For more than two centuries, Ghent University (UGent) has built a solid scientific reputation, investing in fundamental, high-risk, and applied research alike. Today, it is internationally renowned for its expertise in life sciences, (animal) medicine, materials science, agricultural and sports sciences, psychology, and history.

At the end of 2024, UGent employed 1,517 professors, 1,805 postdocs, 6,139 predocs, and, by September 2025, 5,847 PhD students. Its student body numbers around 50,000, approximately 15% of whom are international students. In the academic year 2024-2025 857 PhD's were awarded.

The top can count on a solid basis: thanks to the universities' bottom-up research policy, young researchers are given the necessary opportunities to grow. Thanks to the excellent performance of its entire research community, the university has been ranked since 2010 in the top 100 of the Shanghai Ranking – a worldwide ranking based on research indicators – for many years.



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Researchers at UGent work across a wide range of disciplines — from biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and clean energy to sustainable agriculture, water management, materials science, and public health. Increasingly, they pursue interdisciplinary projects, often through the university's dedicated Interdisciplinary Research Consortia (IDCs).

In developing countries, UGent researchers address pressing challenges such as food security, climate adaptation, and equitable healthcare. Many of these projects include technology transfer components, fostering local capacity and tailored, knowledge-driven solutions.



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Highly Cited Researchers

The most recent Clarivate Web of Science list of the worlds most-cited scientists includes 25 UGent researchers — an honour achieved by only 1 in 1,000 scientists worldwide. Notable names include Peter Vandenabeele and Roosmarijn Vandenbroucke. Since 2001, Clarivate has compiled this annual list, organised by discipline as well as in an overarching category. UGent's highly cited researchers span fields from plant biotechnology to biostatistics, often working in strongly interdisciplinary ways.

From Lab to Market

Technology transfer is a strategic priority at UGent. It goes far beyond patent licensing or spin-off creation — it is about turning knowledge into tangible benefits for the economy, environment, and society.

The TechTransfer UGent office acts as the bridge between academia and industry, helping researchers protect intellectual property, access funding, and bring innovations to market. It works closely with research groups to identify promising technologies and connect them with companies, investors, and policymakers.

UGent plays a central role in the Ghent Innovation Ecosystem, collaborating with public and private partners through initiatives such as Tech Lane Ghent Science Park, which comprises the Campus Ardoyen and Campus Eiland Zwijnaarde. The science park is home to more than 120 companies, ranging from start-ups and university spin-offs to scale-ups, international corporate R&D centres and public research organisations. Its activities are concentrated in four innovation clusters: digital technology, health technology and biopharma, agro- and food technology, and clean technology and materials.

UGent is also a major hub for the commercialisation and transfer of academic research. Its TechTransfer Office currently reports 601 active patent families in which UGent is the

owner or co-owner, as well as around 2,500 contracts covering research and research services, and the protection and exploitation of know-how and intellectual property. Since the 1990s, it has launched more than 150 spin-off companies, many now internationally recognised. Over the past five years, 40 new spin-off companies have been founded.

One of the earliest examples of UGent's innovation support is IIC UGent, established in 1990 as one of Flanders' first incubation and innovation centres. It serves as a hub for spin-offs from UGent and its partner institutions.

Interdisciplinary research centres

UGent currently has nine Interdisciplinary Research Consortia (IDCs) aimed at creating societal impact. Funded through the university's Special Research Fund, the IDCs promote collaboration across faculties and disciplines, including between the social sciences and humanities and the STEMM fields. Transdisciplinarity and co-creation with non-academic stakeholders are key features of the initiative. The IDCs are intended to increase interdisciplinarity, create opportunities for researchers and strengthen the real-world impact of research.

The nine IDCs cover a broad range of societal challenges. They include Psync, which brings researchers and diverse stakeholder groups together around mental health; Gray (Ghent University Research for Aging Young), which focuses on healthy ageing through translational research, societal outreach and the valorisation of new solutions, interventions, products and services; and Delta, which explores digital innovation and its impact on people and society, bringing researchers together with policymakers, entrepreneurs and civil-society organisations. Other IDCs address medieval studies, crime and security, human rights, work and the labour market, urban sustainability, and migration and refugees.



