Building on trust

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Foreword

Dear colleagues and students

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks for the valuable input I have received following my candidature. The past few weeks have been particularly inspiring for me. I have been privileged to have fascinating and warm conversations with many of you, in which I not only gained interesting insights and ideas, but also valuable suggestions for the future of our great university.

Your involvement and enthusiasm further enriched my vision and have helped me formulate my thoughts and plans. I have integrated these conversations with my ideas and turned them into ten key messages that I share with you below.

With this, I hope to give you a better idea of what I stand for; my vision; and how I intend to face the future challenges of our university together. I believe that by **trusting** and working together, we can achieve the best results to **build** a strong and inspiring future.

Enjoy reading and thanks in advance for your time and commitment!

Kind regards



KU Leuven in 2025

Where do we stand today as a university? We offer excellent education to all Flemish and a large number of foreign young people and adults, without distinction of race, religion, skin colour, or sexual orientation.

We are a university with a solid international reputation for its innovative research in a multitude of fields. That broad strength, ranging from Human, through Exact to Biomedical Sciences is a unique asset.

We are a place where academics can shape ideas in free and respectful debate. We are an institution that engages in dialogue with the society that feeds it and does so on the basis of its scientific knowledge and academic tradition. We are an institution that actually creates social and economic value for Flemish, European and international society, by not only developing knowledge, but also actively translating that knowledge to society.

KU Leuven can only continue to fulfil these goals if our university is a community where everyone feels at home, where it is good to work and study, and to which everyone can make a meaningful contribution. We can proudly say that KU Leuven is currently succeeding in being such a community. But a university is never perfect nor static: if it wants to continue to function well, it must constantly evolve. What, for me, that evolution should be, I have summarised below in ten key messages.

My 10 key messages

1. Inspire and motivate 4
2. Students as the pulse 6
3. Create impact 9
4. Innovate and excel 13
5. University *of* and *for* all 19
6. Respect and recognition 22
7. A healthy hospital in a healthy university 26
8. Dare to question 30
9. Autonomous yet together 32
10. Ready for the future 35

1. Inspire and motivate

To maximise the discovery and use of everyone's talent, our university must put individual development first. We give everyone **opportunities**, encourage **initiative and entrepreneurship**, question rules that restrict and pay attention to work pressure and work-life balance. In this way, we ensure a **warm and healthy working and learning environment**.

KU Leuven is more than just a teaching or research institution. It is **a dynamic community** of more than 65,000 students and almost 2,000 professors (Independent Academic Personnel or ZAP/OP3), more than 7,000 doctoral students, postdocs and researchers in various positions (ABAP-OP1/2) and some 4,000 administrative and technical staff (ATP) who together ensure the fundamental support of teaching, research, management and proper functioning of the university. It is this dynamic community that creates the opportunities within and thanks to which individuals flourish. This community animates twelve campuses in Flanders and Brussels. This makes our university a **lively and diverse place of encounter, where knowledge and talent find each other and flourish.**

Recent university satisfaction survey figures show that our staff members consider their job to be important. However, 80% experience a very **high workload**, with a dark-red score that has further increased since 2021. The AAP/BAP is experiencing several problems around tasking. At the same time, the ATP still too often experiences low promotion and development opportunities.

We strongly believe in a working and learning environment in which **scientific progress and opportunities for personal development for all** are central, with an **emphasis on people's well-being in the broadest sense**. There is therefore a need for a central, structural and sustainable approach to prevent the pressures people experience (prevention), reduce existing pressures and provide our people with the necessary clarity and opportunities for development.

1. **We want to facilitate a working environment where trust is encouraged within an agreed framework.** More trust and less control. After all, trust and autonomy increase job satisfaction and engagement and reduce the risk of burn-out. We want an environment that is workable and where people are unburdened by not bothering them with unnecessary administration. **By applying the principle of subsidiarity and allowing more autonomy**, everyone can concentrate on the core of their job.
2. **We provide opportunities in research, education and entrepreneurship**. To this end, we establish **a sustainable system of mentoring programmes**, where individuals with experience help colleagues achieve their personal and professional goals. We support these mentors internally (e.g. via workshops, manuals and feedback sessions) but also publicly, by giving them visibility within KU Leuven and beyond. The aim is to create more **cohesion within teams** in this way.
3. **We reduce the current administrative burden as much as possible**. Internal procedures around privacy, ethics and other regulatory requirements for clinical or social science

studies, for example, could be simplified. We are committed to **simplifying administratively time-consuming procedures** such as faculty evaluations, with the aim of maximising participation by streamlining input. We simplify recruitment procedures, with the aim of reducing processing times, relieving the departments and individuals involved and allowing more time for smooth, quality exchanges with candidates.

In addition, support services that deal with complex processes (such as preparing timetables and exam regulations) several times a year need to be given the necessary framing and support tools, without losing sight of students' needs. Maintaining the right balance is essential here.

4. **We introduce an efficiency test with every new proposed procedure**. For each new proposal, we ask ourselves whether it is realistic and useful to implement. Staff who will be affected by or come into contact with a new measure must be involved in discussions from the outset, before implementation is started. The impact of a new procedure on the workload and the progress of research or teaching will also be assessed, and whether additional support is needed. Together, we need to regain the balance between administrative standards and practicality and refocus on the core tasks of research, innovation and knowledge transfer.
5. **We are exploring how new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), can ease repetitive and time-consuming work**. We are strengthening efforts to offer high-quality education to students, where technological innovations and central support should help make knowledge transfer and disciplinary education as efficient as possible for all. Furthermore, we are convinced that IT-supported examination can remove workloads for faculty and staff. Here, it remains important to proactively involve faculty departments in both strategic decision-making and policy implementation, so that faculty needs can be met according to their own emphases.
6. **The top priority is to create a healthy working and learning environment**. Ensuring healthy working conditions also means **providing** a **clean, tidy, green and pleasant working space**. For example, students and staff on the campuses and in some of our buildings (especially in Leuven centre) too often feel surrounded by concrete instead of greenery. We want to take even more initiatives to create a natural environment in addition to the so-called 'green lungs' being created around campuses. **Noise or odour pollution on the various campuses should be addressed as much as possible.** Furthermore, we should strive to ensure that students and staff **have easy access to healthy food** at **affordable prices** on the various campuses. We will therefore, among other things, ban the supply of soft drink vending machines and unhealthy snacks on our campuses, install more water fountains, offer healthy alternatives to red meat, focus on local food products (short chain), work with reusable materials as much as possible, safeguard the green areas on our campuses as much as possible and in these ways ensure that sustainability is structurally embedded at KU Leuven. Where possible, desirable and opportune, students and staff should also be facilitated to use the university's existing or **further to be developed sports infrastructure.**

