



4th Generation  
University

# 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University Community strategy

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## Context

The 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University Community was founded in early 2025. The Community builds on the existing efforts of universities to reach out to stakeholders and to grow and support regional innovation ecosystems.

The concept of a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University originates from academic research and recognises the anchor role that universities can play, the increased role that government see for universities in supporting socio-economic growth, and the role of universities as neutral brokers in regional partnerships formed for delivery of growth strategies. They can also support universities to respond to a range of pressures, including building public trust and financial sustainability.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University Community strategy has been created by the Community Board and is the first articulation of the Community's strategy. It aims to set the strategy for the Community for the next 5 years, but may be revised periodically as the Community develops. We hope to provide clarity to all stakeholders regarding what the Community is seeking to achieve, why and how. It will inform and guide execution plans by articulating the meaning and rationale for actions.

## Mission

Our mission is to help like-minded institutions become 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities. We will do this by developing and promoting the concept, sharing expertise, and developing insightful indicators, so that universities and their ecosystems can drive socio-economic growth, solve societal challenges, and better tell their stories.

## Vision

Our vision is to create a global network of 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities and their ecosystem partners. This network will share best-practices, tools, indicators, and resources so that they can maximise and articulate their economic and social value in evidence-based ways.

## Concept

A 4th Generation University orchestrates regional innovation ecosystems, achieving societal and economic impact through partnerships with industry, government, and civil society.

The region in which a university is orchestrating the ecosystem will typically be near the university and part of their country, although it might cross international borders. A university may have more than one region if it operates across multiple sites, each with their own unique nature and local partners.

The innovation ecosystem is the quadruple helix of the university, industry, government and civil society, which aims to tackle societal challenges and catalyse regional socio-economic growth.

A 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University will demonstrate three characteristics:

- **It will orchestrate the innovation ecosystem:** University representatives will be embedded in strategic decision-making groups that drive the focus, direction and competitiveness of the region. This way of operating will be embedded in the strategy of the university.
- **Its strategy and actions will address the needs of the ecosystem:** The university will address the needs of the ecosystem across multiple dimensions of impact – governance, education, research and value co-creation.
- **The innovation ecosystem in which it operates will show positive societal and/or economic impacts:** The region will meaningfully benefit from the activities of the innovation ecosystem and the role the university plays within it.

We recognise that this concept will not be relevant to all universities, but we believe there are many for whom it does resonate.

## Our values

**Inclusive and reflecting diverse approaches** – The Community welcomes all universities who aspire to become, or who already are 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities, and all other stakeholders who have an interest in engaging with or supporting 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities. The Community acknowledges and celebrates the wide range of stakeholder missions and strategies.

**Evidenced** – The Community believes that robust and compelling evidence underpins good decision making and allows universities to tell their story. Both qualitative and quantitative indicators, built on quality data will be essential.

**Engaged** – The Community will reach out to other organisations outside the community to engage and plan strategically. We will ensure the voice of members is reflected in the Community’s approach.

## Strategic objectives

### **Strategic objective 1: University members contribute to transforming their regions by orchestrating the innovation ecosystem**

Over time universities have continued to evolve and expand their role, originally focusing on education, then also research, and in recent decades on knowledge transfer. These are considered the first three generations of universities

More recently, some universities have started moving beyond knowledge transfer to driving economic and social prosperity in the regional innovation ecosystem. This is achieved through mission-driven collaborative knowledge creation, open innovation and multi-stakeholder partnerships. These partnerships involve industry, government and civil society, requiring the university to both respond to their needs, and also shape the agenda. It is these ambitions and activities that are considered 4<sup>th</sup> Generation and that have the power to have a transformative impact on lives and societies in a region.

To achieve this change, universities both need to reflect a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University approach in their strategies and implement effectively. Their strategy should reflect the specific needs of their region, and government and industry plans. Implementation requires this vision and strategy to be embedded within the academic community in their organisation. It can be supported by collaborating with others to influence policies on Higher Education and regional investment.

### **Strategic objective 2: Universities are recognised and celebrated for their regional impact**

Universities are increasingly finding that they are part of the public and political debate on societal issues, and in the spotlight for the value they are delivering. In some countries this is occurring alongside budget pressure on universities.

By becoming 4th Generation, universities form closer relationships with their stakeholders – politicians, businesses and key members of their community – who are also key to shaping perceptions of the university more widely.

This is realised by the delivery of demonstrable economic and societal benefit in their regions, which allows universities to be more relevant to their communities and for them and others to tell an additional story of the value the university brings.

