

TINE BAELMANS

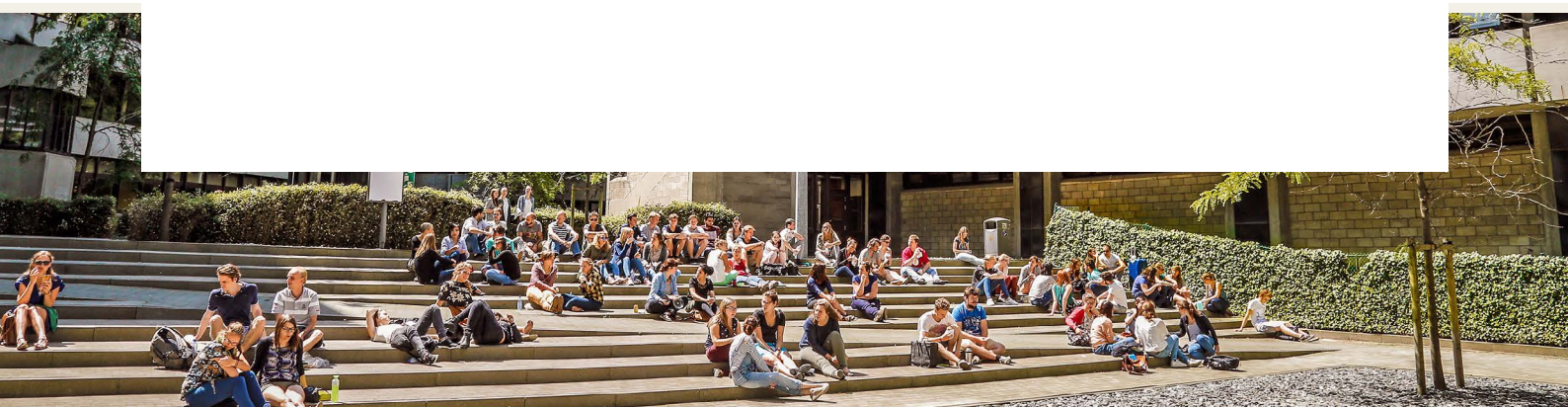
candidate rector KU Leuven



Together, we make KU Leuven

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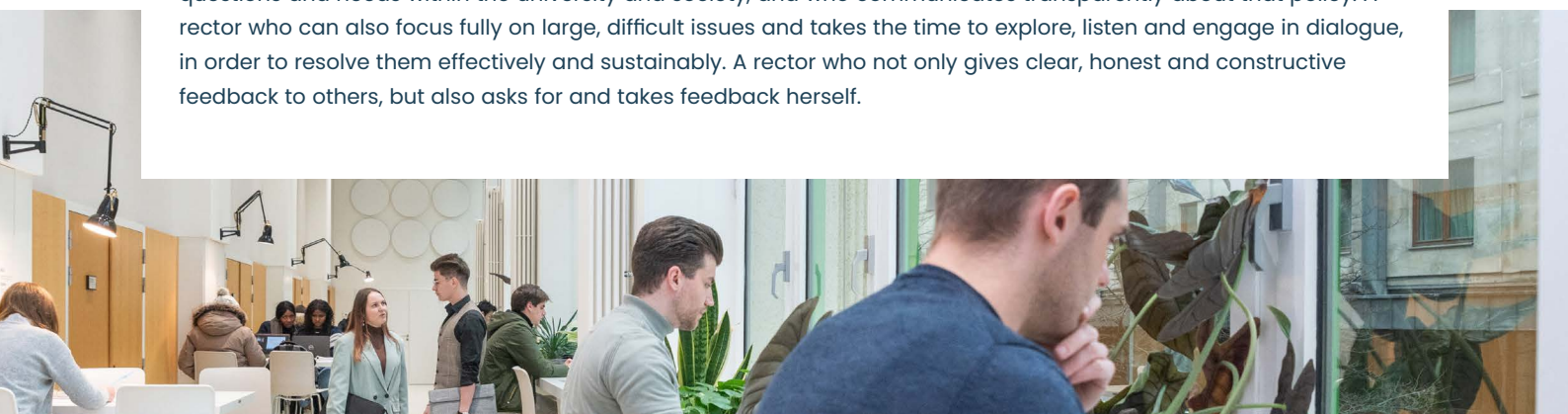


TOGETHER, WE MAKE KU LEUVEN

KU Leuven stands strong: with top-quality education, innovative and impactful research, and a strong community engagement, but above all with motivated students and staff. The challenges we face are considerable, though. The unstable geopolitical context is causing uncertainty and unrest, and we are witnessing growing mistrust of scientific knowledge. Funding for our education and research is under pressure, as is funding for healthcare. Our academic freedom is under increasing threat, while AI is causing a seismic shift in virtually all areas of our lives. Meanwhile, support for important issues such as diversity, inclusion and sustainability in society is eroding, and more and more people are struggling with mental health problems. The results of the Employee Satisfaction Monitor have brought us face to face with the facts: also within our institution, there are still many challenges ahead.

The future looks uncertain, to say the least, and that calls for a rector who is ready to hit the ground running and capable of weathering a crisis. Someone who does not need an apprentice period to learn the ropes, but who will be able to govern effectively throughout the entire four-year rectorate. A rector who is experienced, has a broad network in higher education, politics, the business world and society at large, and who will therefore be able to immediately engage in major and minor discussions at regional, national and international level, for example on the funding of education, research and pensions, healthcare reforms, language policy and internationalisation. A rector who also knows the complex organisation of KU Leuven through and through, both in the full scope of its staff and at the level of the service divisions, faculties and departments, campuses, university hospitals, institutes and the Association. A rector who is thoroughly familiar with the many achievements of the past policy period, but also knows that it will take time for these to take effect in the workplace, and realises that it is important to take that time, together with you.

Extensive and relevant policy experience is crucial for a rector in uncertain times, but just as important is how a rector puts that experience at the service of the entire organisation. I see myself as a rector who wants to be a team captain, decisive but at the heart of 'Team KU Leuven', strategic and visionary, but also constantly looking for opportunities for others. A team player who no longer needs to prove herself and does not necessarily have to score herself, but knows she is surrounded by a strong team of people who are allowed to be critical. A rector who can and wants to draw on the expertise available in all ranks of the broad university community and who wants to stimulate intellectual dialogue within the organisation and incorporate it into policy. A rector who sees herself as the linchpin in a network of faculties, departments, campuses, service divisions and institutes, and who respects subsidiarity within this. A rector who acts independently and with broad support, based on the real concerns, questions and needs within the university and society, and who communicates transparently about that policy. A rector who can also focus fully on large, difficult issues and takes the time to explore, listen and engage in dialogue, in order to resolve them effectively and sustainably. A rector who not only gives clear, honest and constructive feedback to others, but also asks for and takes feedback herself.



TINE BAELMANS

In the four chapters of my programme, I will walk you through what I want to stand for as rector and what I want to pursue wholeheartedly together with you. Each chapter brings together a series of proposals, priorities and questions around a single theme. In Chapter 1, “A heart for education and students”, I outline my vision for education and student policy. In Chapter 2, “Research of and for the future”, I dive into that other world that is so dear to me: research. Chapter 3, “KU Leuven, an organisation that puts people at the centre”, zooms in on KU Leuven as an organisation. Chapter 4, “A university at the heart of the world”, emphasises community engagement and how we, as a university, should stand in solidarity with the world around us.

Four spearheads run through each of these chapters. They outline who I am, as a person and as vice-rector. However, they do not only reflect my personal DNA – they also constitute the DNA of my programme. Because as rector, I want above all to remain true to myself.

- steadfast and agile – In a rapidly changing context, I want to continue to seek a balance between continuity and agility, between preserving what is good and responding dynamically to opportunities and threats.
- impactful and engaged – I want to turn KU Leuven into a place where engagement is a lived reality that connects us, where we stand courageously and in solidarity with the world and make an impact with our research, our education and our community engagement.
- involved and efficient – I dream of a university where everyone can shine, of an efficient organisation where everyone feels involved and recognised, and where we truly form a community.
- supported and transparent – Driven by connected and authentic leadership, I want to turn KU Leuven into a place where there is room for debate and critical reflection, where policy decisions are made transparently and enjoy maximum support, where an open feedback culture is the norm, and where everyone can learn from each other and feels empowered to take responsibility for the whole.

There is much to say about KU Leuven and its future. Yet, I have deliberately kept this programme brief. It is not exhaustive and is not intended to be a finished policy plan for the next four years. After all, policy plans are not written behind closed doors by a small group of insiders, but in broad consultation and with full transparency. This document is therefore more of a discussion paper that invites you to read it thoroughly and, above all, to engage in further discussion. Because together, we make KU Leuven.

I hope you enjoy reading it!



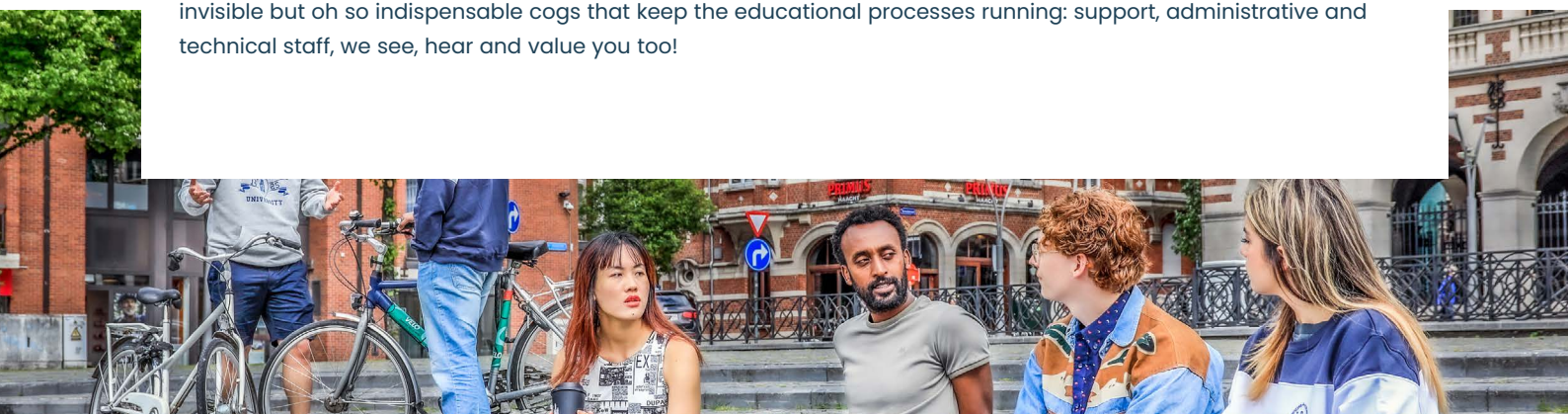


A HEART FOR EDUCATION AND STUDENTS

Sometimes education seems to be nothing more than a complex tangle of processes and actors. And yet, in essence, it is quite simple. It is about passing on knowledge and skills and thereby giving others the opportunity to use these themselves and turn them into new knowledge and skills. Research-based education is the driving force behind society and forms the seed of profound and sustainable change and growth. It trains students to become experts in a discipline, but also committed and critically constructive citizens who are well-informed and able to engage in democratic debate and demonstrate adaptability in a rapidly evolving world with an unpredictable future.

How do we organise ourselves to achieve this essential goal? What infrastructure do we need? How do we help our colleagues to turn teaching into inspiration, and our students to not only study but also truly learn? How do we support not only our students and lecturers, but also our educational support staff? And how do we do all this in a high-quality and sustainable way? These are challenges that I have enthusiastically tackled in recent years, first as Vice-Rector of Student and Diversity Policy (2009–2013) and then as Vice-Rector of Education Policy (2017–2025). Yes, I have a heart for education and students. It has been a fantastic time – sometimes exciting and difficult, but never boring. A lot has happened, a lot has changed and even more has been set in motion, because education is never finished. Education is a field where innovation must be well thought out and broadly supported, data-informed and carried out in collaboration with the many actors and experts involved. That requires time, patience and dialogue. That is why, in what follows, I will not only discuss what still needs to be done, but also what is already working well and what has already been achieved and initiated. In education, we should never innovate for the sake of innovation, but also cherish what is good and must be preserved.

Let us shape education at KU Leuven in solidarity, always keeping in mind the essence of what good education is and can be. As rector, I will continue to be guided by a strong social commitment and intellectual drive. I cherish the emancipatory power of education. I will, therefore, continue to promote greater diversity and inclusion in our education and defend the importance of empathy and care in our relationship with students. But I also believe it is important to set even clearer expectations for them and challenge them to surpass themselves and push their intellectual boundaries. I also want to support our lecturers, educational support staff and student counsellors in giving their best: together, we make our education strong. I will provide them with the right tools, infrastructure and professional support, and give them the recognition they deserve. My heart also goes out to the sometimes more invisible but oh so indispensable cogs that keep the educational processes running: support, administrative and technical staff, we see, hear and value you too!



1. Cherish what is good and innovate where necessary

Higher education is not static. It is intertwined with social and technological (r)evolutions, changes in the student population and the needs and expectations of the professional field. As a university, KU Leuven does not operate in a vacuum, but is part of and contributes to a broader and dynamic educational landscape. The ways in which we shape our education are therefore constantly evolving and require sustained attention. As a university, we must demonstrate our agility and strike a balance between continuity and innovation. Educational innovation can never be an end in itself. Some traditional forms of education retain their value. Innovation must serve the core mission of our university: to offer students excellent education in keeping with the best educational practices and the latest scientific insights. To achieve this, our lecturers and educational support staff deserve an excellent educational environment, appropriate support and solid leadership.

In recent years, KU Leuven has accelerated its efforts to integrate **digital technology** into our educational practice. As an institution, we have learnt a great deal in the process – about technological tools, about the infrastructure needed to use them optimally, and about the support our lecturers and staff require. Many lecturers are also making great efforts to innovate, for example through hybrid teaching methods, online on-campus and remote examination or assessment. We must value these efforts. We encourage lecturers who are keen to play a pioneering role in educational innovation to continue to be trendsetters. We learn a lot from them. At the same time, we realise that other lecturers sometimes find the step towards innovation too challenging or burdensome. That is why we will reinforce the role of teaching support staff through KU Leuven Learning Lab and, where possible, call on (employee) students. We will do this by offering **support hours or a coaching programme** for individual lecturers, teaching teams or programmes with specific innovation needs. In doing so, KU Leuven Learning Lab and its network of support staff will bring innovation closer to the teaching teams. At the same time, we will continue to optimise and expand the technology, infrastructure and support based on identified needs.

