

# Students

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In my 2013 electoral programme, I stated that instead of considering students as consumers, they should be treated as full members of the academic community and I promised my support to the student representatives so they could fulfil their role successfully. Students fully participate in life at the university. In fact, at KU Leuven, they are considered as co-governors. One of the best experiences, for myself and my policy team, has been helping to shape this co-governance in the past few years, on all levels and in all tiers of student life. When the student protests broke out in Amsterdam, I became even more aware of how powerful the Leuven student participation model was and how important it is that we cherish it and work on making it even stronger in the future. The value of student participation at KU Leuven is quite simply down to the students' own merit. Stura, the KU Leuven Student Council, has developed into a body for *all* the students of KU Leuven. It is an engaged, constructive, professional and where necessary critical council. Every fortnight, Stura's general meeting brings together nearly 150 student representatives for a dialogue about the university. The solid Stura positions and position papers that followed from this dialogue were always discussed in further consultations by the governors. Stura also made a consistent effort to ensure the voice of all the students was heard, organising surveys about important matters that often involved many thousands of respondents to define a position.

The faculties' consultative bodies have become more important, and literally hundreds of year representatives and student representatives in Programme Committees (POCs) help shape faculty life and education at the university. The recent *Nacht van de POC* event was a new highlight in this process, engaging the entire university. As policy-makers, we have helped give students a stronger voice. Thanks to the new quality assurance method, called COBRA, students for the very first time can share their opinion, *independently* and *systematically*, on all aspects of study programmes, instead of once every eight years in the course of an external review. Their opinion has now become a structural element in the normal operation of the Programme Committee. The result is immediate, in the form of action plans that must be closely followed.

Besides this, we must certainly also mention the strong operation of student associations and clubs. I have been their guest on countless occasions and was able to discover and experience first-hand how multi-faceted and dynamic they are. In the future, they can continue to rely on my full moral support and the necessary financial and logistical resources. Student Affairs provided strong input for making students, studies and student representation stronger in every possible respect, both in Leuven and on the other campuses. They always pay special attention and great care to students who need special support or assistance, or who are confronted with setbacks or a loss. The number of initiatives taken is impressively large and they were always the result of consultation with the student representatives. They include measures for a reliable orientation and student intake, good progression thanks to adequate student career counselling and initiatives for a successful graduation.

During the coming mandate, I intend to pursue the path we have mapped out, with the students and their representatives, to the hilt. I passionately believe in accessibility at all times, for every problem and

for every good proposal, to create a university where the best academic tuition goes hand in hand with the best possible student life, for all students, regardless of who they are.

## 1. Student Services

During the past few years, we have implemented a number of reforms and launched projects to improve the support for students, starting from the *Mission of Student Services* and the *2013-2017 Policy Plan for Education and Students*. This includes the reorganisation of the Student Health Centre, the foundation of the Student Career Centre, the LUCI Platform, MindMates, and the Code of Conduct for Student Career Counsellors, the I-portfolio, Service Learning and the Study Cost Control project.

Student services at KU Leuven aim to improve equal access to and the participation of all students in higher education, paying special attention to students from disadvantaged groups by improving the basic conditions for higher education. We do this by providing material and immaterial support and assistance and eliminating factors that impede study.

### 1. Entry into Higher Education and Orientation

KU Leuven's Orientation Policy has been strongly developed in recent years to advise and support students in their choice of a study programme. The LUCI Platform was developed together with the faculties and launched in 2015, garnering considerable national interest. The platform has since been further enriched with specific information from the faculties in order to profile how specific our courses are. In so doing, LUCI positions itself in a clearly different manner than the Flemish 'Columbus' initiative, the compulsory and non-binding Flanders-wide orientation tool introduced by Minister Crevits. Additional efforts to support secondary education in the use of the LUCI Platform will be necessary though.