7. **Access to affordable psychological help should be maximised for students and staff both in Leuven and on the other campuses.** The mental well-being of our students and staff is essential to their well-being and that of our university. In recent years, the Student Services Department (Stuvo) carried out a reorganisation with the aim of deploying psychologists and psychiatrists closer to the faculties. The main focus is on prevention and first-line care to eliminate study-impeding factors - both social and study-related. For example, students have access to free first-line psychologists (maximum five individual consultations) and waiting times are kept as short as possible. Unique to KU Leuven is the access to second-line psychologists and/or psychiatrists, an initiative that is not (yet) replicated at other universities. Students can choose whether to enter in the first or second line. Second-line fees are also manageable at 11-22 euros per session (group sessions free). However, subsidies are not possible for a growing group of PhD students and international students. A project was therefore recently launched for this target group. **We want to investigate how we can further expand this initiative** and, provided there is a positive evaluation, **embed it permanently. In any case, the value of buddy programmes such as MindMates for Belgian students and Pangaea for international students will continue to be recognised.** Also, peer-assisted learning (PAL) coaches remain very important for first-year students as low-threshold help with study questions.
8. **We are committed to developing a modern administrative culture at KU Leuven.** Professors are not recruited to take up management positions, but rather to conduct excellent research and provide high-quality teaching. Yet, sooner or later in their careers, most of our professors will take up a managerial position that goes beyond managing their own research group. We need to better prepare them for this through targeted training that not only focuses on knowledge and skills but also on the formation of a healthy management culture. We aim for participatory governance, where decision-makers give sufficient freedom to those they manage. Indeed, micromanagement, which is unfortunately still too widespread within our institution, is a major cause of work pressure and dissatisfaction, which results in people not being able to use their full potential.

2. Students as the pulse

Our students are **the drivers of future solutions** to societal challenges (such as sustainability, green energy, digitisation, democracy, social inclusion and pensions). To address these and other major societal challenges, students should enjoy **excellent education** where they **critically reflect and debate**, in an atmosphere of **mutual respect**, including with other disciplines.

Students make KU Leuven a unique and dynamic community. Our university has the largest student population in the Flemish educational landscape. With **23% international students and PhD students from 154 different countries**, our university is a meeting place for young people from all over the world. They help make KU Leuven a diverse and inspiring community. More than 30% of our students are on one of the 12 campuses outside Leuven.

On a global level, we are currently facing a **large** number of **challenges**, such as increasing geopolitical tensions, climate change, the unfair exploitation of raw materials in the Global South, political pressure on human rights and international law, and the dangers of new technologies to our privacy and copyrights. We are convinced that whoever chooses KU Leuven as a student, employee or researcher should be able to play an impactful role in these areas.

The success of our courses lies in the quality of our education, its organisation and the financial conditions we create for it. The accessibility of our courses is crucial to preparing as many young people as possible for the challenges of tomorrow.

1. **We recognise that the current format of the academic year is suboptimal.** The period between the end of the academic year and the start of a new one is very short and puts a lot of pressure on everyone closely involved in teaching. **One solution could be to temporarily increase the capacity of employees by, for example, working with flying squads/staff** (a model that already exists today) to support the start-up of the academic year (such as starter days). A second problem lies in the long period between the first semester and the resit in the third examination period, which is not optimal for knowledge retention. To address this, we need to work on solutions that are evidence-based, and do so in close consultation with all stakeholders and especially the students. Moreover, an entire **rearrangement of the academic calendar** would **mean a large-scale operation that may require more than one administrative period, and that can only succeed in consultation with the Association and in consultation with the other Flemish universities.** If all actors deem it opportune to reopen this discussion or to implement certain optimisations, students should definitely be included and heard from the beginning, just like all other stakeholders on whom this intervention will undoubtedly have an impact.
2. **Besides existing guidelines around the use of AI in education, there should be a concrete learning line within each course at KU Leuven to teach students how to use AI efficiently and correctly under controlled conditions.** We consider this a form of AI coaching. ChatGPT, Co-pilot and other packages offer ample opportunities for users. However, inappropriate use sometimes makes texts public, which often raises legal and ethical issues. Good **coaching around prompt engineering**, where students can generate the desired output with the right prompts (i.e. the right questions), is essential here. Currently, students in many faculties already sign a kind of honour code: they may/must use AI, but must indicate how and where they have used it, so that lecturers know which parts are authentic or not. However, there is a need for skills training, as we build into various courses for statistics, for example. Currently, there are *ad hoc* workshops around AI, or specific curricula developed. A more structural approach in the existing curriculum - either via a more in-depth course component, or via separate modules, or even a broad subject at the level of the groups or of the entire university, to be developed in cooperation with the Expert committee GenAI, the libraries and/or Leuven.AI – is needed. We should also investigate how AI can be used more concretely to better support

vulnerable students or students with certain learning disadvantages. After all, AI can be successfully used to improve the learning process and studies suggest that students can particularly benefit from it. We need to make a focused effort to ensure that KU Leuven becomes a forerunner in this. If deployed properly, AI can also allow our study supervisors to free up time: that is extra time they can spend on the most complex and/or urgent needs.

3. **Education should be research-driven** and provide in-depth knowledge and learning experiences to prepare students for future challenges. **We therefore offer our students education that integrates knowledge about societal challenges into its curriculum.** And we go a step further: we want all students to learn about sustainability in their curriculum. This complements the range of **excellent programmes in fields such as sustainability and digitalisation**. We implement educational innovations insofar as they are demonstrably efficient. Efficiency is not necessarily demonstrable in quality improvement and maintaining the same quality with efficiency improvement is also profit. This can be done, for example, through interactive work formats that stimulate critical thinking or digital tools that support efficient feedback.
4. We address the **availability of affordable quality housing for students** in close cooperation with the Student Services Department (Stuvo), the City of Leuven and the General Management Services. Affordable student accommodation such as in KU Leuven's residences is essential to allow students to fully concentrate on their studies and personal development, without financial stress. Significant efforts have already been made in recent years through additional purchases and building projects but further steps remain necessary. After all, **the average price for a rooming house has increased dramatically in recent years, notably by 100 euros over a 4-year period (2020-2024)** (source: Stadim's Room Compass). A student room now costs an average of 575 euros per month. The **university should help keep the prices, availability and quality of student rooms under control by ensuring that there are enough rooms available in (subsidised and non-subsidised) student residences**. We will continue to invest in the supply of student rooms. After all, studies show that more (new) available housing causes prices of existing housing to fall. Also, residences currently often mean a lifeline for many families. Currently, about 15% of student housing consists of residences (about 7,000 rooms), and 85% of private lots. The 15% share of residences must absolutely be safeguarded to avoid practices like in our neighbouring countries (the Netherlands) where room prices are moving towards €800. In addition, **we must focus even more on the quality of the rooms.** Rooms with a **K** label meet the quality requirements of KU Leuven or the city of Leuven and appear on Kotwijs. We commit to withdrawing the Kot label if landlords are guilty of discrimination in allocating lots.
5. **We are committed to the safety and efficiency of mobility to and on the campuses**. The availability of public transport is extremely unreliable in many locations, commuter students often feel excluded and the state of the frequently used cycle paths in and around Leuven and on the campuses is wretched in some places. This is where we as a university, in dialogue with De Lijn and the relevant authorities, need to take measures to restore and

optimise mobility on the non-Leuven campuses. We not only continue to advocate for the tram bus to be installed between the station and Hoog Kortrijk, but also try to come up with better mobility solutions in Diepenbeek and Geel, for example, together with our partner colleges.

