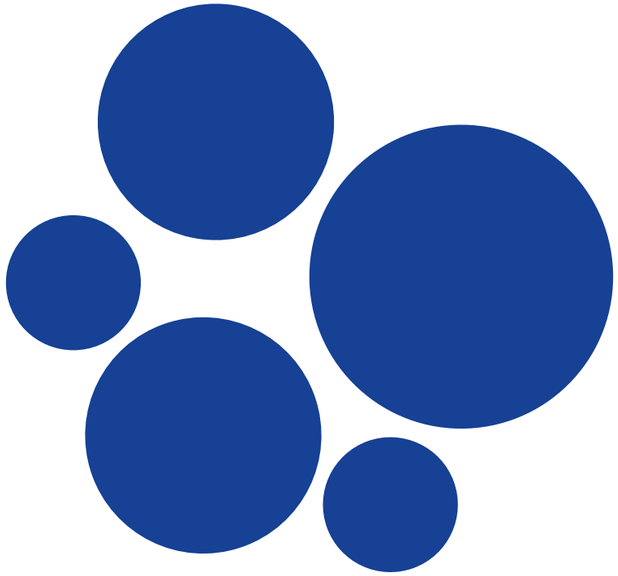




In the years ahead, UniNE will capitalise on its strengths to provide physical spaces that encourage learning through exchange, constructive dialogue, collaborative research, and teamwork. It will promote conviviality, community spirit, and the well-being of its members in order to ensure an optimal learning environment and foster scientific creativity and originality. The quality of relationships and a strong sense of belonging within the university community will be treated as essential components of both individual and collective fulfilment. UniNE will guarantee high-quality supervision for students and early-career researchers, provide appropriate support mechanisms, and develop infrastructures that create new opportunities for interaction.

1.5. Growing in an Unstable Environment with Limited Resources

Geopolitical instability and climate change generate sudden financial and energy crises as well as difficult-to-predict patterns of human mobility. Demographic developments challenge models based on continuous growth. Natural resources are becoming depleted, biodiversity is under threat, and climate disruptions endanger ecosystems. Competition is intensifying between funding allocated to teaching and research and funding devoted to other public responsibilities. Within higher education, student enrolment continues to increase, cutting-edge research infrastructure and equipment become more expensive, and legal as well as administrative requirements grow more complex. Yet public subsidies and funding fail to keep pace with these trends and, in some cases, are decreasing. These contradictory developments risk reducing programme attractiveness, lowering student and researcher supervision rates, weakening UniNE's ability to attract and retain highly qualified academic staff, and generating excessive workloads detrimental to personal health and institutional engagement. High-level scientific research and the capacity to secure competitive Swiss and international funding could also be weakened by reductions in public university support. Furthermore, geopolitical crises may rapidly and dramatically alter opportunities for international collaboration and mobility.



In a context of constrained resources and intense competition, UniNE will make strategic choices to preserve its priorities and its position within the Swiss and international higher-education landscape. It will strengthen its management, analytical, and cost-optimisation tools in order to maintain—and where possible enhance—its attractiveness and capacity to obtain research funding. Measures will be implemented to increase the appeal of its educational programmes and thereby strengthen its share of federal and intercantonal funding, which depends significantly on student numbers. Simplifying administrative procedures will also be a major operational priority. UniNE will continue its commitments to environmental and societal sustainability while further developing its human-centred approach.

2 Foundations: Our Strengths and Values

UniNE cultivates the advantages provided by its human scale and accessibility. It distinguishes itself through its friendly atmosphere, responsiveness, high-quality supervision, and close relationships among students, academics, and administrative staff. These characteristics foster collaboration, encourage exchange, and accelerate decision-making. Combined with the relevance of its research, the quality of its study programmes — which balance fundamental skills with unique regional and national specialisations — its diverse sporting and associative activities, and its attractive location in the heart of the city by the lake, these strengths attract students from across Switzerland and abroad as well as internationally renowned researchers.

UniNE operates in close interaction with regional and national stakeholders, ensuring strong alignment with societal needs while benefiting from international recognition in areas of expertise that are often unique within Switzerland. Its research stands out for its strong focus on societal challenges, its interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature, and the continuity of the research process — from fundamental discovery through to societal and economic impact.

During the coming decade, UniNE will benefit from a new building designed to accommodate emerging learning formats and evolving campus uses. The campus will become more than simply a place of study. This new facility will strengthen the reputation of both UniNE and the Canton of Neuchâtel while improving study and working conditions and reinforcing ties with the city.

The Law on the University of Neuchâtel defines the values that constitute a common framework of reference for all faculties and all members of its community. These values guide the fulfilment of the University's missions and underpin its strategic vision: contributing to the democratisation of knowledge; safeguarding academic freedom; promoting equal opportunities; respecting fundamental professional, scientific, and ethical principles; supporting sustainable development; ensuring equality between women and men; and recognising human diversity. The University Charter builds upon and further develops these values by grouping them into four core foundations: excellence, creativity, freedom, and responsibility. UniNE's strengths and values guide the fulfilment of the missions entrusted to it by law, foremost among them teaching and research. These missions are implemented through a range of commitments and actions that contribute to their achievement.