While the entry of students with diversity characteristics in KU Leuven has increased in recent years, the entry of *students from an immigrant background* continues to lag behind. We must examine pull factors in addition to push factors. An important key for attracting these young people is to improve their prospects (pull) of a job with their university degree. This aspect will be further developed, together with the Student Career Centre, the Interculturality Contact Centre, the efforts of alumni, the steering committee of the Avicenna Fund and the labour market, in order to interest more young people in university studies. The 'No Talent Wasted' project aims to provide far-reaching support to students during their studies (professional intensive coaching and assistance by older students from an immigrant background in terms of course competences as well as faculty-wide development of assistance in terms of course competences). Students will be approached in a more personal way. Students and lecturers both stand to benefit from additional coaching in this respect. Students especially require more far-reaching support from the university for their transition to the labour market. We will achieve this with individual assistance and by making agreements with employers. As a university, we want to ensure that students from an immigrant background also actually find a job so they can see that a university education really has benefits. That is why it is so vital that these students meet with experience experts (alumni). These mentors can share positive and negative experiences with students. Another important aspect of this assistance is entrepreneurship. Many highly-skilled young people from an immigrant background prefer to become entrepreneurs. We have already established initial contacts with entrepreneurs' organisations, such as *Unizo* and *Unitee*. Many entrepreneurs are also interested in recruiting highly-skilled workers, and may possibly also offer work placements.

We must also make a special effort to welcome *young people from a refugee background* to our university. In the past two years, we have for example succeeded in having Syrian refugees study at our university with success. We have a wide range of English-language study courses, a decentralised offer of bridging and preparatory programmes and can also establish ad hoc programmes. In addition, we are a multi-campus organisation, with a presence in many Flemish cities, and have extensive experience with international students, offering a wide range of support facilities in terms of languages, reception, introduction and assistance (including social assistance). International Admissions and Mobility (IAM) and the Study Advice Service are working on promoting our existing offering even more and setting up a website with adapted and more accessible 'Admissions' pages, that are specifically aimed at refugees and their assistants.

Analysis of the presence of young men and young women in our study courses has revealed that a *gender imbalance* (>66% intake of one gender) exists in more than 50% of our study courses. The number of students who make a stereotypical choice is growing. Women tend to prefer 'internal' study programmes, compared with men. When women choose 'external' study programmes, they more often opt for study programmes related to the human body rather than to the material environment, compared with men. Currently, a number of initiatives for workplace learning for students are being launched in general secondary education. Experiences and encounters with professions often give students a more correct (and less stereotypical) idea of certain study courses and professions. We must invest more in this type of initiative. With the Ladies@Science project, KU Leuven also wants to interest more girls in STEM education courses. And we will focus on certain aspects even more, to eliminate these differences in intake. This includes attention to the study choice process and to guidance in teacher training courses, as well as working with alumni as ambassadors for specific courses and professions. Ambassadors can also help break gender conventions about certain study courses. We want to review the presentation of the study courses, among others in brochures and on the LUCI Platform, to help eliminate stereotypical expectations among students and future students. The university-wide 'gender studies' course can also facilitate a more far-reaching discussion about 'male' and 'female' roles.

## **2. Progression**

The attention to improving the credit completion rate, which was further stimulated by the 30% measure, gave rise to various initiatives by the Study Advice Service, in cooperation with the student career counsellors in the respective faculties. We have drawn up a mission statement and a code of conduct and organised intensive training for student career counsellors. In the framework of the mission of Student Services and the *Policy Plan for Education and Students (2013-2017)*, we paid special attention to students with diversity characteristics (first-in-family students, immigrant background, foreign language speaker, entitled to a grant). Thirty percent of the first-time students at our university have a diversity characteristic and their study progression lags behind compared with their peers. A number of faculties have decided to focus on activities aimed at first-in-family students, whereas other faculties tend to use a more inclusive approach for first-in-family students. We continue to pay great attention to the particular needs of these students. Besides the existing efforts of the faculties and student facilities, the university also recently founded the Avicenna Fund. This initiative aims to provide support for the progression of students from an immigrant background.

The number of students with disabilities at KU Leuven has increased by 11% in the last few years. The university thus faces the constant challenge of ensuring that this target group can fully participate in higher

education. Additional structural training remains a requirement in order to continue to accommodate this growing group of students. We are working on the integrated education file to ensure that university students also receive additional support, funded by Flanders. Where possible, facilities (including individual facilities) can also be scaled back. Some target groups/individuals, however, will always require them. This inclusive education concept is becoming increasingly popular internationally. KU Leuven will further examine this pathway. Ever more faculties are interested in developing a more inclusive education environment, where possible. Students, for example, frequently request more time for exams, which requires a large organisational effort by the faculty. Making this measure *inclusive* in the future means reducing the workload for the faculties on the one hand. At the same time, this will also reduce the threshold for students with disabilities, while also benefiting students without disabilities on the other hand.