6. **We want to pay more attention to the socio-economic problems of vulnerable students**, in which KU Leuven can play a greater supporting role. Thus, we will roll out well-functioning local initiatives such as Stuvo's Avicenna career coaching project university-wide, in consultation with all stakeholders. In the medium and longer term, we can play an additional role here by supporting sociological research, by exchanging experiences via international collaborations and by playing an active role in regional, national and European debates on inequality and poverty.
7. **Together with LOKO-recognised student circles and free associations, we are thinking about how to make the associations future-proof**: what is the role of a student association, what support (financial, legal, etc.) is needed for this and by whom should this support be provided?

3. Create impact

Academic service and entrepreneurship, international cooperation and community engagement are strongly intertwined in our university's DNA. These factors make the university ideally placed to weigh in on **policy** in a positive way. We want to feed the **Flemish, Belgian, European and international debate**. In addition, we cherish and promote art and culture as an integral part of our organisation. Because knowledge gathering, education, science and culture are not islands separate from society.

KU Leuven is more than a mere academic institution. The university is an **engine for social progress and innovation**, generating knowledge and translating it into practical solutions for today's big challenges.

KU Leuven is known domestically and internationally for its great impact on the economy and society. This impact is visible in the translation of our scientific research into society, in our educational role for students worldwide and in our clinical care. The impact is reflected in the **strong collaboration and strategic partnerships with organisations from profit- and not-for-profit sectors, with spearhead clusters such as Medvia/Flanders Bio, with the strategic research centres** imec, the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB), Flanders Make and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO), **with research institutes such as** Energyville and other **Flemish and federal knowledge institutions**.

Our academic services and social impact are thus inextricably linked. KU Leuven is globally active at the highest level in research and innovation. It is **number one in the European** Horizon Europe **research programme** in terms of funding (i.e. 277 million euros, which is 9% of our university's total research funding) and participation (we participate in an average of 600 Horizon Europe

projects a year, almost half of which as coordinators), awards more than **800 PhDs a year** and publishes **more than 4,600 scientific articles** annually. In addition, the interdisciplinary KU Leuven think tank **Metaforum** is an academic sanctuary for social debate, where nuanced syntheses of issues are published to inform public and policy-making decisions. The Department of Fundraising and Alumni Relations (DFA) connects our university community with many donors and ensures that every graduating KU Leuven student adds to it a network of 300,000 professionals worldwide. Furthermore, through **KU Leuven Engage**, the university is building a sustainable dialogue with students and teachers around diversity, sustainability, service learning and other forms of social engagement. Moreover, KU Leuven supports more than **150 active spin-offs,** received approval for more **than 160 patents for innovative technologies** in 2023, KU Leuven Research & Development (LRD) concludes more than **4,500 research contracts per year and our university has established 21 KU Leuven Institutes**. In education, too, KU Leuven is a forerunner in various fields, just think of the introduction of the **milestone system,** in which students' study progress is partly determined by completing a group of course units.

Nevertheless, there are challenges that put pressure on our ambition to further increase our social impact, such as the cuts at Flemish, federal and European level and the international political crises with accompanying pressure on our international collaborations. Therefore, we must actively put our shoulders to the wheel in concrete initiatives.

1. We are putting even more effort into **collaborations with our alumni, including PhD and Postdoc alumni, who are active within companies, civil society organisations and other institutions,** in order to translate scientific knowledge into practice faster, and to **safeguard resources for research through these collaborations**. In 2019, an **alumni platform** was made available through **KU Leuven Connect.** We are raising the profile of this network within KU Leuven so that researchers can efficiently identify alumni to initiate collaborations. Getting **young graduates** excited about the KU Leuven Alumni policy remains a challenge, and this is where important steps forward can still be made. We take inspiration from examples within certain faculties where alumni actively engage to give lectures, organise group tours and open up networking evenings.
2. Besides the alumni policy, we are looking at how to **engage companies to participate financially in the purchase and maintenance of equipment and/or buildings/classrooms, inspired by examples from abroad.** Of course, the independence of teaching and research and researchers must always be guaranteed.
3. **We remain committed to chairs, endowments and bequests**, because the expertise we gain from these resources is crucial for strengthening our academic services, entrepreneurship and community engagement. In 2024, KU Leuven received support from no fewer than 12,318 donors, 26 per cent of whom were KU Leuven alumni and 6 per cent from our own staff. These contributions, which together amounted to more than 23 million euros, enabled us to realise numerous projects. Almost 18 million euros of this was invested in healthcare research, while fundamental research outside the medical sector (2.7 million euros), education (1.8 million euros), heritage (342,000 euros) and international

projects (457,000 euros) also received significant support. The instruments that demonstrated their added value in the biomedical sphere can inspire our missions in the two other science groups.

4. **At a Flemish and national level, we are making efforts to convince policymakers to provide more budgetary space for funding and framing research and education.** The government is currently considering a new inter-university funding model, which is likely to land in 2028-2029.
5. **At the European level, together with our partner universities, we will strongly advocate increasing academic research budgets**. This is necessary to consolidate our European research and innovation position in today's rapidly changing world and to ensure that researchers have the means to continue pioneering and valorising work. The role of strong networks with a clear focus, such as the League of European Research Universities (LERU) or CESAER, is crucial here. We advocate that countries guilty of gross human rights violations should be excluded from structural European funding.
6. **We support our researchers even more strongly when applying for funding.** We already make many efforts to help researchers apply for Horizon Europe projects, for example. Here, we think especially of the Global Seed Fund, which funds pilot projects that can leverage larger Horizon Europe projects, or the grant facilitators within the Research Coordination Department (DOC) who help researchers prepare their research applications. This is a first step, and an investigation inton the efficiency of these initiatives is imminent. But we may be able to do more to help our researchers. **Therefore, we should quantify how much financial resources researchers outsource to external partners on an annual basis in the run-up to and when writing and submitting project proposals for European funding.** After all, if project applications are successful, such consultancy/management firms often request up to 10% of project funds. Taken together, we expect this to be a substantial amount that eventually flows away from the university. This amount may be in an order of magnitude sufficient to further develop the Grant Facilitating Office within the DOC.
7. Many faculties, departments and research groups no longer see the connection between their performance (such as student numbers and research output) and the (financial) recognition obtained for it. **A recalculation of the allocation of financial resources within the university is therefore imminent.** At the same time, of course, a new (intergroup) allocation can never be applied indiscriminately and should be seen as **a compass to further steer the direction of our policy**. The last intergroup allocation dates from 2012 and some adjustments have also been made since then. A new analysis of the current situation is essential to better align spending and efforts. After all, a university administration must have the right information to implement adequate policies. To re-run the same allocation model of 2012 would ignore the fact that the university has evolved tremendously since then. Significant adjustments have happened since then, such as the integration of the various college courses, the development of several small campuses, the introduction of growth paths and strategic mandates, the broad investment in the mental well-being of our students, and the additional government funding to cope with

rising physician quotas. We also refer here to the future funding model of the Flemish government, and hope for the additional resources mentioned above. **A new (intergroup) allocation in no way serves to individually count the efforts made by each staff member, service, faculty or department.** In any case, this exercise should take into account the specific situation of the integrated faculties, for instance in terms of their evolution in research culture. After all, it takes about a generation to achieve a steady state around research culture in these integrated programmes. For various reasons, this will be anything but an easy exercise, but this does not mean we should shy away from it, or fear what the outcome will teach us.

