

Internationalisation

1. Serving Faculties and Departments

Internationalisation is a must for any serious university; it is neither an option nor a luxury. This is why we have invested considerable energy in improving our activities in this domain. The International Office was given a new three-part structure (international mobility; international cooperation; development cooperation). The new Internationalisation Council became **the** advisory body for international policy. University Development Cooperation was also overhauled and renewed and is now ready to continue playing its specialised role, even in the financially difficult time of government cutbacks. These reforms have given new shape to intensive contacts between the International Office and the faculties and departments.

That these important steps have been taken does not mean that all the work is done. Central and decentral integration of internationalization at all levels and in all relevant central services still justly requires our full attention. New initiatives are also developing within the three Groups, which nicely complements what is happening at faculty and departmental levels, on the one hand, and central initiatives, on the other hand.

The performance of the International Office, which of course plays a key role in this area of policy, will be given a new boost of energy in the near future. Following a period of transition, a new (administrative) director will be appointed. What is also new is that specialists from senior academic staff will be requested to act as a 'referent' for a certain region, of course in dialogue with those working on the ground. This will involve a contact person who will act as a go-between between the region over which he/she has considerable expertise and all other professors and researchers who wish to involve the region in their work. It is not unimportant to note that the Office has developed a number of new software programmes designed to simplify initiatives and to make them easier to share and so on.

Students will also be given a place in internationalisation policy, by getting them involved in internal activities or by helping our student associations to get in touch with parallel entities in the partner universities.

2. Coherence in Cooperative Agreements

Subsidiarity is a key term in our internationalisation policy. This means that a faculty or a department can enter into a cooperative agreement, on condition that this has been communicated to the Office. It is up to the faculty or the department to take the initiative. If a number of sections express interest in entering into a central agreement, of course this is possible as well. The number of central agreements is of little importance as such; what matters is the quality and intensity of the cooperation. In the 2013-2017

period, central agreements were drawn up with regions such as Central Europe, Africa, South East Asia and Australia; others have since been extended.

Sometimes the nature of the partner country can play an important role in how an agreement is entered into. In this respect, the central government is not the right contact as regards cooperation with partners in America but rather the faculties, with which excellent relations can be built. Of course we will opt for the best approach. This sometimes requires considerable creativity. The Brexit will certainly leave us facing considerable challenges but they may become opportunities and lead to fresh and original forms of cooperation.

The most far reaching forms of cooperation often result in preferential agreements that involve not only a general agreement on cooperation but also implementing orders to be entered into regarding staff and/or student mobility, joint education and research projects, joint PhD or MA programmes, etc. Specific initiatives may arise from these collaborative agreements such as the 'KU Leuven-Stellenbosch Think Tank'. From the academic year 2016-2017 on the Think Tank will be awarded the label of KU Leuven honours programme.

Next to this preferential agreement with Stellenbosch University we have also been working on far-reaching cooperation with Cardiff University. Moreover, possible agreements with Japan, Australia, Taiwan, Chili and Brazil are also being explored and developed.

3. Networks

The goal of Internationalisation is to create close long-term cooperation. To obtain even greater added value from the various collaborative agreements, KU Leuven set up its first regional network, i.e. the 'Central Europe Leuven Strategic Alliance' (CELSA), with universities in Budapest, Prague and Ljubljana. A virtual fund was started with contributions from all partners in order to stimulate research collaboration and joint applications for EU projects and/or to strive for shared policy goals. Later on a similar initiative was undertaken with a number of universities in the Baltic States.

KU Leuven has also joined the *East Asia – Nordic/Benelux University Consortium*, initiated by Korea University, and also comprising the universities of Helsinki, Copenhagen and Oslo. KU Leuven also works together with *Venice International University*. New collaborative agreements can arise from this network of fourteen universities and two research institutes, in the first place regarding urgent developments such as sustainable development and climate change. There is also LMU, our LERU partner in Munich along with a number of other partners. The *Wissenschaftliches Institut Ostbelgien*, founded by KU Leuven together with the German-Speaking Community, carries out research for the government of and people living in the German-Speaking Community (Belgium). The *Universität zu Köln* also became a partner in the institute.

Of course what remains most important is the further development of cooperation with a rather limited number of preferential partners. Despite this, the notion of networks, which actually made LERU such a gigantic success, will only gain in importance in the coming years. Regional networks can form a new incentive for the way in which internationalisation is shaped. Let us be clear: KU Leuven's ambition is to play a pioneering role in this area.

4. Student Mobility

The faculties play a leading role in giving real shape to mobility policy. They were offered a checklist of possible quality criteria designed to set out a socially-aware faculty mobility policy. They were also given extensive information packages and selection criteria for out-going student mobility. One important milestone that the students were offered, was that the conversion method used for grades they acquired abroad would be clearly communicated to them prior to their departure.

The management of the various student mobility programmes was structured and grouped within the International Office, which helped the faculties with the complex but vital work. A travel grant programme was also set up within the same framework.

Particular attention was paid to the financial aspects of mobility for less privileged groups. Student groups were identified and prioritised by the Mobility Unit in collaboration with the faculties and Social Services. Students with limited financial resources were given access to the mobility system by means of 'substantial' grants. The importance of international and intercultural competences for them and for students in general is recognized by numerous governments including the Flemish and European bodies. Quantity is also an important factor in all of this – more and more students should be able to go abroad – but quality must remain primordial. In the coming years the goal in Flanders is to reach a figure of 33% of mobile degrees. The internationalisation policy in Leuven certainly wishes to help achieve this goal but recognises quality as a priority too, and also points to the specific character of faculties and of the various programmes.