### Strategic objective 3: Universities can sustainably build their capacity

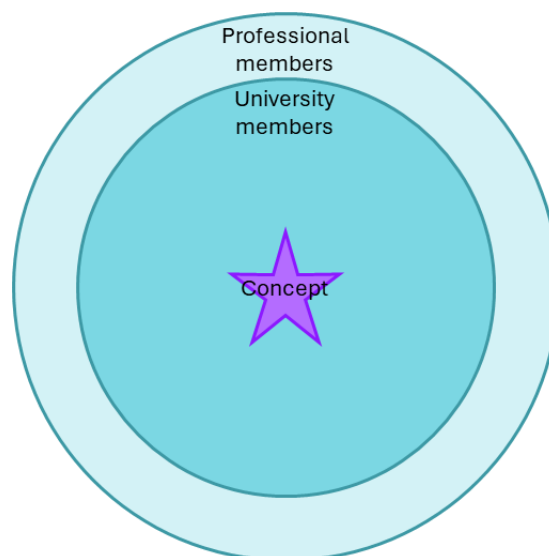
By transforming their region and getting recognition for their role, universities can drive a virtuous circle, by utilising past successes to make the case for investment in further capacity building.

In addition, closer collaboration with industry and government may open up additional sources of funds, like funds for growth, partnerships, place-based, skills innovations and others.

To support these three objectives, we will build an extensive and collaborative Community which shares best practice and is supported by evidence and insights. These strategic objectives are reflected in our Community structure and priorities.

## Community structure

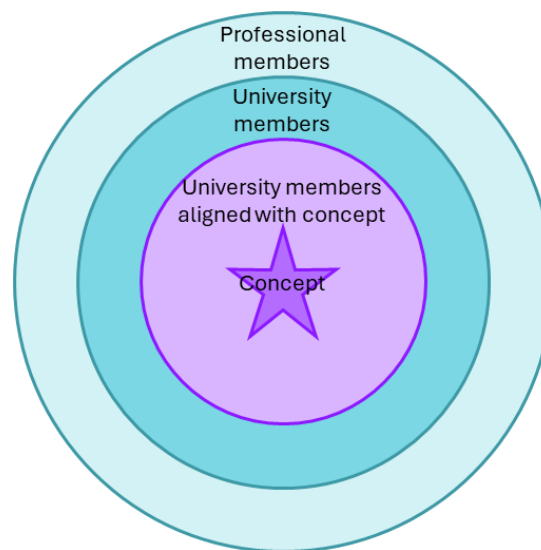
To support these objectives, the Community structure is centred around the 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University concept. We have represented this as concentric rings, as those closer to the centre are more aligned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University concept:



**University members** are universities whose leadership aspire to be a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University (or already are). It is eligible to research institutions who issue PhDs and publish more than 500 articles indexed in Scopus in 5 years.

**Professional members** are either individuals from universities, corporations, or government agencies who are interested in furthering their innovation ecosystems, or non-university organisations who wish to support the Community to achieve its mission. The individuals can be from any relevant role including senior leadership, faculty, and innovation teams.

In addition, **University members who are aligned with the concept** are those universities who have demonstrated that they meet the guidelines considered to be a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University, as illustrated below:



## Priorities and ambitions

The strategic objectives will be achieved by focusing on six priorities.

### Priority 1: Develop and raise awareness of the concept

We will build understanding and awareness of the role 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities play in their ecosystem and value they can bring.

*2030 ambition:* The 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University concept continues to remain relevant and has widespread awareness globally.

We will do this by:

- Continued promotional program
- Creating public profiles for universities demonstrating their journey towards their alignment with the 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University concept

- Input from a Concept Working Group

### **Priority 2: Expand Community membership**

We will increase the membership to include universities who aspire to become, or who already are 4th Generation Universities, and other ecosystem stakeholders including government, corporations and associations.

*2030 ambition:* The 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University Community has an extensive, inclusive and global membership.

We will do this by:

- Continued promotional program
- Creating public profiles for universities
- Input from a Community Working Group

### **Priority 3: Characterise alignment with the concept**

We will identify a method to understand how aligned universities are to their regional innovation ecosystem. This will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate diverse perspectives on how universities interact with their ecosystem and the nature of their ecosystem.

*2030 ambition:* There is a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators that allows universities to understand their progress towards being 4<sup>th</sup> Generation in the aspects that matter to them.

We will do this by:

- Creating a framework of indicators
- Input from an Indicator Working Group to develop meaningful and relevant innovation ecosystem-based indicators

### **Priority 4: Support universities to demonstrate alignment with the concept**

We will create a process and services for universities to follow the method to check alignment with the concept. This includes identifying their ecosystem, the indicators that are relevant to them, and calculate these values.

*2030 ambition:* Many university members have calculated their alignment and use the information to inform the strategy and communications.

We will do this by:

- Creating an assessment of alignment with the concept
- Creating public profiles for universities
- Input from an Indicator Working Group

### **Priority 5: Provide insights and support for members**

We will provide members with deeper insights and support to set and implement strategies.

*2030 ambition:* Community members have a range of services available to them to support their needs.