8. **We put art and cultural projects linked to the preservation of our heritage on the map, as well as culture as a field of study and part of our university public life**. We support great cultural initiatives such as the BAC ART LAB, where art and science meet and provide space for artistic experimentation, as well as the Alamire foundation study centre on polyphony. The Academic and Historical Patrimony Department not only manages KU Leuven's artistic patrimony, but is also responsible for the University's archives and heritage and the related scientific collections. The University Library also organised many exhibitions over the past 15 years, curated by KU Leuven professors and staff. In cooperation with the City of Leuven, Museum M and Art Leuven, our university also contributed to city festivals such as Utopia and the Knalfestival. Weekly, more than 400 students also rehearse with university ensembles and perform regularly at home and abroad, making culture an integral part of our university community. The newly established Vesalius Project with the Vesalius Museum is another example of the strong presence of art, culture and heritage at our university. We definitely want and need to continue nurturing these initiatives. We have an impressive university heritage of which we can be proud and in which we must continue to invest. Legacies received by KU Leuven can be used in part to allocate the funds required for this purpose.
9. **We will further strengthen ties between KU Leuven and UC Louvain.** The sister universities will have four joint degree programmes (joint programmes) in 2025-2026. In addition, honorary doctorates will be awarded together in this festive year and we will celebrate our 600th anniversary together. Joint programmes require **more structural cooperation**. This is the only way to ensure a clear and uniform learning path for all students, while at the same time limiting the administrative burden that follows from initiatives of this kind. This cooperation must therefore be deepened, also in the field of research and sustainability, but with clear added value for both parties. The fact that within a few years the campuses of KU Leuven and of UCLouvain in Brussels will border each other, offers unprecedented opportunities to strengthen the position of Leuven universities in the European capital and the metropolitan context of Brussels.

4. Innovate and excel

KU Leuven must continue to strive for **innovative and excellent teaching, research and service**, without succumbing to the **increasing pressure of overperformance**. Quality and humanity must go hand in hand.

Our education pillar: Research-driven, effective and efficient

As an educational institution, KU Leuven strives for future-oriented, **research-driven education.** In doing so, it profiles itself as a comprehensive university that wants to be a leader in, and recognises the importance of, all disciplines in the three science groups. It gives maximum support to the innovations initiated by the faculties in the educational offering.

1. **We are committed to efficiency, effectiveness and rationalisation in our education**. We must dare to reduce the complexity of our educational offering and ask ourselves how to keep educational assignments manageable in a responsible way. If we want to keep the workload under control without sacrificing quality, we must dare to reduce the number of course units we offer and review the need for all kinds of tasks and assignments. This will benefit students, teachers, support staff and education services. After all, in some programmes, students groan under an inflation of assignments for different course units. Teachers often feel under pressure to offer very different forms of education within different course units. Through rationalisation, we can make better use of scarce resources and improve the quality of education, without compromising the goals and core values of our university. Study time measurements are certainly desirable here too. We do not advocate a *one-size-fits-all* approach for all faculties: some diversity will be necessary, according to the specific contexts of faculties and programmes. We also want to fully recognise the ownership of faculties and education committees in this reform. However, we invite everyone to dare to reflect on the great variation in approach as well as in regulations within our university: after all, all these different regulations need to be maintained and applied. This not only reduces transparency for students and lecturers who are increasingly crossing the boundaries of their own faculty, it also creates a large amount of work that we could avoid by taking a more uniform approach.
2. **The university should fully value teaching tasks, including in promotion policy, and take initiatives to better measure, monitor and raise the quality of education where necessary.** We integrate social aspects such as sustainability or social engagement in measuring and evaluating the quality of education in addition to substantive themes. We want to further encourage the latter in the form of service learning, a form of learning that combines academic learning with social service, where students reflect on their experiences to grow both personally and professionally. We put **'high expectation learning'** at the forefront, with teaching staff motivating all students to reach their full individual potential. To do this, we need to create a teaching environment that builds on trust, motivates, and leads to work attitudes that put teaching excellence first. We are

exploring how to further recognise teaching excellence in the ZAP's remit. Along the same lines, we are looking at how we can strengthen and more broadly embed COBRA quality assurance - and, in particular, the structural involvement of the declining field of work, alumni and international experts in the evaluation of our education - so that, as a university, we are credibly and forward-looking prepared for the next institutional review.

3. **We are working towards a more inclusive education policy. We give representatives of faculty teaching departments a stronger voice in education policy by, for example, inviting one representative from a small faculty, one from a medium-sized faculty and one from a large faculty to sit on the Education Council**. The Education Council and the office are essential to formulate ideas and opinions for the Gebu and the Academic Council. Initiatives from the grassroots, namely the faculties, get to the Education Council faster if representation of faculty teaching support staff is also at the table, given their close involvement in the development, support and quality assurance of education.
4. **We will ensure that good teacher evaluations are equally considered in appraisals and promotions.** We will also review and evaluate the **four dimensions within the new appraisal framework** recently introduced for ZAP/OP3 evaluations in its completeness, and **involve vice-deans of education in** these processes **even better**. Teaching is still too often seen as a secondary task by lecturers, as there is a perception that research output is valued more in evaluations. Although teaching efforts do factor into ZAP/OP3 evaluations, there are still teachers who disregard a lesser or negative evaluation. This is frustrating not only for their students but also for their colleagues and the ATP and ABAP who help shape this teaching. We give Permanent Teaching Committees (POCs), faculties and departments the tools to intervene when lecturers are repeatedly negatively evaluated on teaching. We are integrating this into the new ZAP evaluation framework approved last year and rolled out this academic year.
5. We want to **further integrate innovative learning environments into every curriculum.** A modern university requires a blending of **physical and digital learning methods**. Not all teaching moments need to be organised with physical presence of both teacher and student. We want to make that blending as quality as possible by making the capabilities of our learning platforms as widely known as possible and providing our teachers with the necessary training to deliver quality blended education. We need to ensure that not only starting ZAP are taught these things, but that longer-serving colleagues can also upskill themselves. We want to anchor educational innovations when their concrete added value has been demonstrated. For instance, are we sure that (intensively supervised) group work always offers added value? Are we, in general, convinced that the form of work matters so much? Should the teacher be guiding, facilitating or activating? Can AI add value here? We want to give this turnaround time. Because if good intentions eventually result in increasing work pressure, the quality of our education will come under additional pressure.
6. **We encourage on-campus education, but from the *inclusive classroom principle*, we make online education available for certain student groups.** On-campus education as a basic principle is important for the mental well-being of students and teachers. Research (both in Groningen and Antwerp) has shown that social interaction enhances students'

processing of learning material. **We adjust the vision around the use of lesson recordings** and argue that lesson recordings should always be made available for a short time, unless this has too great an impact on attendance in the auditoria. Of course, recordings remain available for longer periods for students who are absent due to illness, for example. At the same time, it is imperative to avoid students staying at home or in their digs *en masse* because recordings are available. The right balance needs to be found here. The optimal solution will probably depend on the forms of work and the place of the course unit in the curriculum. In the search for a balance, we should also pay attention to creating sufficient added value for the students who are physically present by stimulating a variety of interaction forms. Integrating small exercises into lectures or question-and-answer sessions, for example, can help here. Being present during class should always add value.