In recent years, our libraries have been transformed into *Learning Centres* to provide better support for students. These learning centres are a great success on the campus in the centre of Leuven and on Campus Arenberg. This year, we will make our most modern learning centre, as part of the Living Campus concept, a reality on Campus Gasthuisberg. We are striving to extend opening times and increase the number of venues even further, especially during the revision and exam periods. This will allow us to continue to meet students' growing demand for facilities where they can study together.

The integration of *international students* still requires a lot of attention. LOKO and *Pangaea* are making a sustained effort to integrate international students and involve Flemish students intensively in this process. They achieve this by organising Orientation Days, through the Buddy Programme, the International Contact Club and social-cultural activities. The meeting centre in Vesaliusstraat will be renovated and transformed into a fully-fledged meeting centre welcoming Flemish and international students alike.

Financial factors, finally, can also inhibit a student's success. In recent years, university studies have become more expensive. The raising of enrolment fees and the consequences of the economic crisis have led to a substantial increase in the financial grants awarded by the Social Services. Ensuring that higher education remains affordable continues to be an important point of attention. Our Study Cost Control project strives to map out all the costs related to university study courses. This allows us to inform students and future students correctly and transparently about costs related to university study courses. In this way higher education continues to be affordable by enforcing differentiated thresholds for costs related to university study courses.

### **3. Graduation**

In 2014, the 'Uitstoombegeleiding@KU Leuven' networking group was established, in collaboration with the faculties, students, the Alumni Service, LCIE and the HR Department's Career Center. In 2016, the efforts of the Study Advice Service in terms of how graduation takes place resulted in the establishment of the *Student Career Center* (SCC). This centre has been conceptually organised around a number of activities and services that work alongside each other. Various initiatives will be organised for graduates, who are in the process of completing their Master or third Bachelor year, to support them in their transition to further studies, a work placement or employment in Belgium or abroad. A detailed website for future graduates lists and explains all of these initiatives. The '*Loopbaanlift*' career platform helps students search for relevant job openings, work placements and projects and informs them about career events. Setting up

individual discussions and training sessions such as *‘Eerste Hulp Bij Solliciteren’* (tips and tricks for job interviews), the organisation of several events such as the Go International project, the Job Info Day, Success in the US and the Job Application Week will be further integrated in the centre’s approach. The *Student Career Center* will also assist faculties in mapping out a tailor-made guidance programme for these graduating students, thus providing incorporation within the faculties. In the coming years, we will pay attention to the integration, publication and valorisation of the SCC’s activities. The SCC strongly targets specific groups, for whom the transition to the labour market is more difficult, such as students from an immigrant background and students with disabilities.

We encourage *Volunteering* and *Service Learning* because of their effect on shaping students’ personalities. Studies have also shown that students who engage in volunteering are one step ahead of other applicants on the labour market. The digital portfolio can also be used to publish vacant study placements, volunteering work and students jobs at KU Leuven.

Not everyone is aware of the services that Student Services provides. Despite our efforts, surveys among students have demonstrated that we must make a more sustained effort to publish our initiatives, thereby lowering the threshold to these services (study advice services, social services, student accommodation, and student health centre).

We are currently developing the *KU Leuven App*, together with students, in which you can find the information you are searching for in just three ‘clicks’. The McGill University - Montreal ([http://oohlalmobile.com/case\\_study/mcgill\\_university](http://oohlalmobile.com/case_study/mcgill_university)) app can be used as an example. It is a great way of making information, organised by campus where possible, simply available and efficiently accessible to students and staff.