In the coming years, developments in **(generative) artificial intelligence** (AI and GenAI) will undoubtedly accelerate. As a leading university, we want to promote a **coherent, sustainable and widely supported vision** of the opportunities offered by these technological developments, without getting lost in the hype or the tool of the day. This includes the debate about the shifts in skills and knowledge that AI is bringing about and how we can respond to them. We also need to think about how we can use AI as an **inclusive technology** to remove barriers, and which tools we want to develop ourselves at KU Leuven to respond to our own context and needs. A multidisciplinary **GenAI coordination unit**, comprising both policymakers and experts, will be explicitly tasked with connecting policy and practice for GenAI across research, education and organisational management. This unit will provide an excellent lever to further shape KU Leuven's vision on AI, to innovate and implement it in a targeted manner, and to make recommendations for the broader educational field, including outside the university.

In any case, students and lecturers will increasingly use GenAI in **educational practice** (e.g. for evaluation and feedback, support with all kinds of assignments, text and code generation, etc.). However, GenAI cannot and should not take over the entire role of a lecturer, just as it cannot and should not take over the tasks of the student. We will, therefore, provide them with guidance in the form of clear university-wide frameworks and guidelines. We will implement the recently developed evaluation policy and review current evaluation practices to verify whether they are sufficiently robust in a GenAI context. In this process, we will further specify a lecturer's role in evaluation and communicate transparently about the academically appropriate attitude of students when producing assignments and Master's theses. In order to provide comprehensive and accessible support to lecturers and programmes, we are also setting up an **AI helpdesk** within KU Leuven Learning Lab and the Research Coordination Office (DOC),

which will be able to provide appropriate answers to technical, process-related and ethical questions, tailored to specific programmes and course units. This will allow everyone within KU Leuven to use GenAI and do so in line with KU Leuven's values.

In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for **forms of education** in higher education that fall **outside the traditional diploma programme**. The student population is becoming increasingly heterogeneous and students expect more flexibility. In addition to full-time students following a model programme, there is now a growing group of younger and older students entering programmes through non-standard paths (e.g. transferring from professional Bachelor's to Master's programmes, or from the job market to an academic programme) who want to acquire more targeted and selective expertise. We need to work together to develop a clear vision of what these **flexible programmes** might look like and how they relate to our basic programmes and our lifelong learning courses and programmes, so that we can then offer these within a clear and shared framework. The evident starting point here is that university education writes a coherent story that goes beyond simply collecting credits.

Developments in higher education can never be viewed in isolation from compulsory education. KU Leuven must also continue to contribute to this **broader educational narrative**. Together with our experts, we will **continue the considerate and constructive dialogue** that I have been conducting in recent years with **other educational actors**, such as the Minister of Education, the Department of Education, the administration, partner universities within the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), university college partners in the Association, mixed working groups with the Flemish Council of Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts (VLHORA), and compulsory education providers. Issues such as the teacher shortage and the role of educational Master's programmes must remain high on the agenda, and we must continue to advocate for the central role of research-based educational practices and didactic research. But we must also continue to argue, for example, that those who obtain a Master in Elementary Education and go on to work in elementary education should also see that qualification recognised in their job description and terms of employment. For secondary education, we are entering into further partnerships on study choice and the further development of a seventh year for [special scientific education](#), as preparation for mathematical and scientific programmes in higher education. Finally, together with the other Flemish universities and the Flemish government, we will be committed to strengthening the quality and attractiveness of education through, for example, the [Flemish Language Platform](#), the [Mathematics Platform](#) and the [STEM Platform](#).

KU Leuven must also maintain the **leading role** we have built up in recent years in **Flemish (higher) education policy**. Not only are there budgetary challenges that require great vigilance, but there are also issues where the political vision does not always coincide with the university's/-ies' expectations. Think of the regulatory framework for programmes taught in languages other than Dutch, or the geographical distribution of programmes in Flanders. These are delicate issues where my experience in education policy can make a difference, in close collaboration with the many excellent experts at KU Leuven.

Innovation and excellence in education require **leadership** at every level of the organisation, and we must recognise and honour that. In recent years, many steps have been taken to refine the evaluation of educational efforts, and education has been a fully-fledged pillar of the promotion and appointment recommendations of our ZAP advisory committees (the so-called "BeCo") for many years. And yet, for many, the efforts made in education still seem to remain invisible or appear to carry less weight. It is important to recognise this and to continue to look for ways to give excellence in education the recognition it deserves and to make leadership in educational positions a priority. We are also exploring ways to further develop the [Lighthouse Programme](#) for leadership development in education and make it more widely available, in collaboration with international partner universities. The student representatives also deserve our appreciation for the important task they take on. Together with them, we will look at how they can be given sufficient breathing space to fully commit to their role.

2. Building an academic home together

If we want to continue to set high standards and offer top-quality education, KU Leuven must also be a place where students, lecturers, teaching support staff and student counsellors feel at home and are given opportunities to grow. Building such an academic home requires solidarity and a well-considered and multifaceted approach. With the motto 'we are KU Leuven', we will, therefore, strengthen the social aspect of studying, teaching and support. We will continue to invest in a climate of inclusion and social safety and will support programmes and lecturers in developing a suitable range of physical, hybrid and online contact moments to optimise the social and academic integration of students. We will make KU Leuven Learning Lab the hub of a professional education network that is both efficient and accessible. And even though we strive to create a warm home, we will keep its doors and windows wide open to honour our commitment to society.

Building an academic home requires careful dedication. KU Leuven strives to offer all students, regardless of their gender, nationality, ethnicity and migration background, religion, disability, age and socio-economic background, a respectful and positive learning and living environment where they can fully develop their talents. This requires an **inclusive policy** that is empathetic but at the same time expectant, and which every student, lecturer, teaching assistant and student counsellor has internalised. We are continuing to focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which inspires programme committees ('POCs') to make their education inclusive, as well as on training courses in diversity-sensitive education, which we want to offer to every lecturer, assistant and support staff member, with priority given to those who teach in the first year of a Bachelor's programme or in programmes with a highly diverse or international student population. We will also implement the recommendations of the working groups on diversity (socio-cultural diversity, religious diversity, LGBTQIA+, etc.) and examine how we can remove existing barriers to inclusivity. We will continue to encourage peer-to-peer initiatives, such as Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL), Mindmates and buddy schemes, with a particular focus on (international, intercultural and interreligious) connectedness between student groups. Where this brings added value, we will develop a supporting framework, also facilitated by Stuvo, and encourage faculties and programmes to take up such initiatives, together with their faculty student societies and student representatives.

In an academic home, **social safety** should be a matter of course. Every student, lecturer and colleague of the educational support staff must feel safe during classes, labs, practice sessions, internships, exams, etc. This makes social safety a duty for everyone. We want to strengthen the programmes in this by inspiring them on how they can systematically discuss this theme in POCs. Students must be able to quickly and easily reach someone who will listen to them or help them if they are confronted with inappropriate behaviour. Together with POCs, student societies and student representatives are important allies in spreading the message that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated, that it is dealt with effectively, that we all work together to maintain social safety, and that KU Leuven is there for you if you are nevertheless confronted with it.

An academic home takes care of those who need care. That is why we will remain committed to **accessible** and **holistic student support** that supports both learning and life. Through Stuvo and the faculties' student support services, we will continue to build strong and feasible support that responds to the increased diversity of our students. The local Stuvos that have recently been set up must be able to develop to their full potential on all our campuses. We will encourage closer cooperation between these local Stuvos and the study programmes, as well as with the faculties' student societies, and we will reinforce Stuvo's local information points and online accessibility.

Anyone who needs help themselves or notices that someone else needs help must be able to find the right support quickly and easily. **Mental health** must receive sufficient attention. We have taken important steps in this area in recent years, but there is still work to be done and we must continue to build a solid support continuum for mental well-being: from preventive initiatives that promote social connectedness, mental resilience and a healthy lifestyle, over primary psychological support in local Stuvos to specialised psychological services. We must identify vulnerable groups more effectively and strive for early detection through science-based health checks. We will step up our efforts to raise awareness of mental well-being services throughout the university community, not only among students, but also among lecturers and teaching support staff. They too need to know where to turn if they are concerned about a student who may need help. In close collaboration with the student organisations, we are also continuing to work on accessible communication about mental well-being for students.

KU Leuven is also an **international** home with a growing and diverse group of international students who require tailored policies and support services. Together with Stuvo and our faculties, we will develop initiatives, building on [Pangaea](#) and the orientation days, to help international students feel socially and academically at home on each of our campuses more quickly, more strongly and more sustainably. We will set up pilot projects specifically for programmes with large groups of international students. We will also continue to focus on life in an international classroom and on adequate preparation for international mobility by making full use of our training modules for intercultural competences and preparation modules for international mobility in the faculties. We will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to gain international experience: inclusive mobility is a priority.

We must also ensure that study costs do not constitute a barrier to academic ambitions. POCs should take the lead in this and monitor the **costs** associated with their programmes, for which they can raise awareness among their lecturers, as they are the ones who make the difference here, e.g. by critically reviewing the material specified as 'required reading', by making informed choices about publishers, or by making texts digitally available. Many student societies now organise second-hand book markets or have developed their own financial support measures. At the policy level, we will continue to work on accompanying measures to better support students facing financial challenges. This is more necessary than ever, not only for Flemish students, but also for international students, now that funding for students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) exceeds the maximum percentage set by the Flemish government. Talented international students are at risk of being left behind as a result. We must support them with a targeted fee waiver policy, particularly for students from conflict areas and regions with specific socio-economic challenges. Together with local and regional partners, we will also keep working on high-quality and affordable **student housing** on all campuses and for all students. Through the student societies, we will check in with **commuting students** about any barriers they face in attending lectures on campus, and we will look at how we can make the scheduling of in-person classes more commuter-friendly.

In recent years, I have had the privilege of helping to shape **KU Leuven Learning Lab**. It brings together a wealth of expertise to inspire lecturers, educational support staff, student counsellors, programme directors and heads of programmes. In the coming policy period, the Learning Lab must become the obvious place where they can find support for future-oriented education, innovative teaching and evaluation formats, professionalisation for blended learning, good practices in student guidance... and where they can also share their own experiences and thus contribute to the bottom-up development of education policy at KU Leuven. That is the essence of our learning education community.

Programme directors and heads of programmes who navigate this rich **educational network** can use their powerful and connecting leadership to make their POC a place for stimulating educational discussions in which all those involved can make their voices heard. In turn, educational support staff and student counsellors can feel empowered in their expertise through their networks within KU Leuven Learning Lab, and can put it to even better use in the programmes they are involved in. This is how we can continuously bring the broad expertise of KU Leuven Learning Lab closer to the programmes.

Meeting each other is essential in academic education. That is why we are firmly committed to KU Leuven as an *on-campus* university. But we want to redesign it: with **fewer but better quality physical contact moments** and with sufficient flexibility and consideration for students' and teachers' needs. Through KU Leuven Learning Lab, we will assist POCs and lecturers in turning contact moments into optimal learning moments with room for academic discussion and peer interaction. We will also devise examples of carefully crafted blended curricula and course components, ranging from a maximum on-campus programme to a maximum hybrid approach. Throughout all this, we will not lose sight of communication with students, because blended curricula also require commitment and effort on their part. With an inspiration guide, we also provide programmes with ideas for integrating **lifelong learning** competencies into their curricula, and where possible, we will set up flexible training modules that equip our graduates to engage in lifelong learning, for example through KU Leuven Continue. This will allow us to continue to engage with each other after graduation.

Studying in a **stimulating educational environment** means studying on a living campus. Together with the student societies, study programmes and technical services, we will create sufficient **space to meet and engage in high-quality studying** on every campus. We will strengthen the position of the university libraries and learning centres and further extend the range of study spaces, collaborative learning spaces and meeting spaces. For investments in classrooms, we will prioritise interventions that have a larger-scale impact (e.g. collaborative learning spaces, principles for new and renovated auditoriums that are widely applicable), for which we will work closely with KU Leuven Learning Lab, in which the technical services are already a partner. On the campuses that we share with university colleges, we will of course work in close partnership with them.

In recent years, [KU Leuven Engage](#) has been developed into a solid engine for community engagement, through which we will keep inspiring students and lecturers on themes of solidarity, inclusion, diversity and social developments and challenges. Through KU Leuven Engage, we will continue to encourage programmes to integrate community engagement into their curricula and to develop learning pathways on sustainability and critical and constructive citizenship, in collaboration with the broader societal field. We will also call on our **alumni's** bond with KU Leuven to offer themes, formats and commitments for e.g. projects, Master's theses, service learning and lifelong learning.

3. Ambitious intake yet with support

Higher education remains an important instrument for social mobility. We must cherish and safeguard the opportunities that you people can benefit from through the broad and relatively inexpensive access to higher education in Flanders. At the same time, we must not be blind to the many challenges that come with this broad and free access. The ratio between student groups and teaching and support capacity is sometimes out of balance, and the entry-level competences of incoming students vary greatly, including among international students. A good intake policy, proper orientation of school leavers and solid guidance for new students, both for our (international) Bachelor's and Master's programmes, therefore remain a priority. In recent years, many successful measures have been initiated and developed in this area under my leadership. Examples include KU Leuven's milestone system, which was incorporated by the Flemish government in implementation of the coalition agreement on study progress and the 'hard cut', and the efforts to introduce starting and positioning tests. But there is still work to be done, and our students and lecturers deserve even better guidance in this area.