7. **Every student and teacher must be trained in the basic principles, applications and challenges of (generative) artificial intelligence (AI).** AI and, in particular, GenAI and its expected future evolutions have become part and parcel of our society and, consequently, of our university. We need to study how to properly integrate it into our education, how students and teachers evaluate the use of (Gen)AI, what adjustments in education are needed and how to measure the impact of GenAI. Such **courses, modules or bootcamps in AI literacy** - which can be organised with lecturers and students together - can be developed centrally or (inter)faculty-wide. In time, such courses could also be delivered by lecturers in collaboration with students themselves, and possibly embedded in regular curricula. Today, KU Leuven Learning Lab support for AI literacy development is understandably very limited. We urgently need to see how we can scale up this offering, to avoid faculties feeling compelled to have to develop it themselves. In faculty training, we can add an "AI literacy" track, and these faculty can also integrate this training into their teaching portfolio as a function of their promotion. For students, we can integrate a learning pathway AI into certain basic subjects, focusing on both content knowledge and skills.
8. **International experience should be an essential part of our education.** We continue to attach great importance to language acquisition and exchange through the Erasmus+ programme, among others, and expand, preferably through our existing networks, cooperation projects with other universities, where it is useful for our students and teachers. Attention to diversity, sustainability and carrying capacity is central to this. For instance, new commitments for joint courses within the Una Europa alliance can only be made when there is an agreement with the faculties involved and when the necessary space and resources are available. At the same time, it is precisely in the current geopolitical context that we consider it very important to encourage international experiences. Internationalisation not only forms global citizens but also helps to relieve pressure on local internships. We are committed to internationalisation *at home* by addressing intercultural themes in our curricula.
9. In **our Master's programmes, we support faculties to make maximum use of the space available by decree for foreign-language programmes.** This will require collective

collegial efforts from the VLIR. It also calls for a rector to make the necessary efforts at the political forum and in consultations with the Flemish government.

Our research pillar: groundbreaking, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary

Research at KU Leuven is world class. We are world authorities in various fields, and there is an above-average flow of research results into practical applications (with accompanying valorisation) by European standards. We have repeatedly been recognised as the most innovative university outside the United States, UZ Leuven ranks 40th in the world ranking of hospitals (as compiled by the US magazine Newsweek and the data platform Statista) and KU Leuven ranks 43rd in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and 42nd in the Clarivate ranking that maps which universities contribute the most to the patents of the Top 100 Global Innovators.

To consolidate and, if possible, further improve this position, a well-considered approach is needed. This international standing is a very important part of our social capital: it makes us an interesting partner for companies; international students want to study at KU Leuven; and foreign colleagues often prefer a position at our university. In short, it makes it fascinating and satisfying to be part of KU Leuven. So keeping our research reputation high is of paramount importance.

1. **We must dare to bet more strongly on *blue sky*, *high-risk/high-gain* research if we want to remain competitive in and outside Europe.** This means giving space to basic fundamental research, funded through Special Research Fund (BOF) resources, so that researchers can continue to experiment freely in potentially ground-breaking research. This basic research is essential as an inflow of an innovation pipeline, starting from basic research, through strategic and applied research to valorisation. This was among the suggestions that emerged from the Institutional Review Research in 2024. Within the Human Sciences group, a **pioneer award** has already existed for many years for researchers with innovative ideas that open up a new research path. Such incentives could be implemented more widely.
2. We operate in a society that increasingly values visible impact and innovation from scientific research. Innovation and impact go far beyond patents, spin-offs and licences. They take many forms and are fed from all disciplines. Scientific research can provide **social relevance** in so many ways, for example by fuelling public debate, in the form of ethical perspectives on moral dilemmas or through policy advice on public health, social security, art and culture, sustainability and sustainable consumer behaviour or worker protection. It can lead to solutions that ensure that specific target groups are better reached. We want to give socially relevant research a full role in innovation policy and fully recognise it in the accompanying evaluation criteria. From this exemplary role, we must advocate that this is also implemented in Flemish, Belgian and European funding channels. Researchers or research groups that can demonstrate high-quality research with the greatest demonstrable social impact or relevance for the public debate are recognised within the human sciences group with an annual **Society Prize**. Such initiatives give recognition and

motivation to our researchers. We are driving up support to researchers around science communication, exploring in consultation with the Press and Policy Communication Department and the Marketing and Communication Department how they can gain more visibility and weigh in more on the social debate.

3. We enter into **debate with Flemish and European policymakers on how research funds can be made available to researchers in a feasible way**, and **on how best to use these funds** (supporting larger projects or several small projects, generating higher success rates, reducing the administrative burden). Certainly the success rates for European funding such as European Research Council (ERC) and European Innovation Council (EIC) remain low, and this, **together with the high administrative burden, discourages many researchers from participating in these.** We should also send the message that the chances of success when applying for an ERC Grant at KU Leuven, for example, are significantly higher than at many other institutions, mainly because of the quality of our researchers and the excellent guidance our university offers.
4. **We simplify the offer and procedures for evaluating internal funds,** as recommended by the Institutional Review Research in 2024**.** Initiatives such as core funding introduced at other universities should be closely monitored and quantified in terms of their cost-effectiveness before being introduced at KU Leuven. Start-up funding for new ZAP should definitely be maintained.
5. We should continue to strategically **focus on internal support for applications for funding**. In addition to disciplinary excellence, we promote **interdisciplinarity and team science** to bring together expertise across departments, faculties and groups, as happens in our KU Leuven Institutes. We do this not only to increase the quality of our research, but also to make research more accessible and socially relevant. Our research vision should focus less on personal (over)achievements and a *me me and I vision*, but more on collaboration and constructive substantive scientific dialogue. At the same time, individual efforts and qualities cannot matter. Scientists function in an ecosystem in which both large, interdisciplinary teams and smaller groups should have a place. It would be a pity if eminent researchers missed opportunities because potential collaborations across departmental and faculty boundaries were not sufficiently explored.
6. **Investments should be made to better support scientific infrastructure and our core facilities.** Where overlapping expertise exists with other core facilities (such as the VIB core facilities), integration and a common model should be worked out. After all, core facilities in general are an important asset for KU Leuven. They bundle *state-of-the-art* research infrastructure, databases and archives and provide specific expertise to researchers. Core facilities recognised by KU Leuven receive limited incubation funding but often struggle to become self-sustaining in the longer term. We want to upgrade the support for our core facilities, similar to what happens in our neighbouring countries.
7. In terms of digital innovations**, KU Leuven** should **focus even more on research into the ethical, useful, sustainable and safe use of AI.** Several research groups within KU Leuven, such as the Leuven AI Institute, and VIB.AI, are particularly well placed to effectively implement an acceleration of the use of AI in research but also in education. We are

convinced that a research-based implementation of AI can achieve efficiency gains and, in doing so, potentially reduce some of the workload and administrative burden. **We need to gain insight into which AI tools are really useful and helpful.** Having first versions of meeting reports generated automatically is one example. For its staff, KU Leuven has an agreement with Microsoft for the secure use of Co-Pilot, where staff members can use this tool for free and data is not shared with the general public. This solution can already be used for simple use cases. But open source models or using our own infrastructure can also be considered. All this with the aim of offering long-term solutions for everyone, including our students. We remain actively committed to the Flemish Supercomputer Infrastructure within Tier-1 and Tier-2. The new Tier-1 will offer a significant increase in GPU cores to support AI model training. Our excellent team at KU Leuven ICTS, which manages the Tier-2 infrastructure, will receive continued support to complement Tier-1 with customised services for our researchers and teaching teams, and to facilitate the integration of supercomputing with active data management within our ManGO platform.