## 2. Student Affairs on Campus

The responsibility for Student Affairs at KU Leuven has increased in leaps and bounds, following the integration of 14 new campuses. In 2013, protocols were agreed between the Student Services of KU Leuven and the Student Services of the university colleges with which we share campuses outside Leuven. We want to enable our students to use the services organised by the university colleges on these campuses, by funding this cooperation. We are thus investing in the same services, as set out by decree, for all students of KU Leuven. The annual *Tour of Flanders* by the Vice-Rector for Student Affairs of all the campuses has demonstrated that students there are increasingly starting to feel that they are KU Leuven students. We must continue to invest in this integration. Initiatives that have already been achieved in Leuven must be developed on all our campuses. This includes the study advice service (e.g., the *‘Student Career Center’*, advice about reorientation, efforts aimed at first-in-family students), the *‘MindMates’* project, the NapLap (the acronym for *Non Alcoholic Place/Low Alcoholic Place* pop-up café), facilities such as the extended opening hours and the availability of venues during the revision and exam periods (cf. *‘Blokken in Leuven’*), the implementation of the ‘Living Campus’ Learning Centres and meals at student rates for *all* students of KU Leuven. We will harmonise these agreements, in line with what is available in Leuven and the on-campus needs, in consultation with the faculties and the Academic Directors.

### 3. Student Activities

After integration, we thoroughly reorganised the student activities and student representation. Since the establishment of Stura (the Student Council), that body has been tasked with the organisation of the official representation of *all* students of KU Leuven. Stura has really worked hard to achieve this, as evidenced in the high praise that was accorded by the Institutional Review Committee. The Stura organisation has also fully integrated the representation of the campuses outside Leuven. In the meantime, the Leuven Student Council (LOKO) has continued to focus on the coordination of all student activities in Leuven. After the grant procedure was simplified, the student societies and recognised clubs now can take more initiatives and are more accountable as a result. LOKO organises such traditional events as the *24-uren*, Student survival, *Studenten Praatcafé (Ask me Anything)* and of course the *Beiaardcantus*, which all serve to position Leuven as the student capital of Flanders. LOKO also provides strong support for the annual 'Nuisance' campaign during the first weeks of the academic year, in collaboration with the City of Leuven. The 'Fakbar' status and the signing of the *Fakbar Code* have significantly reduced nuisance. We closely monitor its implementation. The cooperation between the university and the City of Leuven, its residents, the students and the police department is very constructive. The initiative for organising annual community meetings (Naamsestraat, Tiensestraat, Brabançonnestraat, Frederik Lintsstraat, Alma 2) to reduce nuisance gave rise to better agreements, the sharing of good practices and above all mutual understanding for resolving problem situations. This practice will be further extended to other streets that experience nuisance.

Students of KU Leuven are also successfully organising themselves in clubs, societies and presidios on the campuses outside Leuven. This process will only serve as an even greater incentive to share experiences with the Leuven societies and clubs.

The university has worked with the student representatives to ensure the student organisations have accommodation. The vital renovation of the *Koetshuis building* at 's Meiers 5 (the home of the student associations at KU Leuven, UCLL and the Lemmensinstituut, including LOKO, STURA, Veto and STAL among others) will be completed in the short term. The renovation can still commence in 2017, after the signing of the agreement for the funding thereof. We continue to focus on developing more spaces that can be used by student societies and student representation bodies. We will rely on the space allocation model for this.

For several years, students have been clamouring for a multi-purpose space for organising extra-curricular activities for larger numbers of students. In consultation with the city of Leuven and a third party, we now have developed specific plans for a venue on the Vismarkt, in the centre of Leuven. The university commits to developing this project in the upcoming period.

Student organisations, such as the student associations, LOKO and student clubs can continue to count on my support. In the future, we want to provide substantive and financial support for their operations, including for example support for training activities, logistics for organising activities and meetings and granting educational facilities, such as a break from classes for representation activities.

### 4. Health

The Student Health Centre was organised to improve mental health services for students. By organising registration interviews, the waiting period for a consultation with a psychologist has now been

reduced to two days, making this care very low-threshold, more than was previously the case. Together with the students and with the financial support of the non-profit association 'Ga voor Geluk', the Psychiatry Department of UZ Leuven and members of staff of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, we successfully launched the *MindMates* project. This project focuses on making mental health problems easier to discuss. In the years to come, the development of a network for psychological assistance in Leuven will be on the agenda. More attention to this theme will also be paid at the campuses outside Leuven.