If we show ambition in our education and expect students to share that ambition, we must clearly indicate where we set the bar and help students find the programme that matches their ambitions, dreams and entry-level competences. **Good orientation** for students is based on freedom of choice, but twins this with clear expectations, giving them a clear insight into the extent to which they already meet the entry-level competences, but also how they can strengthen them. We will, therefore, continue to encourage Bachelor's programmes to participate in the **starting and positioning tests**, and we will further expand the accompanying support for (future) students. The remedial measures after the starting tests (imposed by government decree) can be conceived of as an opportunity to provide each student with personalised feedback on their starting competences before the start of the programme, which can motivate them to make up for any shortcomings in good time. Together with the Steering Group on Positioning and Start Tests, we will monitor the feasibility of this, and provide project-based impulses to shape both the tests themselves and the remedial measures.

In addition, we will strengthen the **alignment between the (minimum) learning outcomes in secondary education and the expected starting competences in our programmes**. We will do this not only on the basis of statistical data, such as the results of starting tests and the progression rates within the programmes, but also by providing structural moments of reflection with secondary education representatives. The School of Education and our partnership within the Association will shape this dialogue.

In order to **attract diverse talents**, we should actively seek out promising young people in diverse groups who are currently underrepresented in higher education. Together with the Association, we are strengthening the [KU Leuven A-crew](#) and similar initiatives in all regions, giving role models prominent attention in our communications, and forging partnerships with secondary schools in all regions in which KU Leuven is active (e.g. [Samen Onderwijs Maken](#) in Leuven or the meeting days with school principals). We maintain a focus on diversity-sensitive communication at our orientation and information events, such as the SID-ins, and will work with the Marketing and Communication Department to further professionalise faculty (educational) communication staff in this area. KU Leuven still has some way to go in this, but by joining forces, we should be able to welcome talented young people regardless of their background or diversity characteristics and offer them opportunities in the coming years. We are also maintaining and expanding our collaboration with schools to the benefit of [cognitively strong pupils](#), who can come and study at our university at an early stage and with guidance.

International students enrich our programmes and campuses, but all too often they lack the necessary prior knowledge. They also face additional challenges such as social and academic integration. This has (too great) an impact on their chances of success. Together with the International Office and faculty experts, we will ensure a sound admission and selection policy by optimising communication to international students about starting competences. In consultation with the programmes, we will also look into opportunities to test these competences where necessary or to allow students to brush up on their basic disciplinary knowledge with short online courses before they arrive at KU Leuven.

In recent years, thanks to the introduction of the **first milestone**, we have succeeded in increasing the number of students who successfully complete the first year. After about twenty years of declining success rates, we have been able to turn the tide, and we can be proud of that. In the latest institutional review, the international committee was particularly praiseful of our efforts in this area. We will, therefore, maintain the current academic progress policy and continue to help shape Flemish policy on academic progress. In the coming years, we will continue to monitor the situation closely through data monitoring and consultation with the faculties, without losing sight of **students with atypical trajectories** (working students, top athletes, artists, students affected by illness, etc.).

We have noticed significant differences in study success between our Bachelor's programmes. An important factor for study success – in addition to entry-level competences – is reflection on one's own study career. We encourage this right from the start during the Freshers' Days, but we can take further steps to extend this to the subsequent months. To encourage and, where necessary, support students in their **academic self-reflection**, we will inspire programmes via KU Leuven Learning Lab to embed **(feasible and scalable) feedback** in the first year of the Bachelor's programme, with or without technological tools such as Feedback Fruits, Ans or GenAI and learning analytics. We will provide additional support to our students through study skills modules and the Progress Dashboard, which gives them greater insight into and ownership of their study career. We will pay particular attention to how students with socio-cultural diversity characteristics can use it. We must fully roll out the recently launched **KU Leuven Learning Lab network for student counsellors**: it offers new opportunities for further innovation, professionalisation and expertise in student counselling.



4. A viable educational organisation

Society (rightly) expects KU Leuven to offer high-quality and attractive education. We must, therefore, remain critical of our range of programmes, but also of how we design our education. The organisation of our educational programmes is complex and requires a great deal of effort from many colleagues. It is in our DNA to constantly question ourselves in a critical and constructive manner and to strive for improvement, often in the form of new, additional valuable initiatives. This is an excellent attitude that fits perfectly with an academic educational institution that values quality highly. But ensuring quality also means ensuring that our ambitions are realistic. We all need to be given the space and time to realise our potential, and that means making choices. Choices about our educational programmes, how we design them and how we organise ourselves. Targeted choices must also be made for project-based innovation, taking into account from the outset the capacity needed to roll out and sustain the innovations on a broad scale at a later stage. In this way, we can provide the breathing space that our students, lecturers, teaching support staff and student counsellors need to successfully realise their ambitions and the university's.

KU Leuven wants to be a comprehensive university and cherishes the diversity of its **range of programmes**. However, this range of programmes should not be set in stone, and new social needs and disciplinary developments must also be adequately reflected in it. This implies that KU Leuven wishes to continue discussions with the Flemish government about the added value of **Bachelor's and Master's programmes in other languages** in specific fields of study and within the scope provided by the relevant decrees. However, we also want to continue to thoughtfully refine or renew our existing programmes. All of our curricula must be convincing and attractive. We will hence encourage the faculties to maintain a future-oriented and future-proof range of programmes that reflects developments in academic disciplines, is in line with current social trends and befits the profile and identity of the programmes and the campuses on which they are offered. Here too, it is important to make bold choices, supported by dashboards with data on our own educational programmes and benchmarking with programmes abroad. An interdisciplinary approach can sometimes offer considerable added value in responding to complex social issues, and our research institutes can provide inspiration in this regard. The faculties are in the driving seat when it comes to shaping their educational programmes based on their disciplinary expertise. However, central education policy can step up its efforts to support them by providing input and inspiration based on a broad analysis of trends in the field of education and of curricula at an international level.

Behind the scenes of our education, there are many **processes** involved in student career counselling, ISP approval, requests for accommodations (e.g. exam accommodations), class and exam planning, appeals procedures, etc. These processes must run smoothly for all our students, staff and programmes on all our campuses. We will, therefore, listen to the colleagues involved in every step of these processes and to students' experiences, and identify where and how simplification and improvement are possible. For example, can we optimise or expand our range of tools to better support teaching assistants and student counsellors and alleviate their administrative tasks (such as with the recently updated ISP tool and the student monitoring system currently under development), and what supporting role can AI applications play in this? The report "Room for faculty student career counselling" already contains a number of action points that we can start working on in the short term. New or thoroughly revamped programmes often face special organisational challenges (think of the educational Master's, the Master in Elementary Education and the Bachelor of European Studies). We are monitoring these closely, working with the programmes and their faculties to see how we can improve their viability through organisational changes.

Studying at university is intensive, with a rapid succession of busy teaching and exam periods and limited opportunities to catch your breath. The period between the end of one academic year and the start of the next is particularly tight, with hardly any time for students to turn the page on the previous academic year or to reorient themselves. For administrative and educational support staff, lecturers and assistants, too, peak periods merge seamlessly at a time when the academic year has yet to really get started. In February, we do it all over again. How can we bring more **breathing space into the academic year**, thereby improving the studyability and teachability of our programmes and keeping the pressure on the organisation manageable? The academic calendar is a topic that requires careful consideration, without preconceptions, and with all stakeholders involved – students, lecturers, teaching support staff, student counsellors and administrative support staff. Only with this approach can we arrive at a shared vision that makes a real difference for all of us.

We want to give students every opportunity to study in depth and really learn. Delving into the subject matter and mastering it challenges you to push your boundaries. Studying should be challenging, but also rewarding. If, within the limits of what is required of you in your programme, you are able to choose your own path and working method, this can contribute not only to your academic success, but also to the way you experience the journey towards it. It is, therefore, important not to patronise students, but to give them more **autonomy over their own study process**. In this context, continuous assessment has sometimes gone too far. This can lead to additional organisational concerns, especially when combined with group work (often in constantly changing compositions). We will encourage programmes to evaluate at a programme level which assessments are necessary during the semester and which are best placed in the exam period, but also whether group work is appropriate in all circumstances to teach the intended skills.

Technological innovations have greatly enriched the **range of study materials**. Nowadays, there are often not only printed or online courses, but also lecture recordings, knowledge clips, self-tests, additional reading recommendations, informal student channels with extra materials, etc. The range of study materials gives students the opportunity to make their own choices in line with the study method that suits them best and can thus also contribute to autonomy in the study process. However, not all students find their way easily through the wide range of study materials available, and the multitude of materials made available by lecturers is not always based on well-considered didactic choices. Teachers are also sometimes unsure about this. That is why KU Leuven Learning Lab can offer POCs and teachers inspiration and concrete tools to better guide students through the available study materials. This will enable POCs and teachers to make more targeted choices in the materials they offer, tailored to their courses.

Communication with students, especially electronic communication, seems to be increasingly ineffective. The sheer volume and frequency of messages means that students lose track or even switch off completely. We, therefore, want to make efforts to channel **study-related communication** in a structured way so that it does not get lost among the multitude of other emails. We will do this, starting from a connecting and empathetic attitude, and of course with students' input. For **extra-curricular communication** (sports, culture, etc.), a good communication plan must be developed at university level, in consultation with LOKO and Stura, so that communication once again becomes an added value and the bond between the student and their university or programme is strengthened.



RESEARCH OF AND FOR THE FUTURE

Research is all about trying to shape the future. And we shape that future every day, together with the entire KU Leuven community. KU Leuven's research is strong. All research indicators are flashing green. KU Leuven's share of the Flemish BOF (Special Research Fund) and IOF (Industrial Research Fund) funding schemes is higher than the share of researchers that we represent. We are the leading university in Flanders in terms of the number of publications, the weighted share of VABB publications, the weighted share of publications according to the Science Citation Index and the Science Citation Index Expanded, the weighted share of publications according to their citation impact, and the share of publications through international collaboration. Since Brexit, we have also been the most successful European university in Horizon Europe (FP9) and in Marie Curie Doctoral Programmes, both in terms of the number of projects obtained and the funding awarded. The External Evaluation Boards' expert panels are consistently positive about the research conducted in the various departments and faculties. And even though the rankings are not what drives us, we are proud to be among the top 15 universities in Europe and 43rd worldwide in the [Times Higher Education](#). According to the [Reuters Ranking](#) (latest edition in 2019), we were the most innovative European university for three years in a row. This is something we can be proud of.

But we don't do it for the numbers. Why should we always aim for 'more'? There are people behind these numbers. And they are what matters to me. Researchers and research support staff are at the heart of our research. They are the ones shaping the research of the future. They stand strong and deserve our confidence. But they also deserve our attention and care because they are under pressure. I want to create more time and mental space for research, take the pressure off our researchers and support our support staff. I want to see everyone shine, paying sufficient attention to individuality, but also to team spirit and collective ambition. In a complex and challenging internal and external environment, I want to offer researchers and research support staff freedom, responsibility and resilience. How do we ensure that our researchers have the space to achieve their ambitions and dreams without internal competition taking over? How can we stimulate the joy of doing research together, of wonder and of admiration for team members' expertise? How do we collaboratively organise today's research for tomorrow's world? These are important questions that matter to me. Together with you, I want to forge possible answers.



1. Cherish what works and innovate where necessary

Knowledge knows no bounds. In a rapidly changing world, we want to maintain KU Leuven's position as an internationally leading research institution with impactful and innovative research that serves society. We believe in the strength of our researchers and give them the space to explore new intellectual frontiers and solve important societal problems. Mindful of the saying 'standing on the shoulders of giants', we also cherish what already exists and works. In other words, we want to give our researchers the opportunity to respond quickly to geopolitical, social, cultural and technological needs and developments in their research, without abandoning valuable ongoing research. We should make room for blue-sky research, encourage social innovation alongside economic innovation, and value the impact of all our research results, both fundamental and more applied. We must give our researchers the freedom and the right to colour outside the lines: not only the result counts, the journey matters just as well.

When recruiting researchers, we should be open to **diversity** and value **innovative potential**. We will, therefore, make everyone involved in recruitment activities aware of language and other strategies that can remove barriers in the job application process. The full potential and impact of our science and innovation can only be realised in an environment where all researchers are supported and valued, and where inclusion and collaboration are core principles. During their careers, we must value and reward visionary course changes in applications for promotion and project applications within Internal Funds, in line with the ZAP Framework for Recognising and Valuing High-Quality Academic Work. We will make time and resources available for high-risk, blue-sky research: we will continue the sabbaticals scheme and explore opportunities to fund new research themes through an easy-access seed fund within Internal Funds. **Failure is an option.**

As the most innovative university in Europe, we are working with [LRD](#) to build "a world ready for tomorrow, with excellent research today". We will continue to support researchers who are committed to innovation. But if we truly want to respond quickly to geopolitical, social, cultural and technological needs and developments, **more is needed than business as usual**: we must also extend our success story in economic innovation to **social innovation**. We support the current plans to appoint a valorisation manager who can translate the social impact of research projects (pre- and post-award) in economic terms and enhance research teams' mindsets for economic and social valorisation. Within Internal Funds, we will encourage social innovation by paying more attention to and placing greater value on societal and social innovation. We also want to create a social impact network with partners such as the [Social Innovation Factory](#). And why not give our researchers the opportunity to share the social impact of their research with society through expanded collaboration with **KU Leuven Engage**? For example, by developing targeted communication channels that can reach social actors whom researchers can approach, or by setting up tailored engagement projects?

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together," is an African proverb that Nelson Mandela also fondly quoted. Scientific breakthroughs are often, but not exclusively, the result of teamwork. We, therefore, remain committed to **team science** in all its forms. Connectedness in team science is not incompatible with the independence of young researchers. At the same time, we will maintain ample space and appreciation for disciplines where more individual forms of research are the norm.