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IOF platforms

Complementing the IDCs are UGent's IOF platforms and Business Development Centres, which are part of the university's Industrial Liaison Network. While the IDCs primarily focus on societal impact, the Industrial Research Fund (IOF) supports the development and transfer of application-oriented knowledge and technology and therefore has a stronger economic and innovation focus.

The IOF platforms bring together expertise from different research domains around specific areas of expertise and innovation. They aim to identify multidisciplinary valorisation opportunities, facilitate collaboration within the Ghent University Association and respond to innovation needs in industry. Current platforms cover areas including additive manufacturing, marine biorefining, sustainable pharmaceutical engineering, cancer research, gene and cell therapy, hydrogen, image-based materials characterisation and other emerging technologies.

The IOF Business Development Centres complement these platforms by grouping research departments according to application areas or domains of expertise. Each centre is responsible for technology transfer within its field and serves as a point of contact for industrial partnerships, collaborative research, research services and IP licensing.



Campus Sterre: research building S11. © EVR architecten

ERC Starting Grants

Competition for European research funding is becoming increasingly fierce. This is also evident from the figures for the 2026 ERC Starting Grant call. A record 4,807 proposals were submitted, 22% more than the 3,928 applications in 2025. Only 8.8% of applications were funded, compared with 12.2% in 2025 and 14.2% in 2024. UGent reports a success rate of almost 20% among its applications.

Nevertheless, Ghent University obtained six Starting Grants in 2026. Nicolas Englebert, Hilde Gunnink, Mina Ibrahim, Nick Rahier, Wouter Saelens and Akash Koppa were awarded the grants.

VISIR, Nicolas Englebert's project, aims to develop a new nanophotonic platform to

measure light frequencies in the ultraviolet, visible and mid-infrared ranges with unprecedented precision. The technology could lead to cheaper and easier-to-deploy detectors for monitoring greenhouse-gas emissions, as well as highly accurate navigation systems.

With LoLaSa, Hilde Gunnink searches for remnants of the lost languages of southern Africa through traces preserved in languages spoken in the region today. In GPS-Archives, Mina Ibrahim investigates what dubbed Latin American soap operas and Japanese anime reveal about everyday life under Hafez and Bashar al-Assad in Syria. With HEATWAYS, anthropologist Nick Rahier investigates how communities in the East African Rift Valley experience, understand and prepare for increasing heat in the future. The project aims to address a fundamental limitation of existing heat models.

In PowerPortrait, Wouter Saelens' team examines how cells acquire their identity. The researchers will modify genes and track how individual cells respond as they develop in their natural environment, initially focusing on macrophages in the liver. Akash Koppa's LAMDA project investigates land–atmosphere interactions as a mechanism of dryland formation.

North Sea

The Belgian part of the North Sea is relatively small compared with the maritime zones of neighbouring coastal states, but it is intensively used for shipping, submarine cables, fishing, aquaculture, sand extraction and offshore energy production. Ghent University is actively involved in research into the economic and ecological aspects of the blue economy. By allowing more expertises to work together and linking them, the university wants to reconcile the values of 'good for the ecosystem' and 'good for the economy'.

At its Ostend Science Park campus, UGent has developed multidisciplinary research infrastructure for marine and maritime research. The university works there together with partners including the Port of Ostend and the Province of West Flanders. Ostend Science Park is a thematic science park dedicated to the blue economy, while BlueBridge functions as an incubator and innovation centre at its heart.

UGent's marine research infrastructure in Ostend includes the Coastal & Ocean Basin, which is used to study waves and currents and their effects on coastal and offshore structures, as well as floating and marine renewable-energy technologies. The university also operates a high-tech saltwater wave flume for interdisciplinary research into marine ecosystems, coastal protection and ocean health.

The university is also investigating nature-based solutions for coastal protection. Among

other projects, UGent researchers are studying whether artificial or restored oyster reefs can contribute to wave attenuation and coastal resilience, potentially reducing the need for conventional sand nourishment.

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