Within Student Services, we are working on the further coordination of care and the sharing of expertise between the Student Health Centre, the Study Advice Service, Social Services and the 'Studying with a Disability' unit.

Soon the university will launch a 'Health' portal that focuses on such important themes as psychosocial well-being, nutrition and exercise, targeting both students and staff. We recently launched the contact centre and manual for dealing with *Inappropriate Behaviour*. Inappropriate behaviour occurs in all environments. The university does not tolerate such behaviour. We have therefore opted to develop a clear and transparent procedure for dealing with this theme. On the one hand, we believe in an open culture, when it comes to relationships and sexuality. Our starting point is trust and we encourage people to treat each other respectfully and discuss boundaries. On the other hand, we take inappropriate behaviour very seriously and guarantee that all the people involved will receive rapid and expert assistance. We also make a special effort to share expertise with the confidential advisers for students and staff on the campuses outside Leuven. We also coordinated our *crisis care* policy with our contact persons for *shocking events* on the campuses.

Healthy *nutrition* is an important theme. Alma's policy focuses on the 5 Gs (in English: good, affordable, healthy, convenience, enjoyment). In recent years, Alma has not only become a financially sound operation, it has also focused on a quality label, which it will develop further. Alma is also investing heavily in the Living Campus concept on the Social Sciences Campus, in the Faculty of Law, on Campus Arenberg and also on Campus Gasthuisberg in the coming months.

*Substance abuse* and the responsible consumption of *alcohol* in particular are themes that we have focused on together with students, the city of Leuven and pubs in recent years. We organised a 'Doe het eens op café' campaign (targeting binge drinking), served mocktails at the *Studentenwelkom* event and organised the *NapLap* pop-up café. We are currently working on the *Global Smart Drinking* project, together with ABInbev, UZ Leuven and the city of Leuven. By 2020, we hope to have reduced alcohol consumption by 10%.

## 5. Physical Exercise and Sport

Stimulating physical exercise and sport is a vital aspect of an active society, with attention to health, social cohesion, mobility, tolerance and sustainability. As an employer, the university has a special responsibility for its staff. At the same time, it encourages its students to develop an active lifestyle as part of the full development of their personality.

The University Sports Centre has made substantial investments in the enlargement of its sport facilities (new athletics hall). In the coming years, we will build an elite sports centre and a newbuild on the location of the current KBC Hall in Arenberg Park, thereby increasing our sports offering. After the major

survey about exercise and sports among our staff, we will now organise a survey among all students of our university. This will allow us to better tailor our policy to suit their needs. *UniefActief* became a permanent partner, for the support of the physical activities of our staff. In the past two years, we focused extensively on sitting still (too long) at work (*Doorbreek de Zitmarathon* and *Sta-secretaris*) and on creating an active workplace. We are now also taking steps to extend *UniefActief* to students, by organising exercise activities during the exam period and providing movement coaching. We are also increasing exercise facilities on all campuses (ping-pong tables on location, the Table Tennis Challenge).

In the context of the Institutional Review, the strong intertwining of Student Affairs and Education Policy has been singled out as a powerful asset of KU Leuven. At our university, we pay great attention to students, and to various aspects of their personality, including living and learning and the relationship between the two: mind and body, studies and leisure, autonomy and responsibility, freedom and solidarity. In the coming years, we want to continue to develop the interaction between both domains - students and education - along the same lines, and in a continuous dialogue between the students, the student representatives and the university's administration. We are facing some major challenges including the further improvement of orientation, the optimisation of credit completion, attention to diversity and internationalisation (gender, migration, first-in-family students and so on), the transparency and control of the cost of higher education, the further improvement of student career advice, adapted infrastructure for courses and studies, new ICT applications to facilitate studies and life (timetables, exam schedules, enrolment tools and so on), further reducing the legal issues related to exams by creating more transparency in our education information and evaluation procedures, the further development of extra-curricular training, equivalent student affairs across all campuses and enhancement of student life with more infrastructure and support. To be able to work on this, with motivated and capable student representatives, is one of the best aspects of running our university. Because students are the heart of our university. And we want to keep focusing on them to the hilt.