As complex social, cultural and technological problems require interdisciplinary collaboration, we will join forces with the directors to strengthen the impact of the **KU Leuven Institutes as drivers for innovative interdisciplinary research themes**. We can safely say that in recent years, our institutes have played an important role in expanding and deepening interdisciplinary research, with a major internal and external impact. The institutes are increasingly acting as a driving force for interdisciplinary education and lifelong learning and for the development of new interdisciplinary research methods. A first group of institutes that started four years ago has now been evaluated very positively by an international panel. If we want to strengthen our institutes' clout and capacity, we need to urgently provide clarity about the **long-term funding** of KU Leuven Institutes and their research managers. Examples from abroad can inspire us in this. At University College London, for example, there are two different models for 'institutes', depending on the nature of the theme. For institutes focusing on themes that are more time-limited, the "Acceleration" model is used: an institute receives temporary funding to provide additional support for a specific theme that is already well developed, with the aim of achieving specifically defined results more quickly. On the other hand, there is the 'Permanent feature' model, in which an institute receives long-term support for themes that have great potential for innovation and will remain on the agenda for a long time. This is just one example. We must also take the time to reflect broadly and profoundly on the **future model of the institutes**, not only with the institutes themselves, but also with the faculties and departments. The institutes should by no means replace departments or faculties, nor is it advisable to fund them with part of the resources earmarked for departments and faculties. **Each has its own function, and together they are stronger.**

However, (interdisciplinary) cooperation between faculties on the same campus or across faculties and campuses remains an important asset for a comprehensive university too. Our **regional presence** throughout Flanders also provides a strong embedding in the **local ecosystems** of university colleges, companies, public authorities, civil society organisations, etc. There is still a lot of potential to be tapped here. Together with the academic directors and deans, we will ensure that all campuses remain education as well as research campuses. We will maximise efforts to obtain regional research funding, also in collaboration with local university colleges and economic, social and cultural partners. In doing so, we will not lose sight of the level playing field with the **Strategic Research Centres** (SOCs, such as VIB and Imec): we will retain the specific funding rules within Internal Funds and improve arrangements regarding personnel and research collaboration where necessary. Here, too, we all stand to gain from the strongest possible and **fairest cooperation, moving away from the us-versus-them narrative** and focusing on shared opportunities.

In our choices for (new) **international research collaborations**, we will focus on existing strategic or innovative interdisciplinary research themes. Internationalisation is and will remain extremely important for universities, but it **cannot be an end in itself**. We must dare to question or simply discontinue structural collaborations that do not live up to expectations, where the commitment between the partners is unbalanced, or where scarce resources result in hypercompetition. This will free up space and resources for new collaborations. In order to **avoid overregulation and excessive structuring**, we also want to leave sufficient scope for bottom-up initiatives and individual collaborations. These too can develop into fully-fledged departmental, faculty or university-wide international collaborations.

Both nationally and at European level, we will continue to **influence decision-making on research funding**, taking into account the full breadth of research (e.g. European framework programmes) but also safeguarding blue-sky research (e.g. ERC). In an international context where **academic freedom** is under pressure, we are committed above all to protecting that academic freedom in the choice of research topics, the evaluation of research projects and the publication of research results. This also means that we seek to have a stronger voice in the (international) public debate, particularly on the core purpose of the university: **the independent pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.**

2. Trust in science and scientists

In a world where independent research and academic freedom are under siege, we want to offer a safe haven for researchers who feel threatened. Not only do we provide them with optimal guidance and support, but we also give them our full trust. We want to train young researchers to become broad-minded, independent scientists and embolden the entire research community in its academic freedom and responsibility. Researchers who dare to think outside the box in terms of methodology are likely to derive greater satisfaction from the research process. That is why we must be open to alternative forms of excellence, not only in terms of research topics but also in terms of research methods, and set an example for other universities. Innovative research methods are the best guarantee of openness and scientific integrity. This should also increase society's confidence in the power of science and be a guide for society in word and deed.

Throughout a researcher's entire career, both in recruitment and promotion, as well as in project applications for Internal Funds, we must value and reward **methodological innovations, interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation** and **alternative forms of research output** such as artistic creation or artistic performance. We still have some way to go, particularly with regard to the latter category. We can draw inspiration from the [Australian](#) example.

[Open science](#) is widely recognised as contributing to openness and scientific integrity. That is why we value and reward researchers who uphold the principles of **open science** – open access, fair data, reproducibility, pre-registration, citizen science, etc. And that is why, in collaboration with KU Leuven Libraries and the Research Coordination Office (DOC), we remain committed to [Research Data Management](#) support and to providing support (in terms of personnel and technical tools) to guarantee the reproducibility of research, (green) open access and the openness of research data, free of charge as far as possible.

We must also take these principles into account when **evaluating** researchers. KU Leuven has endorsed the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#), the [Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics](#) and the [Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers](#), and we are a member of [CoARA](#), the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that we still have steps to take in the implementation of research evaluation: the [KU Leuven CoARA action plan](#) will be our roadmap in this regard. We are working with our LERU and UNA Europa partners to keep all aspects of open science high on the European agenda.

Needless to say, AI is one of the most powerful tools for (methodological) innovation in contemporary research. In the coming years, developments in **(generative) Artificial Intelligence** will undoubtedly accelerate, offering opportunities for research. (Gen)AI is here to stay in the research process and, as was the case with previous impactful technological revolutions, skills and knowledge will shift from a generic to a more specialised level. At the same time, we must take transition phenomena into account. As a leading university, KU Leuven must remain committed to reflecting on these issues, implementing new insights and making recommendations for the broader research field outside the university. Reflecting on guiding principles is preferable to getting lost in the hype or the latest tool of the moment.

Thanks to [AI as a Service](#) (AlaaS), we already have a fast and flexible tool to guide researchers in using AI to develop new research applications that can lead to scientific breakthroughs. But we also need a task force that provides researchers with clear university-wide frameworks and guidelines and prepares them to **use AI tools productively**

but critically, thereby increasing research efficiency and impact. We want to work quickly to establish such a support structure, together with the Leuven AI Institute, DOC and KU Leuven Libraries.

Data are the new gold, or so we often hear. Stefan Lefever (Imec) has a different opinion: [“Data should not be the new gold](#), but – like renewable energy – should be managed sustainably and with decentralised ownership with a view to innovation and the common good.” To prevent data from remaining the monopoly of the current tech giants, which would be detrimental to privacy, research security and innovation, we want to contribute to the development of **common European data spaces**, together with other European partners and in line with the [European Data Strategy](#). Such data spaces will ensure that more data is available to scientists and the public sector in general, while remaining under the control of those who generate it. [KU Leuven researchers](#) are already contributing to this.

Researchers, on the other hand, are truly the new gold. Government funding for **young researchers** (OJO funds) is, however, under pressure in Flanders. At the same time, we are still seeing high dropout rates among PhD students and the results of the Employee Satisfaction Monitor for the entire “ABAP” group are largely negative, partly as a result of uncertain funding. The **training opportunities for our young researchers** (PhD students, postdocs, young “ZAP”) must not be compromised in any way. That is why, together with the other Flemish universities, we will monitor the scope and effectiveness of the use of OJO funds within YouReCa for the training of “ABAP” and young “ZAP”. Internally, we are committed to reviewing the resources for **start-up funding** so that PhD students can be assured of funding for the entire duration of their PhD at the start. After all, uncertainty about funding is a source of stress for both doctoral candidates and supervisors, which, according to the Employee Satisfaction Monitor, also increases the risk of burnout. The differences in status and salary between self-funded doctoral candidates and doctoral candidates funded according to the Flemish salary scales also remain a point of concern. How can we strike the right balance between giving international doctoral candidates fair opportunities, on the one hand, without discriminating (equal pay for equal work) on the other? We, therefore, want to map out the scale of the financial differences, how many doctoral candidates we attract who are in a precarious situation and, if we want to continue to attract them, what measures are needed to give this group of doctoral candidates a fair pathway and a fair chance of success.

There are legitimate concerns among “ABAP” staff about their future prospects. We must, therefore, critically evaluate the current ODOT policy (open-ended contracts with an end date). Does this policy remove the uncertainty associated with repeated short-term fixed-term contracts? Does it effectively lead to an increase in the number of permanent contracts? If necessary, we must adjust this policy while continuing to explore other possibilities for sustainable employment at KU Leuven, always in consultation with “ABAP” representatives. In doing so, we must certainly not lose sight of **international “ABAP”**, who make up half of the entire “ABAP” and have specific concerns and require extra care and support. Unfortunately, their voice is still too often overlooked. We aim to remedy this with the Research Forum (see below). However, we must also ensure that our international researchers (ABAP and ZAP alike) feel represented in the relevant committees and councils. We will see to this.

For **newly recruited ZAP** (senior academic staff), we have greatly expanded and deepened the ZAP onboarding process in recent years, with thanks to our colleagues in the HR department and in the faculties. We definitely want to keep this up and, where necessary, strengthen it for our international colleagues. We also need to implement the recently outlined language policy for **international ZAP**, with a special focus on expectation management, career conversations and enhanced language support provision. But let’s not forget that our senior peers also play an important role in the onboarding process as coaches and mentors. Why should we not explicitly value and

reward the guidance and training of young researchers in general as a form of **research impact that is at least as important as the actual, traditional research results**? When recruiting and promoting staff, we will also value and reward researchers who, on the basis of their scientific expertise, contribute to public debate and nurture trust in science.

Throughout their careers, in recruitment and promotions, but also in project applications for Internal Funds, we will value and reward researchers who are committed to scientific integrity and good scientific citizenship. We will continue to train and support our researchers in [Good Academic Practices](#) for [integrity in research](#) with initiatives such as the VLIR podcast series, which was produced with input from all Flemish universities. We will also take the necessary steps to ensure that costs associated with achieving scientific integrity can be recovered from the running costs of projects funded by Internal Funds. At the European level, as a member of the [LERU Policy Group on Research Integrity](#), we will continue to engage in policy development on research integrity in collaboration with other European LERU partners. In 2023, for example, this group published an advisory paper on [Responsible and Equitable Authorship](#).



3. Room for research support

We often hear from foreign visitors that our research support is top notch. Yet our researchers and support staff are under pressure. We, therefore, need research support 2.0. In a context of scarce (research) resources and a justified focus on a good work-life balance, we must ensure that we reduce the workload. Workload is not only a consequence of an excessive amount of work, but also of a lack of autonomy at work. If we want everyone to shine and play to their strengths, then everyone must also have a say in how we collectively organise our work. If we want to create more time and mental space for research, we must relieve our researchers of unnecessary tasks and support our support staff.

The problem is well-known: researchers and support staff struggle with overregulation (e.g. for clinical trials, privacy, etc.), with cumbersome and sometimes unpredictable administrative processes, with well-intentioned yet inadequate coordination and, as a result, overlap between successive actors or policy levels, and with a lack of staff to deal with ever-increasing compliance requirements. That is why we must **make a genuine effort to simplify administration**.

But we must not be naive: no organisation strives for administrative complexity. Administrative simplification, therefore, requires sustained and thoughtful effort. Much has already been achieved in recent years thanks to the many research support staff in laboratories, faculties and departments, thanks to our Research Coordination Office DOC and thanks to NeON, the learning network for researchers and research support staff. So we will not be starting from scratch. To take the next crucial steps, we will be guided by the same principles that should drive us as a “learning organisation”. As a living organisation, we must also be a learning organisation in terms of our research administration, **taking care of** the organisation’s **carrying capacity** and that of everyone who is part of it. However, we can only take steps towards administrative simplification if we take all perspectives into account and actively engage in dialogue with each other in order to arrive at optimally informed and broadly supported decisions. Here, too, we must be guided by **realistic voluntarism**: identify support needs, take into account everyone’s carrying capacity, set priorities and, above all, draw up a clear plan of action together so that we can limit the number of steps in a process to what is strictly necessary and efficient.



Without wanting to pre-empt the outcome of this process, we can already identify a number of possible areas for administrative simplification. For example, we need to evaluate the support provided for doctoral programmes (YouReCa and doctoral schools), paying particular attention to the administrative burden associated with joint doctorates: we will **review the procedure, provide additional support and make cuts where necessary**. Support for European projects is another frequently cited example of complex administration and heavy workloads. We, therefore, need to explore alternative systems for **smart, pooled support** (at a central level or between departments and faculties) for European projects. This will take the pressure off both researchers and support staff and give everyone more time for their core tasks. But researchers and support staff also repeatedly mention terms such as “application burden” and “evaluation burden” in relation to project applications for Internal Funds. We want to reduce this **application and evaluation burden**. Based in part on the advice of the Institutional Research Review conducted by an external international review panel, steps have already been taken to streamline the evaluation process between, for example, the Executive Body of the BOFZAP Advisory Committee and the BOFZAP Advisory Committee itself, in order to prevent overreliance on the same people and duplication of work. This can certainly be extended to other committees and councils. But why not experiment with shorter project texts and applications without CVs, or with very concise CVs? The application and evaluation processes at **ethics committees** must also be simplified, both for applicants and for support staff. No more multiple iterations between ethics committees, which cause inconvenience for both applicants and support staff. With the addition of one extra FTE and as much pre-filled standard information as possible (e.g. for MRI), we can ensure that the entire PRET system is simplified.



Here too, (Gen)AI can help us navigate the various processes more effectively, provided that we use it in a responsible and critical manner, based on KU Leuven’s values and a clear university-wide vision on its use. As with education, (Gen)AI remains a tool that will change the role of the researcher, yet without completely replacing the researcher, just as it cannot and should not take over the role of the research support staff. As with education, this may mean that we will train AI tools specifically for the KU Leuven context, in terms of society, policy and content.

4. Optimising internal research organisation

The research landscape is complex, not only within KU Leuven but also at the Flemish, European and global levels. Internationally, important research themes are under pressure in countries such as China and Iran, but more recently also in the US, where socially relevant research themes such as gender, diversity, social justice, inclusion and racism are under threat. In a general context of great geopolitical and societal uncertainty, Flemish, European and global research resources are also under pressure, both in terms of the relationship between fundamental and applied research and in terms of the willingness of governments and other funders to scale up resources in line with needs. This will further increase competition between researchers. In this complex and highly uncertain research landscape, we want to broaden the support for research policy, combat the fragmentation of (internal and external) research policy and increase the transparency of decision-making processes. At the same time, we will ensure that researchers and supporters maintain confidence in internal and external research funding systems.