Our service pillar: What do we give back to society?

KU Leuven has a major social impact, including through the thousands of graduating young people who enter the labour market each year well trained, through excellent healthcare in the university hospitals, through socially valuable publications and debates and through the many public activities on the various campuses. With more than 150 spin-offs, accounting for almost 7,000 direct jobs, and collaborations in the science parks and incubators, the university delivers significant economic added value to society. Venture capital initiatives, business angles and other investors in the Leuven biotope such as KU Leuven Kick, Startit@KBC, Capricorn Digital Growth Fund, Gemma Frisuis Fund and imec.istart provide space for young entrepreneurship and innovation. Thanks to LRD, DOC, our Industrial Research Fund (IOF) managers and so many others, we are able to deliver this social service.

1. **As a university, we have a social mission to bring our knowledge and insights closer to citizens.** We will therefore explore with the city of Leuven whether initiatives such as the 600-second lectures that were very successful during the Leuven Inside weekend could be repeated with some regularity, inspired by initiatives such as the University of Flanders. Also **science cafés** where our professors in Leuven or on the campuses engage in discussions with citizens and **Citizen Science Projects** such as the Health Pass in which more than 1,000 individuals participated during the opening weekend of 600 years of KU Leuven, are great examples of how we can bring the university closer to the city and region of Leuven and its citizens. An example where innovation coming from our university and citizens meet is the **Vesalius Experience Centre**, which will be dedicated to scientific research, care and society. We encourage researchers with expertise to be present in the media and social debate in order to share our knowledge with a wide audience.
2. **New technologies like (Gen)AI can be used even more to create impact in social debate**. This can be done in many ways. For instance, policy-relevant research and

expertise of our employees should translate into societal goals (e.g. the elaboration of climate policy suggested by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC). Moreover, we need to implement AI developments, AI-driven algorithms and prediction models in the day-to-day operational activities of the university and hospital in an efficient and rule-free manner.

3. **We encourage the optimal use of the 40 IOF valorisation managers that the KU Leuven Association currently has.** In tandem with KU Leuven R&D, the research consortia that form their home base, but also the entire university community, their valorisation efforts contribute to making our university one of the most innovative in Europe. Within the budgetary constraints of the IOF channel, we strive to ensure that their **valuable work benefits a wider group of researchers and the university**. IOF managers may well be active not only within the specific valorisation programme to which they are appointed, but also partly outside it.
4. **A university has the task of being an intellectual beacon in society.** We often study topics that are sometimes socially very sensitive: this can range from international conflicts (such as Gaza, Ethiopia or eastern Congo) to the application of new technology in medicine (mRNA) or agriculture (GMOs) to aspects of gender policy. Scientists cannot be content with just research: they also have a duty, even when dealing with difficult, controversial topics, to actively share that knowledge with society. More than that, they also have a duty as gatekeepers: they must help ensure that the social debate is conducted correctly and that factual truths are not omitted or distorted. Not every individual researcher at KU Leuven has to participate in the social debate, but as an institution we have to make sure that our voice is heard in all areas. We therefore want to encourage and support everyone more strongly in this.

5. University *of* and *for* all

Our policy bodies and professorial staff need to be **more balanced**, especially with regard to gender and the presence of minorities. We hope to bring the campuses outside Leuven even closer to the heart of our university. We must continue to guarantee the intake and integration of international students. Only then can KU Leuven be everyone's university, and remain a credible partner in today's diverse society.

KU Leuven strives for a university community where **diversity and inclusion** are not only respected but also **cherished as an enrichment of academic life**. An inclusive university offers opportunities to all, regardless of socio-economic background, gender, religion, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation. This is essential not only for the personal growth of students and staff, but also for KU Leuven's credibility as an active player in an increasingly diverse society.

Today, KU Leuven already makes many efforts with regard to diversity and inclusion, for example by supporting students in buddy programmes, organising orientation days and the various activities of the intercultural centre Pangaea. Especially our sizeable international community (with

23% international students in total, including 53% international PhD students and scientists and 57% postdocs) can benefit from this. For excellent master students with a migration background, KU Leuven recently launched the Focus+ initiative. This programme supports this target group to remove structural barriers in their search for a potential PhD position.

We have also come a long way with regard to the professors' corps: our academic corps has become much more international, and when it comes to recruitment, women are on average just slightly more likely to be selected. Moreover, promotion opportunities for women and men are completely equal. Yet we cannot ignore the **unequal representation in policy-making bodies.** Although the gender balance is improving in lower academic ranks (with **63% of PhD students and scientists** and **58% of postdocs** being women), the proportion of women in ZAP positions remains stuck at 38%, with only 22% female full professors. Not surprisingly, this translates into a striking underrepresentation of women in university policy-making bodies. Today, only 3 in 15 deans are women. Moreover, barely 1 in 14 department chairs within both the Biomedical Sciences Group and the Science & Technology Group is a woman. Unless our policy bodies and search committees are more balanced, decisions will not adequately reflect the diversity of the university community.

Although the 12 campuses have great strategic value for KU Leuven, too often a distance is still perceived from the university's central decision-making bodies. Besides Leuven itself, there are campuses in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Kortrijk, Bruges, Geel, Diepenbeek and Sint-Katelijne-Waver. Each of these campuses has its own individuality: the range of courses on offer varies widely, with, for example, a focus on industrial engineering sciences at the Sint-Katelijne-Waver campus (Campus De Nayer), law, business studies (FEB), languages (Faculty of Arts) and architecture and arts (LUCA School of Arts) at the Brussels campus, commercial sciences and languages at the Antwerp campus and specialisations in life sciences and industrial sciences at the Geel campus. Campus Kulak in Kortrijk offers a wide range of courses: from chemistry to history and medicine. Campuses also have specific regional positioning. Some have a large network of companies and healthcare institutions like Campus Brugge or collaborations with other universities (UHasselt) like Campus Diepenbeek. We have campuses located in historical centres of major cities, campus Ghent in the vicinity of UGent and campus Brussels in our national capital (which can offer additional opportunities). In addition, campuses also vary widely in size and autonomy, with some campuses relying more on support from, for example, partner colleges, while others such as Kulak operate completely autonomously. Finally, the student population also varies greatly from campus to campus, with Brussels' campus of some 4,000 students comprising about half of international students, which poses major challenges now that the Flemish government has decided it wants to cap funding for non-EEA students at 2% of the total number of students. In turn, other campuses face the challenges around declining student numbers.