5. Staff Mobility

Any contemporary university has international senior academic staff, either attracted from abroad or their own lecturers and researchers with a considerable international experience.

It must be said that KU Leuven has been highly successful acquiring Erasmus+ funding for student and staff mobility with partner countries in the EU. The principle of subsidiarity also applied here. A few of the projects tendered by the faculties were supported and further developed and submitted centrally.

A new element is our 'close foreign policy'. For family, social or other reasons, not all students or staff members can afford to spend extended periods abroad. 'Near home' international experience can be a comfort in this respect. It was with this goal in mind that we are cooperating with the universities of Nijmegen, Cologne and Lille.

A new approach to traditional calls selections and funding for staff mobility will be worked out in the coming months. The idea is to set up a help desk within the International Office for those who have plans concerning international mobility and who are therefore in search of funding. A radical simplification of application procedures is currently in the make.

We are also creating space to allow ATP (Administrative and Technical Staff) to participate in international mobility. The first related experiences are now in progress within the Humanities and Social Sciences Group.

Moreover, an attempt is currently being made to streamline the various lines of funding support within staff mobility: the categories for which special funding will be earmarked are exploratory mobility for individual staff members, initial meetings between research units and the creation of joint research projects (with or without staff support). In this way, we will be able to organize small-scale preparatory thematic workshops.

Hospitality must be **the** keyword in all forms of receiving (inward) mobility. If colleagues and senior academic staff are attracted from abroad, they should be able to find a reception structure here that will allow them and their family to integrate easily into the new work environment. Even those guest lecturers, researchers or students who are only visiting our university for a short while should also feel really welcome from the very outset.

A Welcome Desk was set up at the International Office specifically for this purpose. It is available to the university community at large and offers such services as collecting guests at the airport or the railway station; showing guests to their (temporary) place of residence, to IAM, the HR Department or to the section or faculty, etc. The purpose is to expand the activities of the Welcome Desk in the coming years and to turn it into a high-performance unit in the service of all incoming mobility.

Given its conviction that service is not only directed inward, KU Leuven wishes to be present structurally abroad. To achieve this goal, a policy of global presence has been set out comprising, among other things, a network of our own liaisons in the world. The purpose is to evaluate our current experiences in two regions (South America and Japan) and to continue to work on a worldwide network of people who know our university and who are willing to keep us informed of interesting opportunities and developments.

6. University Development Cooperation

These have been eventful years for university development cooperation. A reorientation of ministerial policy has resulted in uncertainty. In order to find a solution to this and other issues, KU Leuven has pleaded, in close and fruitful cooperation with the other Flemish universities, for more trust in and more responsibility for the universities. This plea has only had limited success thus far and the universities' financial room to manoeuvre has been limited de facto. From 2017 on, the new *Global Minds* programme could add some zest to the situation, but unfortunately it brings with it so many new rules and conditions, along with the extra funding. Add to all the above a number of chronic austerity measures enforced by the government ...

But this should not discourage us. Our Interfaculty Council for Development Cooperation (IRO) provides us with an important platform for negotiation. A study of the present professional situation of those who completed IRO-funded doctorates gives us an initial idea of the impact of IRO funding.

We also pay continuing attention to awareness raising among students and staff regarding development cooperation. Development cooperation activities can already be taken into consideration when it comes to the promotion of senior academic staff.

The university development cooperation is not an agency of the Federal Department for Development Cooperation; our task is to set out our own policy as KU Leuven. In this framework, a study was carried out recently on how KU Leuven, a number of LERU universities and other partner universities stand on development cooperation. It has emerged from the study that a diversification of sources of funding is needed; still today, there is too much dependence on federal development cooperation. Crowd funding for clearly defined projects is a possibility, while companies, especially those active in developing countries, must be addressed and rendered responsible. And of course the funding campaigns run by KU Leuven at home and abroad can target development cooperation in a clear and precise way. In this respect, the Father Damian Fund is an important asset among all the other funds in the United States where it is very well known. Whatever the case, care for development cooperation is part of our university's DNA, a university that holds human and social values in high respect.

Particular attention needs to be paid to so-called emerging countries and to their leading universities. They no longer qualify for classical development cooperation. Though their academic potential is limited, cooperation with their leading research groups would be interesting both for us and for them.

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Internationalization is a challenging policy domain that touches all of the university's sections and activities. Sometimes it involves large-scale policy, sometimes small but highly important expressions of hospitality and everyday care for international visitors. Sometimes it involves highly targeted, strategically well thought out initiatives to create new contacts, sometimes ordinary everyday forms of common sense – think for example of keeping in touch with foreign alumni: 'ambassadors' should be treated with the necessary respect.

The International Office has gone through a number of rather turbulent periods. This is never pleasant when it is happening but it does result in a higher degree of alertness regarding the work at hand: much can be said about KU Leuven's international policy but it cannot be accused of falling asleep on the job. It is an area with many complex matters in which one has to fight very hard to take one step in the right direction. It is a terrain in which one can trace one's own policy lines only to a very limited degree but it is also a domain in which all our sections can exercise great influence and discover considerable intellectual advantage. So, does internationalisation lead to a better university? Isn't that what it's all about, surely?