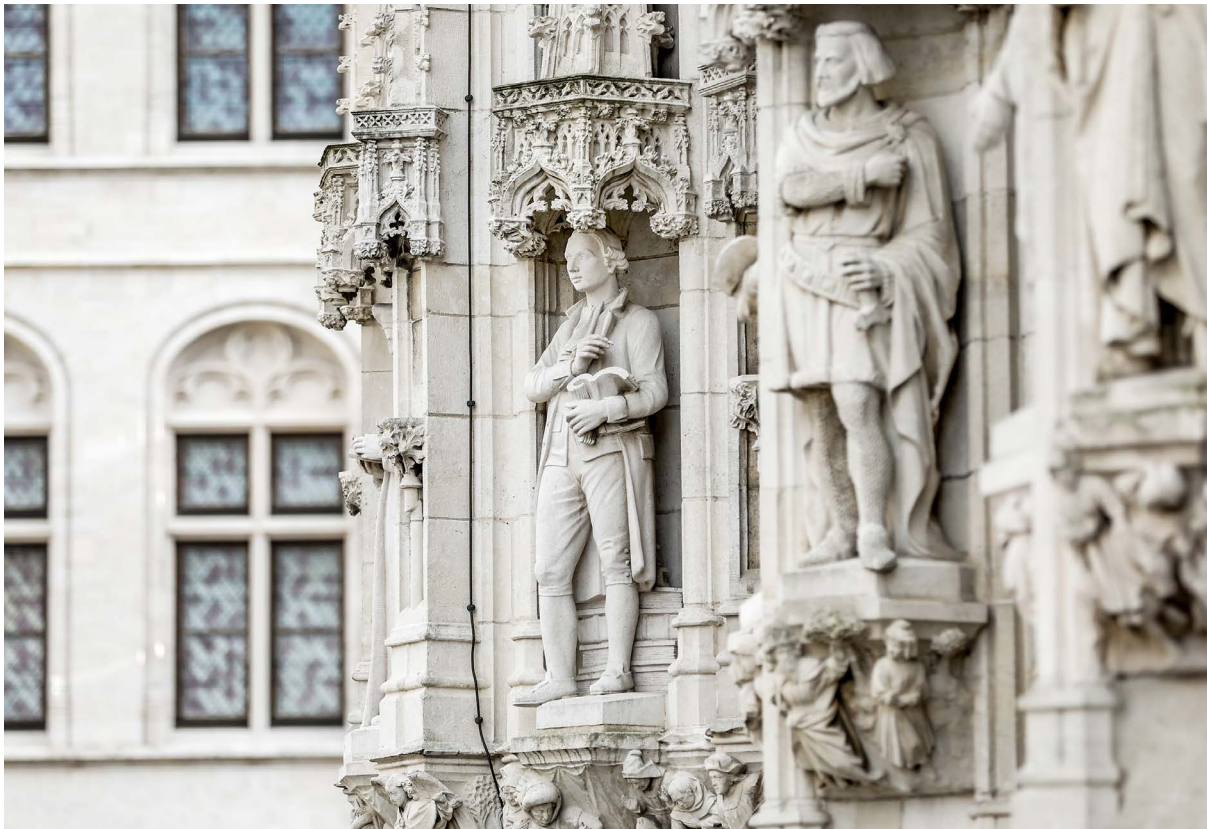
With regard to European funding, we endorse and support [LERU's Key Messages for FP10](#). Europe must invest **better, smarter and more ambitiously in research and development** in order to increase its strategic autonomy and help drive the knowledge revolution in the fields of health, digitalisation, energy, diversity and inclusion. Within KU Leuven, we must use our **Internal Funds wisely and ambitiously**. This requires a clear and shared vision of their purpose. What exactly is the purpose of Internal Funds? According to the Institutional Research Review conducted by an external international review panel, the strategic purpose of Internal Funds must be strengthened: C projects must remain the most important instrument, other, less-used funding channels must be trimmed, and part of the Internal Funds must be reserved centrally to enable policy responses to strategic themes and opportunities. In addition, it should be noted that BOF funds are being spread across an increasing number of funding categories (e.g. Global PhD, Global Seed Fund, CELSA, Network and LIAS Fellowships, etc.). As a result, over the last 10 years, the percentage of BOF funds allocated to C projects has decreased (from 40% to 32%) and the success rate of C projects has come under pressure despite stricter cumulation rules. The BOF key also shows a downward trend. Choices must be made.

How can we ensure the most successful **distribution of Internal Funds** that is at the same time **fair and receives broad support**? And above all: what are our own researchers' views on this? We believe it is crucial that they also have a say in this. That is why we will organise **a broad internal consultation on the aims of Internal Funds**. Some questions that could be addressed in such a broad consultation are: Should Internal Funds serve to support as many researchers as possible, in terms of chances of success and/or in terms of the variety of instruments available? Make researchers more competitive for external funding? Fund (high-risk) research that would not be possible elsewhere? Guarantee the continuity of ongoing research? Strengthen team science? Provide **basic funding** as proposed by the [Think Tank on Optimising Research Resources](#) or by analogy with the [Ghent model](#)?

A **broadly supported research policy** reflects everyone's voice. According to the Institutional Research Review, our KU Leuven research policy does not sufficiently reflect the ABAP voice. We must take this to heart. On the recommendation of the Institutional Review Panel, we are, therefore, creating a **Research Forum**: an open consultation at regular intervals where everyone is welcome to provide input and feedback on all possible aspects of research policy. We believe it is crucial that the agenda is not set solely by the policy-makers, but also by ABAP staff or the broader research community, and that there is clear communication about how the input will be followed up, why and how.

TINE BAELMANS

A broadly supported research policy can also be achieved by **maximising interaction between central research policy and the research policy and research needs of faculties, departments and groups**. Here too, the Institutional Research Review made a clear diagnosis: “The link between the research strategy and research policy, as elaborated at the central level, and the decentralised, more content-oriented research plans as elaborated within the science groups, is unclear.” We want to address this fragmentation. Interaction must be improved. The process to draft the central research policy plan will be designed in such a way that it builds on existing research policy plans. And why not clearly define the respective levels at which action is required (central – group – faculty/department) in all action plans? This will prevent the same actions from being taken at different levels and will provide a clear and efficient overview of everyone’s core tasks.



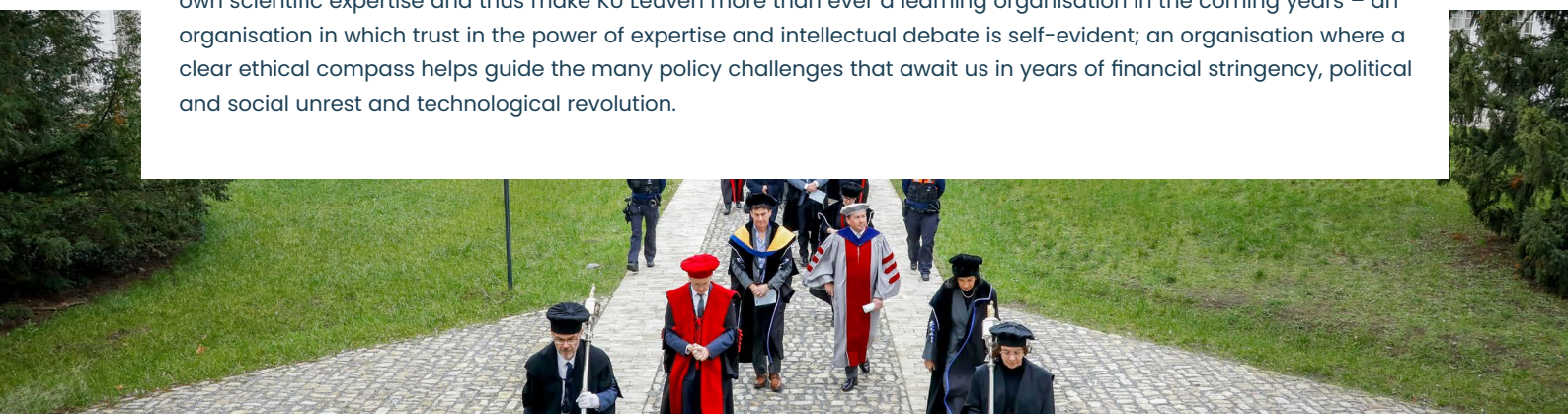


KU LEUVEN, AN ORGANISATION THAT PUTS PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

KU Leuven is an organisation that puts people at the centre. This requires a carefully considered and powerful organisational structure and a human resources policy that is ambitious and dynamic, but also uniting and appreciative – for all staff categories. It is only then that the focus can be where it should be: on research, education and community engagement.

From the results of the Employee Satisfaction Monitor 2023, we have learnt what the needs and concerns are among staff. Staff representatives and trade unions have for years been important and constructive partners in the search for solutions. Let us, therefore, join forces in critically and openly reviewing what is not yet right and what needs to be improved. At the same time, we must take the time in the coming years to anchor the many achievements in HR policy of the past policy term. As rector, I am determined to go all out for an HR policy that is not complacent, but continues to listen to the rank and file, while keeping in touch with how HR policy is being shaped in other organisations and educational institutions. Strengthening the sense of community in times of telecommuting and growing polarisation in society is an integral part of this, but also installing a widely supported feedback culture and authentic and responsible leadership at all levels.

As in past years, we are facing major challenges as an organisation, which will require us to be flexible and join forces. Special attention in this context will need to go to the cooperation between our service divisions, faculties, departments, campuses, regions and institutes, to the relationship with the university hospitals and to our embedding in the KU Leuven Association. They all need to (be able to) operate within a transparent and well thought-out framework, with clear competences, consultation structures and management lines, and with representatives who can fully assume their roles. We must not shy away from thematising that framework and adjust it where necessary. As rector, I want to put my shoulders to the wheel and take on the role of well-informed, experienced and independent game-changer. Based on my broad knowledge of the organisation, I will always cherish its multilayered diversity, but I also have a clear view of what is going well and where changes are needed. In times of crisis – from a pandemic to financial challenges to various delicate ethical issues – I know what it is like to stay calmly on course while showing decisiveness. With the challenges we are facing, let us certainly also use our own scientific expertise and thus make KU Leuven more than ever a learning organisation in the coming years – an organisation in which trust in the power of expertise and intellectual debate is self-evident; an organisation where a clear ethical compass helps guide the many policy challenges that await us in years of financial stringency, political and social unrest and technological revolution.



1. We make KU Leuven

Surveys such as the Employee Satisfaction Monitor, as well as our own everyday experience, show how passionate we all are about our jobs. Sometimes we come up against our limits: all too often, we see the boundaries between work and private time blur, we fold back on our own department or research group and let go of the broader connection, we switch between campuses or between the university and the hospital and as a result no longer really feel at home anywhere ... To hold on to the passion for our jobs and our university, each of us needs anchoring, a sense of belonging and a feeling of connection with the broader community of KU Leuven colleagues, because it is together that we make KU Leuven.

Telecommuting is a powerful tool allowing colleagues to work with more focus and to maintain firmer control of their work-life balance. Now that this has become widely adopted at our university, we are in a position to chart its impact on the dynamics of the workplace, and to encourage and inspire teams to discuss what their needs are in terms of arrangements or infrastructure to truly get the best out of the combination of telecommuting and working on campus.

We are putting even more effort into **disconnecting** and raising awareness of its basic principles. Not only are we suggesting sustained attention to restricting email traffic outside regular working hours to an absolute minimum (and setting a good example ourselves), but we will also examine whether, where possible, we can keep internal deadlines for, say, promotion or for project applications clearer of vacation periods.

A full **diversity-sensitive HR policy** considers the added value of diversity as a given and gives everyone the opportunity to feel at home at KU Leuven. It requires strengthening diversity awareness in recruitment and increased attention to diversity in our daily operations and decision-making. We will strengthen our commitment to inclusive recruiting by increasing awareness in everyone involved in recruitment processes of language and other strategies that can remove barriers for applicants. Through an institution-wide and easily accessible “inclusiveness test” we will include the diversity perspective even more systematically in our daily operations and policy decisions.

International colleagues starting at KU Leuven will be given every opportunity to integrate into our university community and society. To that end, the procedure for their *onboarding* has already been substantially refined, but follow-up after the start-up phase (e.g. monitoring the extent to which they can fully participate in internal debates and decision-making processes, and attending to the integration of family members) can be dealt with more systematically, ideally in cooperation with local initiatives such as the City of Leuven’s [International house](#). In addition, we need to properly implement the recently outlined language policy for international senior academic staff (ZAP), focusing on expectation management, open dialogue through career interviews and strengthened language offerings. Faculties, departments and institutes may also actively look for inspiration on how to encourage international colleagues to fully engage in, for example, a research group or POC.

Culture connects people across cultures and social groups. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Heritage will, therefore, be mandated to draw up a plan to encourage the cultural participation of colleagues and students, and to ensure access to a diverse cultural offering on or around all KU Leuven campuses. We have already learnt from the anniversary year that our own university **heritage** deserves even more attention than it currently receives: not only should it captivate students and colleagues, but also connect us as a university to society. We will continue to encourage the interaction between art and science and explore ways to propagate the intellectual and connective

power of art and literature throughout the organisation (e.g. by bringing our *writers in residence* to the fore more prominently, or by keeping the 600 years KU Leuven poetry route alive even after the anniversary year).

All our campuses should emanate the **living campus** idea, where students and colleagues can experience the full breadth of academic life with lectures, research, lab work, seminars, office work, conferences, events, opportunities for new encounters... Each campus should also become an open house (and garden!) for the broad group of colleagues and students at KU Leuven, not only offering them a place to work but just as easily a warm place to meet, connect with students, or organise a study day.

Sports, sufficient physical exercise during long meeting or class days, eating healthy... these are all tools that can make our days at KU Leuven noticeably more pleasant and have a positive impact on our **health**. Quite rightly, students and colleagues on all campuses are increasingly asking for easy access to solid sports infrastructure, for an organisational culture in which meetings are not unnecessarily long sitting marathons, for tasty, healthy and affordable food in the university restaurants and other meeting places. Through KU Leuven Healthy we will explore how we can promote and support even more widely the importance of a healthy lifestyle, more exercise and healthy food for the well-being of our students and colleagues.

Strengthening connectedness and mutual understanding between colleagues is best accomplished by truly sharing experiences. We are exploring the possibility of having KU Leuven colleagues **spend**, at least once a year, a day **within another entity** (a service division, faculty, department, institute, campus, hospital...). These participation days would allow us to get to know and further enhance our understanding of the human richness and wide diversity of the fascinating world that is KU Leuven.