3 Five Strategic Axes to Shape the Future

UniNE pursues its strategy through a dynamic of continuity, openness, and adaptation to future transformations. It anticipates the new challenges that will shape society in the years ahead and seeks to turn them into opportunities through five cross-cutting strategic axes.

3.1. Building on Our Values and Strengths

- The values enshrined in the LUNE and in our Charter serve as common points of reference and guide our actions.
- These values are reflected in concrete commitments and measures promoting diversity, human rights, sustainability, equality, ethics, integrity, academic freedom, quality, health, safety, solidarity, and transparency.
- Our strengths — grounded in our human scale, responsiveness, agility, creativity, and the quality of our teaching and research — ensure that our actions remain relevant, coherent, adaptable, and resilient in unstable contexts and times of crisis

3.2. Placing People and Their Environment at the Centre

- As a human-centred university, we create an environment that fosters direct interpersonal interactions and prioritises proximity, availability, and accessibility.
- Through the close integration of teaching and research, and by incorporating research findings into reflections on our own practices, we educate responsible citizens equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate a complex world. They can use AI tools and critically assess their outputs, thinking independently, resisting attempts to manipulate their judgement, making informed decisions based on scientifically valid criteria, defending democratic principles, and finding their place in an evolving labour market.
- We provide educational and research opportunities, as well as working conditions, adapted to the diverse pathways, circumstances, and living conditions of our community. We prepare and support our community in identifying, anticipating, and overcoming barriers to participation, including those generated by the increasing digitalisation of learning and working environments.
- We cultivate sustainability in its three dimensions—economic, environmental, and societal—and integrate it into our teaching, research, services, and governance. We add a fourth dimension: human sustainability, understood as the capacity of individuals and communities to live, develop, and flourish over the long term within a healthy, stable, and equitable environment.

3.3. Fostering Dialogue Between Knowledge and Competencies

- We offer coherent programmes in complementary disciplines that address relevant issues and encourage interdisciplinary — and where appropriate, transdisciplinary — exchanges and collaborations, enabling complex societal, economic, political, and technological challenges to be approached from multiple perspectives and with shared scientific rigour.
- We value curiosity and doubt as drivers of scientific discovery and the opening of new avenues of inquiry, while fostering continuity from the generation of knowledge to its societal application.
- We develop research projects and educational programmes that leverage cutting-edge technological advances and prepare graduates to face a wide range of professional challenges, while providing them with a solid foundation of fundamental and transferable skills that enables them both to benefit from artificial intelligence and to think independently beyond it.
- Within a climate that combines high standards with support and care, we encourage social interactions that stimulate collective intelligence, constructive exchanges, and collaborative debate, while safeguarding academic freedom and strengthening both cognitive and social skills.
  We provide diversified supervision for students and early-career researchers.

3.4. Cultivating Diverse and Strategic Partnerships

- We develop innovative, cross-functional, and seamless modes of internal collaboration, as well as attractive networks and alliances that encourage active participation, strengthen the sense of belonging, and make our university an institution of choice — deeply rooted in its region while remaining open to the world.
- We maintain diverse and targeted collaborations with public institutions, non-governmental organisations, and private companies. These partnerships aim to develop new fields of inquiry, ensure high-quality research infrastructure, increase the societal relevance and impact of our research, enrich teaching, and promote student and academic mobility.
- We promote the joy of thinking and lifelong learning through flexible, modular, and stackable educational pathways tailored to different audiences, as well as through contributions to public life and events that enhance our visibility at regional, national, and international levels.
- We co-create evolving knowledge and develop platforms for sharing expertise and research results that support reflection and encourage societal and economic impact of knowledge.

3.5. Practising Agile and Sound Governance

- We manage our human, financial, and infrastructural resources in an agile, coherent, and sustainable manner, adapting our tools, processes, and practices to digital developments to preserve our long-term capacity for action. We rely on frameworks and instruments that enable us not only to address challenges and solve problems, but also to anticipate them.
- We safeguard the physical and mental health and well-being of all members of our community, recognising that the quality of working and study conditions is a prerequisite for our collective success.
- We foster a positive and inclusive environment conducive to initiative and collaboration among central and faculty bodies, as well as between the different groups that compose our community. We favour dialogue and are not afraid to adapt, transform ourselves, or question our own practices

In this spirit, we cultivate hope, creativity, agency, and a sense of responsibility in our daily activities, convinced that UniNE is—and will remain—an essential place for thinking about, questioning, and shaping the future.

This Strategic Vision was adopted by the Rectorate of the University of Neuchâtel on 29 June 2026

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