1. **We aim for gender balance in all policy bodies, starting with the rectoral team**. Better representation of underrepresented groups in policy bodies is a neck-and-neck issue.

2. We deploy **gender** and diversity strands even more widely: not only in the faculties but also in the departments (and search committees) that help recruit new colleagues.
3. **We are setting up a mentoring programme of, by and for women and minorities** to encourage them to advance to higher academic ranks and/or take up policy roles. Indeed, we see that the few women who qualify for positions on certain policy bodies are overcrowded, or do not come forward. The proposal to divide the assessment committee into a recruitment advisory committee and a careers advisory committee may help in this regard.
4. **We aim to have the diversity policy coordinated more strongly from the new KU Leuven Engage service**, albeit in close consultation with the faculty diversity teams. The primary focus should be on student and staff recruitment, as well as on study yield (students) and throughput (staff). **We further establish concrete initiatives and actions that promote inclusion and diversity.** We take an example from initiatives of some faculty diversity teams by offering free sanitary pads, for example. We want to make all our facilities accessible to people with physical disabilities and ask technical services to prioritise this. We will comply with the legal **obligation to provide spaces for breastfeeding**. Beyond these specific initiatives, diversity, inclusion and solidarity should be embedded as full and transversal values in every domain of our university.
5. **The representation of ABAP-OP1/2, ZAP-OP3 and ATP on our policy bodies is particularly valuable. We need to inform and consult these sections more proactively**, especially during impactful reforms and when the university takes positions that may be divisive internally. After all, together with student representation, they are partly responsible for policy-making in the Academic Council
6. **KU Leuven's various campuses should be even more closely involved in the university as a whole, so that together we form a stronger and more connected academic network.** Campuses offer opportunities for better connection and outreach of our university all over Flanders. Physical integration of different faculties and programmes in the same building can make collaboration easier. In Brussels, at least, the move of the four programmes to the new Pacheco site will promote integration and create more opportunities for outreach, including to European institutions and together with our neighbours at UC Louvain. We also need to take steps forward in the cooperation between the central services of KU Leuven and those of the campuses in terms of ICTS. In addition, it is important to have open discussions about reforms of the training offer on the various campuses. This should be done in cooperation with the colleges of the Association. It is important to move from 'together at one location' to joint management, starting from a common vision. Building and managing infrastructure should become a common project on those campuses where we have Association partners.
7. **Policies and practices around attracting and integrating international students need to be further prioritised, with a stronger emphasis on their embedding and integration into our academic community.** The number of international students at our university has doubled in the past eight years. While this evolution is positive, it **also** brings **many challenges.** Despite many efforts, international students often feel **isolated**, which has an

impact on their mental well-being. We want to make this integration a priority in Stuvo's policy, in good consultation with other departments and faculty teams involved. International students should really feel at home at KU Leuven and become a real member of our *community*. Among other things, this means that the extensive student representations we have in, for example, faculty councils and POCs must also become more representative.

8. **Together with other universities within the VLIR, we need to enter the debate with the Flemish government to avoid losing international talent.** The Flemish coalition agreement states that funding for non-EEA students will be reduced to 2% of the total number of students. Within KU Leuven, however, this group makes up more than 8% of the student population. As we still charge relatively low tuition fees compared to abroad and based on our good international ranking taken into account, we should consider increasing the tuition fees for non-EEA students. In parallel, we should offer sufficient scholarships for excellent but financially less well-off students. At the teacher level, internationalisation is also strongly inhibited by the strict language policy. Results of a study commissioned by the Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (VLUHR) and the Vlaamse Adviesraad voor Innoveren en Ondernemen (VARIO) show a net positive effect of internationalisation, with direct benefits exceeding two to three times the costs. The results further indicate a positive contribution of international students to the economy with a net contribution of €400-600 per inhabitant in Flanders.

6. Respect and recognition

Integrity should always be our central value. The enormous wealth of technical, administrative, logistical, clinical and scientific expertise must be **recognised**, **valued** and optimally **valorised**, especially by moving beyond pigeonholing where colleagues are locked into their status or function.

It is essential that we constantly put the integrity of our university at the centre, not only in our academic and scholarly activities, but also in the way we cooperate with each other and value each other's expertise.

KU Leuven is made up of a diverse group of students and staff: teachers, administrative and technical staff, PhDs, postdocs, IOF managers, research cadre, ... It is crucial that we not only recognise but also harness this diversity. Respect means ensuring that every position and expertise enjoys equal recognition.

A new Job Framework 2.0 was recently developed within KU Leuven to meet the changing needs and demands from our university's organisation, evolutions and further professionalisation of the ATP framework.

Yet we see that **employees are still too often pigeonholed depending on their status or function**. This is not only the result of the way we are organised; it is also related to the way we sometimes look at our own organisation. Within our organisation, there is often a distinction between employees from different ranks, based on their formal role, position or function. This can create a hierarchy that potentially limits the contribution of individuals, potentially preventing them from getting the recognition or opportunities they deserve. We strongly believe that less hierarchy, less pigeonholing, more teamwork and more respect lead to a better work culture.

1. For the ZAP, we will **further concretise and elaborate** the valuation framework. This valuation **framework** looks wider than just fulfilling the university's tripartite mission, and takes into account various other factors such as the extent to which team collaboration and leadership happen. Indeed, good leadership (not just by ZAP) is essential for a well-functioning organisation and it is clear that we still need to make progress here. By identifying good leadership practices, and naming what deviates from them, we can make important steps forward: not only in addressing, but especially in preventing transgressive behaviour. For this, training and a culture of 360-degree evaluations are essential. Colleagues with little managerial experience need coaching before taking on new responsibilities. We need to identify those colleagues well in advance and give them time and space to prepare for a responsible role. We can also take important steps when it comes to evaluations. Too often, evaluation at KU Leuven is only done by the immediate supervisor. That is too narrow. Colleagues and, if necessary, members of the team being managed, should also be involved.
2. **We better recognise the engagement of students, ABAP-OP1/2 and ATP in policy functions.** In the case of ABAP and ATP representatives, absence from work through participation in policy bodies is not always fully recognised. Additional teaching facilities may be allowed for students in policy positions, in line with an advice from the Flemish Education Council (Vlor).
3. **We make more room for collaboration between scientists and administrative and technical staff.** This can be done by strengthening **cross-functional teams**, bringing together different areas of expertise to achieve common goals. More generally, it is essential to involve the ATP in policy as well, at all levels, and certainly not only through representation in policy bodies. KU Leuven is a complex organisation in which professors usually only take on a certain responsibility for a limited time. That in itself is a good thing, but this model can only survive in an increasingly complex context if those same professors are supported by employees who feel involved in that policy. Those staff members know the objectives and share the underlying vision because it was defined together with them. After all, policy and management inevitably grow towards each other: a good policy is not possible if it is not supported by the right management processes, and it is equally impossible to develop well thought-out management independently of all policy objectives. We are not only convinced that we need to work on this, but also that, if we achieve this, it will lead to greater job satisfaction for all concerned.