If we want to make KU Leuven into a real community, then **social safety** should be self-evident for everyone – students and colleagues alike. From the Employee Satisfaction Monitor's results on verbal aggression, abuse of power and discrimination, it has become clear that we still have some way to go here. Although important steps have been taken in recent years, we must continue to assess them with an open mind, pay attention to what could be improved, and judiciously continue on this path. We must do this primarily on the basis of data, including registrations with the Unit of Confidence and with external violence and abuse hotlines, results of the Employee Satisfaction Monitor, and the annual reports of student and staff disciplinary committees. Priorities to be maintained are raising awareness on how to deal with transgressive behaviour as well as taking preventive actions such as refining and firmly embedding the Code of Conduct on Social Safety in our organisation. But just as well we need to further strengthen local leadership (including that of student representatives) and continue to focus on the professional reception of those reporting an incident with the Unit of Confidence. With each such report, quick and considerate follow-up is important for all those involved, whereby special attention should be given to appropriate communication.

If we really want to strengthen social safety within the organisation, we must be able to protect those reporting an incident and take appropriate action against colleagues whose behaviour is experienced as transgressive or problematic. In this respect, quick follow-up will make up an important part of an accessible feedback culture that we want to strengthen through the new evaluation procedure or ZAP review. Problematic behaviour by ZAP staff must be addressed through the disciplinary procedure. A first **evaluation of the new disciplinary procedure for ZAP staff** is in order, including an assessment of the turnaround time of cases, and a correct appraisal and acknowledgement of the substantial commitment of members to the investigative and disciplinary bodies. Colleagues who find themselves involved in a procedure must be given every opportunity to defend themselves,

but KU Leuven must also take strong action against those who intimidate those reporting an incident or those who abuse the procedures.

At times, colleagues and students may feel less at home at KU Leuven for a variety of reasons. They may be underrepresented, have special needs, feel different, insecure or disrespected as individuals, or find cultural differences difficult to adjust to. The pressure they experience when studying, when working, when searching for who they are and can become may create **mental** pressure that requires support. KU Leuven's mission statement should provide guidance here as well. We will examine how we can help support staff and staff in supervising positions – lecturers, PhD supervisors and heads of department – in managing, supporting or referring colleagues and students with special needs or mental problems. And, with Stuvo, we continue to invest in the mental well-being and psychological care of those who need it – because true solidarity knows no barriers.

For years, **student organisations** have been taking a central role in, among other things, welcoming new students, introducing them to their study programme, and introducing them to campus life. **Student representatives**, in turn, ensure that students have a voice within the faculty decision-making process. This makes both student organisation leaders and student representatives important partners for the faculties: through their inclusive approach, they help shape an important spearhead of KU Leuven's diversity policy. They give many students a sense of connectedness and belonging and thus give them a firm footing. With these partners, we will examine how to increase our support of their diversity-sensitive activities, how to reduce their administrative burden so that they can concentrate on their core tasks, and how to initiate a similar dynamic on those campuses where student organisations are not yet active.

Once a member of the KU Leuven community, always a member of the KU Leuven community. After graduation, we do not let go of our students: our **alumni** are our best ambassadors, and at KU Leuven Inside/Insight, they have shown overwhelmingly how enthusiastic they remain about their university. Other activities in our festive year are also meant to strengthen the bond with our alumni, and will serve as an inspiration to keep that bond alive in the future. In this respect, we will consider how we can strengthen alumni activities on campuses outside Leuven, and how we can respond specifically to the needs of programmes with many international alumni.



2. A learning organisation

A living organisation must also be a learning organisation, because the environment in which we operate is constantly changing; also within the university we are enriched with new insights every day. Against the background of unifying and authentic leadership at all levels of the university, we strive for an open feedback culture, where everyone can learn from each other and does not shy away from taking responsibility for the whole of the organisation, all the while looking out for the carrying capacity of the organisation and all those who are part of it.

KU Leuven is a strong organisation which in recent years has successfully weathered various crises and rapid (technological) evolutions, and is now cautiously facing the uncertain times to come. Yet there is also much to learn from previous years. Too often time is still lost, we miss out on useful **expertise** or opportunities by working in isolation rather than with each other. That is why we want to engage in a discussion about which tasks are best carried out at **which level** (central services, faculties, departments, campuses, regions ...), how we can best use the expertise present in all units and divisions of the university and how we can avoid duplicating work. By listening to those involved in the various steps as well as to the end users (colleagues and/or students), we can work more efficiently but we will also experience more support, thus refining the final result.

Complex challenges are typically addressed with a whole host of initiatives and actions. In doing so, we need to be aware of what our organisation can handle if we want to avoid that the service divisions, faculties and departments are unable to keep up with the pace of change. We should not change for change's sake. Realistic voluntarism cherishes what is good. When change is necessary, it considers the **carrying capacity** of the entire organisation, sets **priorities**, identifies **support needs**, makes clear and sensible choices in consultation with stakeholders, and develops **a sustainable** plan of action before a decision is made through **clear decision lines**.

At the same time, we need to examine where bottlenecks have arisen or threaten to arise in providing services, and review the **deployment of people and resources** where necessary. We will also examine where the system of "flying staff" – already used here and there at KU Leuven – could usefully be extended to strengthen (university-wide and local) services at peak times.

We strive to provide **the same level of service** (for students and colleagues alike) on all KU Leuven campuses. On campuses where KU Leuven collaborates with partner university colleges, we need to coordinate how logistics processes can be optimised, starting from the needs of students, faculty, support staff and researchers.

The **internal allocation of resources** should continue to guarantee stability for all faculties; at the same time, we need to consider in all transparency how to provide additional support to faculties experiencing strong growth. The intra- and inter-group allocation model has been frozen for years despite a lot of shifts in student numbers. Ad hoc adjustments, often funded by earmarked government funds (e.g., funds in response to quotas for the medical and dentistry programmes or for the Master of Elementary Education) will sometimes provide relief. Although redesigning the allocation model in financially stringent times is not obvious, our organisation at least needs transparency about the current actual allocation. An open debate about the parameters that determine the allocation can then form a first step towards a clear and fair distribution of resources shaping our educational

programmes. In doing so, we need to be mindful of the wide array of programmes that characterises our comprehensive university as well as ensuring high-quality support for them. We will also develop a methodology to support programmes that (temporarily or otherwise) are faced with significantly increasing student numbers, so that their workload becomes manageable.

There are a lot of **meetings** within KU Leuven and it is important to cherish this culture of consultation. This is precisely why, as an organisation, we must take a critical look at how we currently organise our meetings, who we involve, and what we wish achieve with them. To this end, we will outline the overarching, group, and/or local consultation structures and information flows for each policy area and examine their effectiveness. We will develop a framework of good meeting practices that we wish to spread throughout the university; among other things, it pays attention to how to chair a meeting in a competent, efficient and open manner, as well as to aspects such as language policy and family-friendly meeting times.

In general, **professionalization** must become a standard component of everyone's career as an integral part of their job responsibilities. To put professionalization to optimal use, staff need to be able to participate in CPD programmes, but what is needed as well is an analysis of the current CPD offer and of each target group's needs, with the flexibility to respond quickly to current and acute needs such as how to deal with GenAI in a teaching, research and/or service context. Strengthening diversity skills and providing tools that can help colleagues in a step-by-step fashion towards diversity-sensitive action should also have a permanent place here.

Authentic leadership at every level of the university is crucial to shaping a healthy, connecting organisational culture. The leadership compass that has been developed provides an excellent starting point for leaders to discover their own strengths and weaknesses and to take steps in their development as a leader. That tool must find its way throughout the organisation. Supervisors must be given the opportunity to participate in appropriate CPD courses, which should become more systematically embedded in their job responsibilities. We will also investigate how they can get better support throughout their careers. It should become a natural part of the authentic leadership we strive for at KU Leuven for staff in a supervising capacity to give feedback in a constructive and clear manner, but also ask for feedback and follow up on it.

3. In dialogue and with a clear ethical compass

KU Leuven's mission statement sees the university as a "centre of reflection", a place of open discussion and debate, with room for personal initiative, critical reflection, collaboration, solidarity, diversity and academic freedom. If we really want to live up to that mission, we must also be such a thinking centre for our own organisation and positions on ethically loaded issues. If we are to strengthen the support for our policy choices, we must fully harness the expertise and intellectual brainpower already present in our university as well as transparently convey policy decisions and positions to the broader university community and to society. In times of growing polarisation and uncertainty, this will enable us to continue to truly build a community and together design the ethical compass that guides our organisation and positions.

In order to broaden and deepen the **support** for our policies and public positions, especially those involving ethical perspectives, we will always map out the **relevant (interdisciplinary) expertise**, enter into dialogue with the experts within the relevant policy areas, councils and committees, and work toward a clear position that is then transparently communicated to the broad university community. Together with ethics@kuleuven and [Metaforum](#), we will devise a feasible structural approach for this.

The **Academic Council** can and should take on an important role in this intellectual dialogue. Too often its focus is on merely getting policy papers approved and implementing them. Members of the Academic Council should also have a voice in the choices on which university policies are based and in ethically delicate topics such as the debate about international cooperation in conflict situations. The different perspectives they bring to the table can further complement our experts' opinions and strengthen the intellectual dialogue. This is how *together* we should create the framework within which further work can be done by committees such as the [Ethics Committee on Dual Use, Military Use & Misuse of Research](#).

Everyone's voice counts. In our **decision-making process**, we will, therefore, take note of all perspectives, both those of colleagues and students and of inspiring practices from outside KU Leuven. We will actively bring them into dialogue with each other so that we can make optimally informed and strongly **supported** decisions. In the policy-making bodies, all staff groups will be considered full discussion partners. To that effect, the Education Council and the Research Council will be enriched with ATP **representatives**, and the Groups' Executive Committees will be broadened with the ZAP representatives of the Academic Council, in addition to the ABAP, ATP and student representatives.

Commitments and action points that concern the entire university deserve active discussion. They will, therefore, be reported on annually in a **University Hall Meeting** where we, as a university policy team, will engage with colleagues and students, both on the policies pursued and those envisioned for the coming period – in an easily accessible and open-minded fashion.

In the past policy period, important steps were taken in the areas of **inclusion, diversity, solidarity and sustainability**. KU Leuven Engage will allow us to further encourage and support initiatives in this area in the coming years. As recent developments and increased polarisation have demonstrated the importance to remain



committed to **broad support**, to involving broad relevant expertise, and to communicating considerably to the broad university community. A strong dialogue with and a concerted commitment from the faculties and campuses and from our students are of primary importance here.

In the coming years, we will be fully committed to **integrating** inclusion, diversity, solidarity and sustainability into the fabric of the entire university. In addition to the importance we already attach to inclusion and diversity, we wish to **anchor** sustainability in the university's mission statement, and explore how each of these domains could be positioned within the remit of a Vice-Rector, such that the broad responsibility for them would permeate all policy areas and the entire operation of KU Leuven. We are developing a careful **communication plan** to strengthen support for diversity, inclusion, solidarity and sustainability, and to reflect our data, expertise and bottom-up commitment in these areas. More than ever, we will give the Diversity Council and the Sustainability Council a central and visible role in deploying expertise and developing policy recommendations, and turn KU Leuven Engage into the engine that shares practices and knowledge and brings partners together.

Anchoring inclusion, diversity, solidarity and sustainability within university policy is one thing. It is at least as important not to lose touch with **what is happening around these themes** on the work floor, in the auditorium, and in the heads of those students and colleagues who, day in and day out, experience firsthand that we still have a long way to travel. We will, therefore, continue to feed and question our policy-making bottom-up, monitoring how it takes shape on the work floor, in policy texts and realisations. Likewise, we will take into account the uncertainty, questions or doubts of colleagues who are less familiar with these themes, lending them support from KU Leuven Engage throughout their careers, possibly together with the faculty research and teaching support staff, through practical and accessible **training sessions** and **advice**.

Thanks to the Central Purchasing Department's sustainability policy, our concern for "people and the environment" is already systematically factored into **framework contracts**. The sustainability test aims to make purchases based on their potential environmental impact and qualitative, social and economic scores. We will investigate how we can broaden the sustainability test with an ethical test that includes respect for human rights.

4. Value each and everyone of us

KU Leuven has many inspired and ambitious staff. We should not only show them our appreciation with a heartfelt thank-you or a pat on the back – although these do contribute to their well-being – but also by ensuring a feasible range of tasks, by providing transparent feedback on their performance, by creating room for various careers and complementary talents, by remunerating them correctly, and by offering growth opportunities within the organisation wherever possible and desirable. KU Leuven's human resources policy has grown and modernised rapidly in recent years. A lot of work has been done. Still, the results of the Employee Satisfaction Monitor show that many challenges remain. Therefore, we must continue to listen to each other and keep improving KU Leuven's recognition and appreciation policy.

A dynamic, proactive and appreciative personnel policy must be flexible and adapted to an organisation's policy objectives and the concrete reality in which it operates. The size of KU Leuven's workforce, the challenges we face, the real impact that HR policy has on people's lives and well-being – these are all arguments for entrusting a **Vice-Rector** with the explicit responsibility for HR policy and organisational culture, thus forging a close link with the heart of policy-making.

ATP staff are rightly asking to further refine and optimise the job architecture framework within which it operates. Together with the HR Department, we will continue to develop the **Job Architecture Framework 2.0** in order to be able to respond more flexibly to changing or temporary needs in an entity and to employees' growth and development. We will continue to provide opportunities for talented staff within our organisation through internal mobility programmes and to strengthen the role of supervising staff in providing coaching support to a staff member's **sustainable career path**. In that context, we are also exploring introducing senior grades in those classes of the job architecture framework where they are currently lacking. ATP colleagues who, based on the specificity of a course and their competencies, have been assigned responsibility for a course, will continue to be valued and will be recognised as **course holders**, in accordance with the framework for teaching roles.

In many ways, **ABAP staff** form a special group within KU Leuven. ABAP colleagues make a fundamental contribution to the core missions of our university – teaching and research – but sometimes experience the fixed term of their contract as frustrating. Too often they still feel sidelined and insufficiently heard or appreciated. We, therefore, intend to work with them towards **concrete actions and initiatives** that can sustainably be implemented throughout the organisation and that can positively contribute to how they experience their work environment and to their perception of appreciation. An essential part of this is **receiving and giving feedback** in structural **career development conversations**. If ABAP colleagues are weighed down by inappropriate behaviour or too high a workload, we as an organisation have to take **responsibility**, fully aware that they are all too often in a vulnerable position.

