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 1,543 professors, 1,731 postdocs, 6,094 predocs, and 5,006 PhD students. Its student body numbers around 50,000, with approximately 15% coming from abroad.

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 spectrum 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 Centres (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 Alain Goossens, 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. In total, 81 Belgian-affiliated scientists appear on the current list.

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 in initiatives such as Eiland Zwijnaarde (a biotech and cleantech cluster) and Tech Lane Ghent Science Park — home to more than 70 companies and research labs.

In 2023 alone, UGent recorded over 40 patent applications, 20 new licensing agreements, and several new spin-offs. Since the 1990s, it has launched more than 100 spin-off companies, many now internationally recognised.

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 operates 9 IDCs, funded through its Special Research Fund. These centres combine interdisciplinarity with transdisciplinarity and co-creation involving non-academic stakeholders. The IDC Psync is a model for a new form of research collaboration on mental health. Gray (Ghent University Research for Aging Young) is an IDC aimed at boosting healthy ageing through translational research, social impact and valorisation of new solutions, interventions, products and services. This IDC brings together expertise in the biology of ageing, health promotion, healthy behaviour (exercise, nutrition, mental wellbeing and cognitive behaviour), geriatrics, environments that encourage healthy ageing and the use of adaptive technologies within the field of ageing. Delta explores the possibilities of cutting-edge technologies and steers digital innovation in the desired direction. It brings together researchers with policymakers, entrepreneurs, and civil society organizations.

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IOF platforms

Complementing the IDCs are UGent's IOF platforms, which connect different research fields to address industry needs. These business development centres focus on specific application areas, coordinating technology transfer and fostering innovation.

Campus Sterre: research building S11. © EVR architecten

Science Campus of the Future

On the Sterre Campus, south of Ghent's city centre, UGent is building a new research facility for its chemistry departments. This marks the start of a major renovation programme for 1970s-era campus buildings, aimed at improving sustainability and energy efficiency.

The new research building (S11) responds to the rapid developments in scientific research related to chemistry and should provide a modern and safe environment for around 200 scientists. Virtually all modern research disciplines within chemistry will be housed there. Leading-edge research in chemistry, from breakthroughs in 3D printing technology and wound dressings for medical applications to nanoparticles for a new generation of displays, which has already led to the creation of several successful spin-offs, will be able to develop further there under optimal conditions.

The building will be heated and cooled via a geothermal energy storage (BTES) field. The campus will become more accessible for cyclists and pedestrians thanks to a new cycle path and a covered walkway. The university will plant approximately 2,000 square meters of new tall-stemmed greenery, connecting to the Sterrebos. This planting will contribute to biodiversity. It will also provide for the collection and infiltration of rainwater, natural purification, and reuse of wastewater.

Campus Sterre: research building S11. © EVR architecten

North Sea

The Belgian zone of interest in the North Sea is much smaller than that of the other coastal states, but it is intensively used. By shipping, for various submarine cables, for fishing, mussel farming, sand extraction and for offshore electricity production by wind turbines. Ghent University is actively involved in researching the various economic and ecological aspects of the blue economy. On its Ostend campus, the university invests in labs and personnel through the company Bluebridge. In addition, together with the port and the province of West Flanders, the university has founded Ostend Science Park, a 'blue' science park. 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’. Among other things, it is trying to find out whether artificial oyster reefs break the waves, so that it would no longer be necessary to blow up sand to keep the Flemish coast intact.