We will do this by:

- Creating a Community program
- Input from a Community Working Group

### **Priority 6: Improve influence of 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities**

We will support and enable the Community to influence policies on Higher Education and regional investment. We will gather, organise and share the approaches taken by members to orchestrate their ecosystem, and the impacts on their region.

*2030 ambition:* 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Universities and their stakeholders have better evidence of their impact and more influence on the innovation ecosystem.

We will do this by:

- Creating a Community program
- Input from a Community Working Group

## **Approach**

There are five components to our approach to achieve our strategic objectives and priorities.

### **Board and Working Groups**



Our mission, as the Board, is to support and grow the 4th Generation University Community. We hold the authority to govern the 4th Generation University Community by setting the strategy for engagement, promotion and membership based on the concept of the 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University.

We will establish Working Groups to support us to deliver the strategy. We will initially establish three groups:

- Concept Working Group – comprised of academic experts, it will expand and adapt the concept to ensure it remains relevant to the role of universities in society.
- Indicator Working Group – comprised of experienced representatives from 4<sup>th</sup> Generation universities, it will advise on the relevancy, selection and use of indicators.
- Community Working Group – comprised of active Community members, it will support growth of the Community and value to the members by nurturing ambassadors in key regions and engagement with strategic partners.

### **Promotional program**

We will raise awareness about the Community and the benefits that being part of the Community brings. Initially we will focus on universities, especially those who already have experience of orchestrating innovation ecosystems. Over time we will broaden out to include other stakeholders in the ecosystem.

We will promote via:

- Events – targeting events relevant to innovation ecosystem members, for example, on commercialisation or collaboration
- Demonstrating thought leadership – webinars, white papers, media stories on relevant topics
- Networks – existing members of the Community promoting membership to others in their network and through their associations

### **Framework of indicators, including assessing alignment with the concept**

The framework of indicators supports the Community to provide evidence of impact, in line with our values.

Indicators cover all dimensions of impact, including governance, education, research and value co-creation. Indicators are a mixture of qualitative and quantitative and are either mature or exploratory. Mature indicators are technically feasible to calculate,

tested, scalable, and are useful to the Community. Exploratory indicators are ideas which lack at least one of these aspects but have the potential to become mature over time. The Indicator Working Group will advise the Community on these indicators, although new ideas are welcome from anyone.

Indicators are available to use in a variety of tools and services, and the method for calculating the mature indicators will be available to Community members.

One such service is an Alignment Application to understand alignment with the concept. One of the key strengths of this model is that universities can select the indicators that best represent the characteristics of their own innovation ecosystem. By focusing on what is most relevant to them, institutions conduct a meaningful check against the concept's core characteristics. This helps each university clearly see where it excels, identify areas for further development, and understand how its innovation journey aligns with the broader vision.

### **Public profiles for universities**

We aim to develop the option of a public profile for universities to showcase their impact on their ecosystem.

### **Community program**

We will create regional and global opportunities for members to engage to share experiences, learn about best practice and identify opportunities for collaboration, e.g. influencing policy.

This will be supported by:

- Convening - members from 4th Generation University innovation ecosystems will meet to discuss their approaches and share ideas
- Systematic data collection - information on the approaches taken and their impact will be recorded and made available to members
- Creating guidance – resources and events focusing on supporting members of innovation ecosystems who aspire to be 4th Generation

## **Value of Community**

While the Community welcomes all organisations who aspire to support regional impact through innovation ecosystems, we anticipate there will be four main types of

member organisation: university, corporation, government/funder and association. The value of Community membership varies for each. We also strive for value to the general public.

Stakeholder	Value of Community	Enabled by
For members from universities	Showcase and support funding	Indicators and data to demonstrate impact
	Set strategy and improve execution	Best practice guidance and events
	Insights on external developments	Thought leadership, events and networks
	Better respond to opportunities and risks	Collaborations and events
	Establish new collaborations	Events and networking
For members from corporations	New collaboration opportunities	Networks, collaborations and insights
	Better integration into decision making	Networks and best practice guidance
For members from government and funders	Better policies and investment decisions	Best practice guidance and insights
	New investment opportunities	Networks and collaborations
	Monitor policy impact	Best practice guidance and insights
For members from associations	Identify opportunities for their members	Thought leadership, events and networks
	Represent the needs of their members	Input into Community approaches
For the general public	Improved impact on the region	All of the above
	Understanding of activities in the innovation ecosystem	All of the above

## Measures of success

There are two primary measures of success:

Measure	2030 ambition	Measurement approach
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Number of university members	1,600	Internal tracking
Net Promoter Score for all Community members	+30	Member survey

We will capture additional information from members over time and aim to broaden the measures of success to provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the Community.

## Milestones

There are several key milestones in 2026 required to implement the strategy:

- Provide a calendar of activities and engagements for Community members
- Publish 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University indicators
- Make available to members the option of understanding their alignment to the 4<sup>th</sup> Generation University concept
- Publish an annual review of the Community
- Survey members to gather feedback and input on the Community