It is important to remain honest in our communication with ABAP colleagues about the temporary nature of their position (and therefore support them in their further career planning): after all, not everyone can stay at KU Leuven and ZAP staff cannot make commitments they may not be able to fulfil. At the same time, we should heed the results of a first thorough evaluation of **the "ODOT" policy**. This recently introduced policy is meant to put an end to the uncertainty associated with repeated short-term fixed-term contracts, replacing them with contracts of indefinite duration with a final date ("ODOT"). Does the ODOT policy achieve that goal, and does the increased

awareness it aims to raise around the precarious situation of ABAP colleagues in temporary positions lead to an increase in permanent contracts? We will listen to both the ABAP and ZAP colleagues involved and the faculties and departments.

The financial differences among PhD students coming to KU Leuven on foreign PhD scholarships are large. Not all such **doctoral scholarships** are sufficient to cover the cost of living in Flanders, and many of these PhD students experience additional mental pressure as a result. As we need to correctly appreciate the value of their contribution to our research output, we have the moral responsibility to map out how big the financial differences really are, how many PhD students we attract find themselves in a difficult financial situation, and, if we want to continue to attract them, what measures are needed to offer this group of PhD students a fair trajectory and a fair chance of success.

The new “**framework for recognising and valuing high-quality academic work**” for ZAP staff resolutely opts for an ambitious HR policy for ZAP staff which, within the institution’s values and needs, leaves room for personal choices, i.e. for a truly differentiated ZAP career framework. It is especially important to introduce this framework now by embedding it systematically in the different phases of the ZAP career: from job application (as in job vacancy texts), over tenure track contracts (including giving attention to the specific situation of international colleagues), to ZAP reviews and BeCo advice on applications for promotion. Only in this way can the new framework come to life throughout the organisation and realise the intended culture change.

The specific context of **clinical ZAP staff** merits special attention. Their range of tasks is in the hands of their medical head of unit, while their department and faculty coordinate the research component and assign teaching assignments, respectively. Structural coordination between all these partners is, therefore, essential to allow clinical ZAP staff to perform their broad range of tasks with satisfaction and give them the appreciation they deserve. Together with our university hospitals, we will examine how to provide them with more time and space and to communicate our expectations – now often rather left implicit – in a more explicit fashion. Individual expectations could more readily be complemented with expectations typically fulfilled at a unit level. We will also examine how applications for sabbatical leave can be made more accessible and whether the specific situation of clinical staff creates additional (implicit) barriers when they submit applications for promotion.

We continue to look after **integration staff** (OP1/OP2/OP3/ATP-IK). We need to continue to hear their voices in policy-making bodies, and we also need to correctly value their contribution to the organisation. Importantly, these colleagues are often the drivers of our programmes, and retirements are likely to lead to acute needs of a middle management among teaching staff. This calls for proactive and considerate policy-making that is forward-looking and cherishes expertise.

An organisation like KU Leuven revolves around people. Valuing and remunerating them correctly throughout their **careers** is essential. To meet the different needs and cater for the different staff profiles within KU Leuven, we will explore the feasibility and desirability of a **cafeteria plan**, together with the HR department and the representatives of the different staff groups: how can we – within the current fiscal framework – use the remuneration of our staff for activities or benefits that respond flexibly to their specific needs? For example, we can examine whether the recently developed bicycle leasing facility can be extended to other **mobility solutions**. In addition, we want to explore other options such as allowing staff to convert gross pay into additional vacation days, additional insurance, meal vouchers, or the leasing of electronics. This would give all colleagues the opportunity to tailor their **salary packages** to their needs, keeping our salaries competitive with other employers.

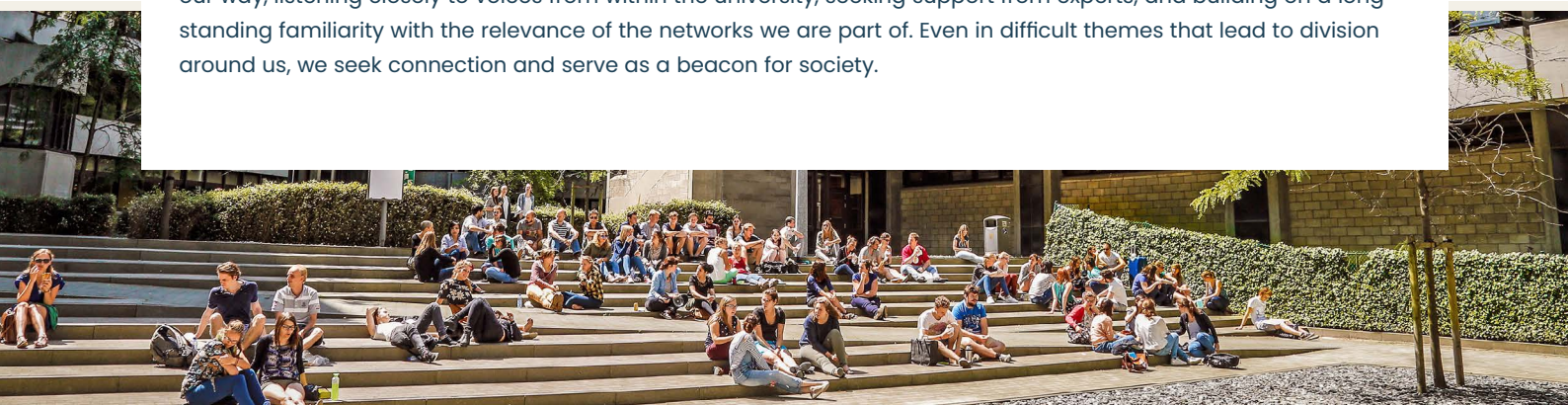


A UNIVERSITY AT THE HEART OF THE WORLD

Now more than ever, the world needs strong universities that serve as beacons in society, dare to hold up a mirror to society, debunk myths and *fake news*, and take a thoughtful and courageous stance based on their multifaceted expertise. Strong universities do this by thoroughly exploring societal challenges, sharing their analyses in a way that is accessible to policymakers and the general public, and, where possible, offering solutions or outlining possible next steps. The societal role that universities can and should play, therefore, has many faces. Strengthening this role and boosting the societal commitment of and within KU Leuven requires a multi-layered and broad approach, which deserves a separate chapter in my view.

In this area too, significant steps have already been taken during the past policy term, but we can and must do better. As rector, I want to be committed and driven in helping to build initiatives that strengthen the dialogue between the university and society, together with the many actors within KU Leuven who are already contributing to this. These initiatives should be embedded in our research and services, but also in the education we provide and in how we define ourselves as a people-centred organisation. They must be developed in a sustainable and inclusive manner. I, therefore, want to make engagement a lived and shared priority. The opportunities to do so are plentiful. The societal impact of our research is already significant, but it can be further enhanced through increased efforts to promote its social valorisation. Through the School of Education and KU Leuven's educational research, with LIVO as an important new partner, KU Leuven's commitment to compulsory education is taking ever clearer shape. By providing even better support for KU Leuven's lifelong learning programmes, we can also turn this into a powerful engine for disseminating our expertise more widely. And we can also step up our efforts in the field of science communication.

A university should not act from a position of superiority. It does not stand above or at the sidelines of society – it belongs at its heart. It should not just speak or listen, but engage in dialogue. It should not only fulfil its role in words, but above all in deeds. Now that universities and scientific knowledge are under pressure all over the world, it has become even more important for KU Leuven to position itself firmly and visibly in the world and to speak out. After all, research and education can play a powerful, connecting role in society, both locally and globally, and community engagement is firmly anchored in our mission statement. As universities, we can join forces even more strongly and, across borders, not only safeguard and defend academic freedom, but also provide scientifically underpinned arguments to support political decision-making. This requires enthusiastic, but also patient and connecting leadership and the strength to network and keep the lines of communication open with policymakers at all levels. Together with the university community, I want to take on this task for each of the themes that come our way, listening closely to voices from within the university, seeking support from experts, and building on a long-standing familiarity with the relevance of the networks we are part of. Even in difficult themes that lead to division around us, we seek connection and serve as a beacon for society.



1. Courageous and connected in a complex world

As academics, we are embedded in a sometimes local but usually also international community of partners who meet, challenge and engage each other in new questions based on shared interests and drive. Research and education are the glue that brings together perspectives, cultures and nationalities and focuses on what connects us rather than what distinguishes us. However, if university partners are directly or indirectly guilty of serious human rights violations or if academic freedom is compromised, we at KU Leuven must take responsibility, not only in the position we develop together, but also in the actions we take. This requires both courage and solidarity.

Our international collaborations are regularly under pressure, e.g. due to human rights violations. Using the so-called 'human rights test', KU Leuven verifies whether all cooperation agreements with external academic and non-academic partners in the fields of research, education and community engagement, abide by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This task is carried out by the Ethics Committee on Dual Use, Military Use and Misuse of Research (EC DMM). However, direct or indirect involvement in human rights violations is not always easy to determine, much to the dissatisfaction and frustration of many. There is a legitimate demand among colleagues and students for a thorough and informed debate on this issue. The recently intensified demand for greater strategic military autonomy within Europe, as well as the ever-increasing pressure on academic freedom, also compel us to take a stand. We should, therefore, invest in a **structural and transparent approach to arrive at a consensus at university level on partnerships in all their forms**, courageously and independently. The values framework endorsed by KU Leuven should give direction in this. When this courageous stance has negative consequences for individual members of our organisation, solidarity mechanisms should be activated.

At the European level, together with other research-intensive universities, we must continue to exert influence on **European policy** through strong partnerships such as LERU, and continue to emphasise the importance of academic freedom in the face of growing global aversion to scientific argumentation. KU Leuven must also demonstrate commitment within these partnerships, for example by continuing to raise the issue of a consistent and fair European funding policy that respects human rights. Through UNA Europa, we can continue to work on education and research initiatives that promote our shared societal commitment in Europe, in a bottom-up approach and therefore *together with* researchers and faculties. In the regional, European and global partnerships we enter into, let us always keep our ambitions focused and continue to challenge the partnerships themselves, scrutinising their merits and added value, and monitoring their sustainability. This is how, together, we can make broad social commitment a priority that connects us and drives us forward.

In addition to a courageous and independent stance, we also adopt a caring attitude towards colleagues and students who find themselves in precarious situations, e.g. as a result of war or totalitarian regimes. We maintain our openness to receiving students and researchers from war-torn countries or countries facing serious threats, and continue the many initiatives already in place (such as the reception of refugee students, the *Daughters for Life* programme, the EU Passworld pilot project and *Scholars at Risk*), but we are also stepping up our efforts to offer education and research cooperation in areas where people are deprived of education due to war. Through our collaboration in the consortium of universities that is shaping [the Global University Academy](#), we are working, among other things, to provide higher education for the local and often displaced population in war-torn areas and refugee camps.

2. Engagement in, for and with society

KU Leuven's mission statement leaves no room for doubt: KU Leuven wants to prepare young people for their societal responsibility, with a special focus on the most vulnerable. Now that the most vulnerable are at greater risk than ever of being left behind in a growing culture of muscle-flexing, it is essential that we fully live up to that commitment. We already take our responsibility towards society seriously in many ways. Our students can get involved through numerous initiatives, often within organisations with which KU Leuven also demonstrates its commitment through structural cooperation. Our research and education already place us at the heart of society in many ways. Last year, the importance of engagement and solidarity was structurally embedded in KU Leuven Engage and linked to the attention we also want to devote to sustainability, diversity and inclusion. A great deal of effort has clearly already been made. I want to consolidate and strengthen these efforts in the coming years, in a variety of ways. By doing so, we will make KU Leuven a place where engagement is a lived reality that connects us – to society and to each other.

The [Science Shop](#), [Service Learning](#), [Engagement at KOT](#), the [A-Crew](#), [iCare](#) ... these are wonderful examples of how our **students actively translate solidarity** into commitment both within and outside KU Leuven. Mutual involvement and partnership are central to all these forms of social solidarity: we enrich our partners, but they also enrich our education, our research and our community. Many of these help our students to turn the great importance we attach at KU Leuven to inclusion and diversity-sensitive interaction with others into concrete practice. We should be proud of the many opportunities for engagement we offer our students! Nevertheless, we want to deepen our commitment and explore how we can further expand these opportunities and enable a larger group of students to participate.

The opportunities for engagement that we offer our students are often based on cooperation agreements with social organisations and institutions. We are strengthening our **institutional commitment** to them and continue to support and, where possible, expand social initiatives such as [TADA Brussels and Leuven](#), [buddy schemes](#) for students, the [veggie bag](#), [Humasol](#) and Academics for Development ([AFD](#)). In doing so, we will leverage the strength of our regional embeddedness (why not roll out TADA on other campuses in a metropolitan context, for example?) and explore ways to extend current successful formulas, such as buddy programmes, to students with specific language needs.

Community engagement is in KU Leuven's DNA as an organisation. So why not expand the Engage programme to **staff members** and give them the opportunity to engage with society both in their own country and in the Global South? We have already made a start with the buddy system, which emeritus professors can sign up for, but we also want to involve other colleagues. This could be done, for example, through collective social engagement projects (such as [TADA](#) in Brussels and Leuven) that every staff member can sign up for. And why shouldn't we extend our involvement in the student initiatives [Humasol](#) and [AFD](#) to staff members? This would enable them to support projects related to renewable energy, water and sustainable technology in the Global South (Humasol) or to enrich themselves and create social impact by contributing to a multidisciplinary and intercultural entrepreneurial experience in the Global South ([AFD](#)). We will actively support this by allowing time for it: every staff member must be able to take a number of hours of **commitment time** during working hours, either individually or as part of a team (as 'social team building'). Because commitment enriches each of us and therefore KU Leuven as well.

