



PRESS RELEASE

When foreign brains choose Italy



SISSA confirms its international feature

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Attractive and international: SISSA is swimming against the tide. As emerged in a recent UNESCO report on trends in higher education worldwide, entitled "Towards 2030", in Italy foreign doctoral students account for just 11% of the total. SISSA is way ahead, pulling in 34% of its PhD students from abroad. And that's not all. The new government report on Italian academic research quality (VQR) highlights SISSA's ability to attract internationally acclaimed researchers from the world's most renowned universities. A recent example is Chris Mathys, inventor of novel computational approaches in human neuroscience, who has left University College London to continue his research in Trieste.

"SISSA has an excellent reputation. It is the ideal place for me to carry out my research given my background and scientific interests". This is how Chris Mathys explained his decision to opt for the International School for Advanced Studies to conduct research into how the brain learns and how the mechanisms of learning can break down in some individuals. His is a cutting-edge, cross-disciplinary approach that combines neuroscience with big data analysis.



"Mathys is an extremely distinguished scholar who has produced top-level, original and rigorous scientific work. His presence on our academic staff is grounds for great satisfaction; it is also further proof of the top quality of SISSA's research in both fundamental and innovative fields", commented Stefano Ruffo, the university's Director. "SISSA's uncompromising quest for the academic community's best minds has two effects: On one hand, it enables top Italian scholars to find a place where they can thrive in their country of origin. On the other hand, recruiting outside Italy's boundaries allows researchers of Mathys' calibre to set up their research program in an ultra-lively academic context".

The VQR, a recent report compiled by the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems (ANVUR), has confirmed SISSA's capacity to generate research of high quality. SISSA holds the top position in physical science among the medium sized universities and in biological science among small-sized universities, thanks to the activity in neuroscience. SISSA also earned the first absolute position in mathematics and ranks first among the medium-sized universities in physics.

The numbers testify to the success of the School's approach. Of 286 doctoral students, just over one third arrive from outside Italy, resembling the international mixture found in traditional destination countries for young researchers, such as France and the United Kingdom. 37% of SISSA's research grant holders come from abroad. Additional numbers identify SISSA as a pole of attraction: 450 non-Italian scientists visited the university in 2016 alone. SISSA has signed 240 academic partnership agreements with the most prestigious institutions in the world ranging from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to the German Max Planck Institute and Israel's Weizmann Institute.

All lectures and seminars at SISSA are held in English, the official language. Students and researchers come from Asia, South America, Australia and a range of European countries. "Our PhD students and postdoctoral investigators enjoy training and research opportunities that are among the best to be had anywhere. They meet eminent international academics who visit SISSA to take part in the meetings organised by the institute year round", says Stefano Ruffo.

SISSA has proven its ability to keep up with scientific and innovation trends. UNESCO's Towards 2030 800-page report, written by a team of more than 50 experts, notes that university internationalisation, student mobility and brain circulation have never been so predominant. The trend is destined to increase further in the coming years. Director Stefano Ruffo comments: "Not only are we aware of this trend but we are also acting as spokespeople and sponsors of it. Our belief is that research progress and academic education can only be nurtured with a continuous exchange of knowledge and experience, free of borders. And we convert our beliefs into real actions."



USEFUL LINKS

The report "Towards 2030": <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002354/235406e.pdf>

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Press office contacts:

Nico Pitrelli
pitrelli@sissa.it
Tel. +39 0403787462/Cell. +39 3391337950

Donato Ramani
ramani@sissa.it
Tel. +39 0403787513/Cell. +39 3428022237



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