In our research and education, we are already reaching out to society by **working together on research and education**. Think of citizen science, which actively involves citizens in scientific research and thus contributes to society's trust in science. Or the partnerships we enter into with schools, companies, hospitals and other healthcare institutions to jointly educate young people and prepare them for the workplace, for example through internships. We literally put our expertise at the service of society by acting as **service providers** for accessible, high-quality health and welfare care in our university hospitals, through [Z.org KU Leuven](#) or initiatives such as [PraxisP](#). With our experts, we contribute to the broad educational landscape in Flanders in development and evaluation committees for curricula in primary and secondary education. We are pioneers in the development and implementation of orientation tools, entry and positioning tests and entrance exams. These are also forms of commitment in which we must continue to invest and which we must not forget to reward internally, as they require considerable effort. In the partnerships we enter into in the context of internships, we must continue to pay careful attention to our students' working environment and social safety. And why shouldn't strong initiatives such as Lessons for the 21st Century and some of Metaforum's activities evolve into public events where dialogue is sought with a wider audience and we can **reflect together on important themes**? Metaforum is strong in community engagement that puts a spotlight on multiple perspectives and nuance, but its fascinating Lunch Discussions deserve a larger audience and could possibly be opened up more widely. Good practices such as Helsinki University's [Think Corner](#) could serve as inspiration.

The [Green Office](#), the [Ecoteams](#), the [sustainability week](#), [sustainable business practices](#)... these are just a few examples of how the commitment to **sustainability** is taking shape at KU Leuven and how students and staff are making a difference every day. It is no coincidence that we are ranked 25th in the [QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2025](#), which ranks 1,744 universities worldwide based on their environmental impact, social impact and good governance. Sustainability initiatives within KU Leuven have a broader societal impact: a lower ecological footprint of our students and staff has a local and global effect, and every sensitised student and staff member will promote the values of sustainability outside the context of their studies and work. It is, therefore, essential for us to continue to focus on sustainability in the service of society. In order to fully embrace everyone's commitment, we need a long-term **overarching sustainability vision**, as rightly requested by the [Sustainability Council](#). More than ever, we must also dare to take a critical look at ourselves: what is our ecological footprint and, above all, how can we reduce it? We have already made significant changes to our energy consumption and travel policy, but we also need to make our hospital and laboratory activities, as well as our internet and data consumption, more sustainable. In addition, each of us can also contribute by making simple changes to our habits and raising awareness, and it is up to us to inspire every student and colleague to do so with concrete ideas and actions. Where possible, we also align our overall sustainability vision and concrete initiatives with the vision and plans of local authorities, such as [Leuven 2030](#) or [Go4Brussel 2030](#).

With the establishment of the [School of Education](#), which brings together all educational Master's programmes across faculties, we have taken an important step towards consolidating our commitment to the field of education. Let us be clear: in the coming years, we want to train many more students to become strong and motivated teachers, and we want KU Leuven to continue to take responsibility for the professionalisation of the field of education. In doing so, we are fully committed to the advantages that this increase in scale brings in terms of administration, communication with students and schools, recruitment and community building, while continuing to emphasise the importance of subject-specific didactic expertise. We are strengthening our commitment to a clear internship framework and unambiguous communication with the internship schools. And we will continue to fulfil our commitment to influence Flemish policy in the discussions on teaching and the relationship with and cooperation with professional Bachelor's programmes through strong educational research and through our experts and policymakers. This will enable us to help shape the future of education in Flanders.

We also demonstrate our commitment to society through our range of **lifelong learning** programmes. Here too, steps have already been taken in recent years, including through KU Leuven Continue and by creating a financial framework that aims to help guarantee the sustainability of these initiatives through clear awareness-raising about their funding. In doing so, we will strive as much as possible, but certainly not exclusively, for self-sustaining continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives and, as an organisation, we will work with the relevant initiators, faculties and research groups to find solidarity for those initiatives that are struggling financially but are of great value due to their social impact and must be able to continue. These initiatives should not be viewed purely in financial terms – that too is commitment. To enable our research groups and faculties to focus on the provision itself, we will also strengthen the framework for lifelong learning with support formulas and business models that inspire initiators and show them the way forward, and we will continue to support them in communicating about their initiatives via [Continue.be](https://continue.be).

Following the advice of our education experts, we are also investing in an attractive and up-to-date **range of CPD courses tailored to teachers**. In addition to CPD based on the latest research findings and subject-specific teaching insights, there is a need within the field for strong training pathways for working students and “Teachers-in-Training” (so-called “LIO’s” in Dutch) as well as for microcredentials that give teachers who end up in disciplines that do not fully correspond to their qualifications a solid disciplinary boost. To this end, we will draw up a financial framework that takes into account the limited CPD resources available to schools: given the great societal importance of teacher professionalisation, we will develop an approach within KU Leuven in which exemption from overhead costs or even financial support will serve as incentives to develop cost-conscious but ambitious CPD initiatives.

With **KU Leuven Engage**, we have anchored KU Leuven’s commitment in a single overarching service that is also committed to sustainability, solidarity and inclusion. KU Leuven Engage aims to become the hub in the network of actors and partners, bringing together knowledge and practice and providing solid and sustainable evidence-informed policy support. The service will reach cruising speed in the coming years, and will act as a catalyst in the coordination and further development of initiatives and collaborations that foster solidarity and engagement, and therefore deserves every support. The opportunities here for KU Leuven are numerous. We will work with colleagues at KU Leuven Engage to explore the role they can play, whether or not in collaboration with relevant external partners, in developing a range of projects for which colleagues and teams can use their ‘commitment time’. And why shouldn’t KU Leuven Engage, with its many partnerships with social organisations, play a role in bringing together social actors and researchers, or in strengthening communication about the social impact of our research?

3. Sharing knowledge and expertise with society at full force

As members of the university and as a collective, we want to be a beacon in a very complex world. We want to put our knowledge and expertise even more at the service of society, and in particular of the most vulnerable. This does not mean that all research and education must be applied, but it does mean that we must make even greater efforts to share our research results and our researchers' and policymakers' insights in a structured and effective way in our education and with society at large. More than ever before, thorough and clear science communication must become a priority for the entire university.

At KU Leuven, we make great efforts to bring our research results and insights to the attention of society. Sometimes this is done quickly and concisely, e.g. via university-wide press releases, sometimes more slowly and for a wider audience, via KU Leuven Stories, Sonar, Sonoor, Karakter and numerous newsletters, or in a targeted and thoroughly substantiated manner, e.g. via [Metaforum's](#) or [Ethics@KULeuven's](#) position papers. Policy positions are regularly shared through Op-eds, opening speeches and/or blogs. In recent years, many other partners within KU Leuven (individual researchers, research groups, departments, faculties and now also institutes) have been working on ways to present their research in an engaging and accessible way, through newsletters, social media, blogs and/or Op-eds. This multitude of communication channels, working methods and partners paints a [richly varied picture](#) of what goes on at KU Leuven. It gives colleagues the opportunity to communicate in a targeted manner and showcase their research to society. At the same time, we sometimes miss (communication) opportunities because our approach is too fragmented, because we miss target groups or because we often hear from the same colleagues, while others may have equally important insights to share but don't know how. We will therefore work closely with the colleagues at our central services to map out exactly how KU Leuven currently interacts with society and develop a feasible approach to make the outreach and valorisation of research more systematic and purposeful, and therefore more effective. Not only for the general public, but also through targeted information flows to specific (societal, industrial and other) stakeholders. This will maximise the impact of our knowledge and insights.

There are also channels for science communication that are currently insufficiently known or utilised, and which offer accessible but no less valuable opportunities to introduce research to a broad audience or a specific target group. Examples include the Children's University, the Science Shop and Junior College. Here too, we can make progress by mapping out the wide range of possibilities in the field of science communication more systematically, streamlining and supporting them where possible, and improving internal communication about them. The possibilities offered by the Science Shop in the context of research can be promoted more strongly to supervisors of Bachelor's and Master's theses via Programme Committees. By forming teams between university-wide and local communication staff and research support staff, we can then promote and utilise this diversity of opportunities for science communication to the fullest extent possible.

Nuance and scientific argumentation always take precedence in our (proactive) communication about research results. We must also use this same nuance and scientific argumentation *reactively*, e.g. in the context of **scientific fact-checking**. As a university, we do not yet have a structural method to respond quickly to events, opinions and discourse as they surface in society. We are, therefore, exploring whether and, if so, how we can organise adequate and rapid scientific fact-checking at KU Leuven, the results of which can then be communicated just as adequately and quickly.

Our expertise should not only be at the service of the general public. It is equally important to continue to inspire both our **own policy** and that of our **public authorities** in sensitive issues or crises **from broad and diverse scientific perspectives**. Not from the usual limited group of confidants, but in full transparency and fed by the relevant group of experts (junior and senior researchers, staff and, where applicable, students). The approach to the pandemic, when we as policymakers formed a team with experts and experienced professionals, can serve as an example here. We will explore how we can structurally shape this process and integrate it into our activities. After all, we have many discussions ahead of us in which this methodology can lead to scientifically grounded and more widely supported advice and decisions, and can remove internal mistrust or frustration about opaque decision-making. Think, for example, of the discussions about the place and role of academic hospitals in the healthcare landscape. Of how the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences can make the training of clinical psychologists financially viable, with government funding and support from the University Psychiatric Centre. Of how we can make society more aware of the great importance of internationalisation and development cooperation. My experience in education policy has taught me that such an approach inspires confidence and builds bridges, both internally and in consultations with national and international political policymakers.

4. Collaborations and partnerships

Collaboration in research and education broadens our horizons and can be a powerful socio-cultural and economic lever for our region. Collaboration with scientists nearby and with academics around the world should, therefore, remain a priority. We will continue to cherish and strengthen the many strong partnerships and collaborations that KU Leuven has established. However, it is also important to keep the primary objectives of these partnerships clearly in mind, to continue to seek their added value and to act decisively if that added value has ceased to exist. As KU Leuven, which includes the university, LRD and the university hospitals, we want to achieve interconnectedness through the various partnerships we enter into for our core activities.

For many years, we have been joining forces with our university colleges within the **KU Leuven Association** to provide promising, high-quality and future-oriented higher education. As equal partners, we will continue to work consistently towards a unified higher education space that is firmly established as a continuum of programmes: from practice-oriented to academic, from short to long. A higher education area where our students' talents can develop to their full potential. To this end, we will build the necessary bridges and learning pathways between and across our institutions and will critically evaluate student pathways that have displayed a need for improvement. In the coming years, we will be asking for a **stronger commitment from our partners** to make this a reality, putting the student and their study career at the centre. Together, we can reach out to the compulsory education sector to ensure that the final competences acquired in secondary education are well aligned with the starting competences required in higher education. Where we share campuses, we should evolve towards a true partnership that creates room for a sincere collaboration in education and research, and towards a maximally joint approach to student services.

Through our School of Education, we will work with teacher training programmes at university colleges to strengthen compulsory education and will continue to develop a coherent framework for education and research in the care sector. We are also jointly committed to lifelong learning through the Continue platform and will continue to build a strong set of programmes and courses, making use of economies of scale and our regional presence in Flanders and Brussels to maximise the value of the training modules. At the policy level, we will clarify how advice and themes at the Association level are implemented within KU Leuven. To this end, we will improve the decision-making process within KU Leuven and optimise internal communication on themes that originate primarily from the Association. This will serve to clarify our involvement in the KU Leuven Association.

In recent years, KU Leuven has focused on a number of **interregional and regional partnerships**. These include the Kortrijk collaboration with the University of Lille, the strengthened collaboration with our sister university through the Leuven-Louvain University Alliance (LLUA) and the recently launched collaboration with TU Eindhoven. These partnerships allow us to join forces on an interregional level and strengthen our position and outreach in those regions. That is the strength of our local partnerships. Nevertheless, it remains crucial to critically examine the levers and initiatives we envisage within these collaborations. We will do this on a regular basis together with our partners. After all, mutual academic reinforcement must be the guiding principle and must outweigh any heightened administrative, organisational or logistical impact. This will allow us to improve valuable partnerships, but also to discontinue initiatives that are not gaining sufficient traction.

We also collaborate with **strategic research centres** (SOCs), in particular with the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and imec. At VIB, more than half of the researchers are also affiliated with the related departments of the

Biomedical Sciences or Science, Engineering & Technology groups. We will continue to embrace these partnerships, but we are also mindful of potential ambiguities that may arise from dual statutes, differences in research funding and additional KPIs imposed by partner organisations. We will resolve these issues in a transparent manner so that researchers can work together in a collegial spirit. By joining forces, we will write an even stronger story together. Similarly, we will continue to build on our partnerships with EnergyVille, Vito and SCK-CEN.

In the European context, we have pioneered and shaped UNA Europa in recent years as part of the creation of **European universities**. It is structured around a number of carefully selected priority themes and includes initiatives in both research and education. New educational programmes have been set up from scratch, sometimes under very difficult circumstances. Differences in national regulations made a full partnership for the first joint programme impossible. The first Bachelor's programmes that have been realised, viz. the Bachelor of European Studies (BAES) and the Joint Bachelor in Sustainability (BASUS), respond to a real need and offer a new generation of students a unique broad-based education. The current pilot projects must now be capitalised on, but also adjusted where necessary. KU Leuven must continue to support the faculties involved in this. Any further commitments must also be jointly supported by the various internal and external partners. That is the only way for these collaborations to evolve into a workable model and a success story that enjoys broad support.

We must continue to supplement the European initiatives and the priorities that have been chosen with other international partnerships, paying particular attention to **partnerships with the Global South**. The declining VLIR-UOS grants and the withdrawal of the United States from the international stage are challenging all European universities to take even more responsibility than before and to commit to sustainably maintaining equal partnerships. KU Leuven must have the ambition to play a leading role in this through our European and international networks, in equal partnership with local universities. In new partnerships, we should focus on existing strategic or innovative (interdisciplinary) research and education themes. We will regularly and critically evaluate ongoing partnerships on their merits. We must dare to question or simply discontinue structural collaborations that do not live up to expectations, which would free up space and resources for new collaborations. We will continue to support the more policy-oriented networks such as LERU, CESAER and Coimbra, as well as the global network Universitas 21, where we can draw inspiration from our international peers. We will encourage our colleagues to participate more widely in peer intervention activities and in webinars within these partnerships and to make the outputs of the networks more visible to everyone within the university. This will make the networks become more vibrant within KU Leuven and their power more tangible for everyone.