4. **We need to work on valuing expertise in all functions. We also want to work on further rolling out and optimising the job framework 2.0.** There should be more focus on the **valorisation of ATP expertise**. Employees must be given a platform to make their ideas and contributions visible and to collaborate. A very good example is the knowledge platform for laboratory technologists recently established in the Biomedical Sciences (BMW) group. Such initiatives should be rolled out university-wide, and we are sure they will be inspiring to other members of the ATP.
5. **We need to better monitor, recognise and address the specific situation and needs of ABAP.** We commit to better inform doctoral students and researchers about their professional future. Within the Biomedical Sciences group, structured consultation moments are built in for PhD students and postdocs as part of an individual development plan (IDP), in which promoters follow up and discuss future prospects with their PhD students. However, these discussions have not been implemented university-wide. **We would like to propose the IDP (or an alternative interpretation of it) in the other science groups as well and would like to roll it out university-wide.** Moreover, it is important for young researchers to get feedback and also be able to give feedback on their experiences in their research and teaching environment. **We will also pay more attention to the reception of doctoral students (ABAP)**, and in particular international ABAP
6. **We must also pay due attention to the perspectives of staff members who are included in extinguishing statutes such as OP1, OP2 and OP3 upon integration.** These colleagues often work in specific circumstances on the campuses and also have specific questions and needs that are not always adequately captured. Regular consultation with representatives of the Teaching Staff and the relevant deans is necessary to allow them to become more part of the greater KU Leuven community.
7. We must keep a close eye on allowances for **home working and cycling** and dare to prioritise within a limited financial space, but always in consideration of other desiderata.
8. **We are taking further steps to prevent and address transgressive behaviour.** KU Leuven's satisfaction survey shows that more than 25% of staff have received a report or witnessed cross-border behaviour in the last six months. This mainly involved verbal aggression, and to a lesser but still significant extent abuse of power or discrimination. In half of the cases, no adequate solution was found. Our university has taken steps in the right direction here, including strongly encouraging professors to attend a webinar on transgressive behaviour. We need to go further. **Policy around transgressive behaviour needs to be more transparent, and even more coordinated**, taking into account input from various quarters such as HR, doctoral schools and ombudspersons. Confidential counsellors should be as approachable as possible, and not take on other policy functions either. It is also important to involve **external experts** throughout the procedure. Transgressive behaviour has no place at the university. We must continue to work towards a **culture** where transgressive behaviour is named and addressed openly and without hesitation. Finally, it is very important that an administration shows the necessary decisiveness in serious cases and acts when necessary to prevent a repetition of serious cross-border behaviour. Thanks to the new disciplinary regulations, the procedures we

now have at our disposal are already a great improvement on the situation a few years ago. But we must dare to note that procedures sometimes take a very long time which leads to uncertainty and dissatisfaction among reporters. We should therefore consider how to make our procedures more efficient. Shortening certain deadlines (e.g. to submit a defence) could be a first step towards reaching a decision faster without compromising the quality of the assessment.

9. **We recognise the red results of the satisfaction monitor:** meeting them is an important form of respect. We look with experts internally and externally at how to interpret and remedy negative figures in order to formulate solutions. Career planning and career guidance are important spearheads for this. We take **performance interviews** with all employees seriously. The **appreciative career interviews** for ZAP and the **two-year onboarding processes for new ZAP** are a step in the right direction but we need to actively ensure that these are taken to heart. Both the qualitative dimensions (development and renewal, leadership, knowledge sharing, teamwork) and the quantitative dimensions should be taken into account. **An efficient, short and university-wide electronic system should be worked out for all these appraisal interviews with a uniform template to reduce the administrative burden, and to have good traceability of these interviews among rotating decision-makers.**
10. We **want to give more recognition to completing policy mandates by qualifying it as a positive element in the promotion ladder**. It is important to actively involve staff in policy-making and encourage them to take up policy mandates. This contributes to a culture of commitment and responsibility within the university. The recent proposal to split the assessment committee into an advisory committee on recruitment (which may include (head) lecturers and professors) and an advisory committee on careers (which simply includes professors no longer seeking promotion) contributes to this objective. Splitting this committee can also ensure more focus and build up expertise in recruitment and appointment, the distribution of the workload, greater opportunities for involvement of professors in appointment committees and more flexible planning throughout the year. This would allow the careers committee to allocate more time for career advice.
11. **We are working towards increased transparency and efficiency of decision-making processes and co-creation in policy-making.** Decision-making processes today are sometimes too complicated, too technocratic, with too many levels and bodies involved and therefore take far too long. We write far too many and far too long notes in which key messages drown. We deliberate too much, not always in the right constellation, and with too little result. Decision-making processes need to be shorter. Indeed, the feasibility and practical implementation of every policy decision is better tested sooner than later. Moreover, staff members feel like no other the themes within education that are hard on students and teachers. We must also trust each other if we want to avoid advisory bodies bursting at the seams in terms of composition and becoming mere information rather than advisory bodies.
12. **We let the groups play their role as governance entities.** The groups within KU Leuven are necessary: the institution is simply too large and diverse to work everything out at the

institution level. However, the groups can do more than they currently do. They have increasingly become a forum where faculty visions are articulated and confronted so that they can be streamlined. A consultation between a central department and a faculty is, in itself, a one-to-one conversation. This is certainly necessary in certain cases, but it can also quickly lead to blockages: after all, with 15 faculties, there is a good chance that divergent views will be posited by different faculties on certain topics. In recent years, the deans' consultation has developed into a forum where visions can be aligned, often successfully, but this is not possible for all themes. For a number of themes (think of marketing and communication, but also the operation around diversity and inclusion and the roll-out of innovative education), the group is the appropriate level. In that case, the central services also no longer need to consult with (at least) 15 entities but can work together with the group board or with the various working groups active in the groups. This will not only save a lot of meeting time, but also lead to a more coherent policy. Obviously, coordination between the groups remains essential: the informal intergroup consultation is very important for this.

7. A healthy hospital in a healthy university

UZ Leuven plays a pioneering role in the healthcare landscape, biomedical research and training in many areas. A sharpened focus is needed to ensure that the hospital can perpetuate that leading role. The ambition should be to bring **UZ Leuven and the university closer together** while respecting each other's individuality.

UZ Leuven is not only the beating heart of healthcare in our region and far beyond, but also an **essential part of KU Leuven**. With its size and expertise, the hospital plays an important role in the university community. The new policy plan 2025-2030 of UZ Leuven aspires to be an **Agile and Connecting UZ** to maintain its leading position in the Flemish and also the European landscape. The three **pillars of the 2025-2030 policy plan include subsidiarity**, whereby responsibility and accountability are placed in the right place, as close as possible to those involved, **innovation** and embedding in regional and supra-regional **networks**. To further develop UZ Leuven's leading position, **cooperation and mutual reinforcement between the university and the hospital** are needed.

UZ Leuven consists of several **campuses**, each with its own expertise: Gasthuisberg campus for acute care, Pellenberg campus for rehabilitation and the city campus for dentistry and oral-maxillofacial surgery. Together, they form a unique cluster of research, education and care. In addition, the University Psychiatric Centre (UPC) plays a pioneering role in mental health care.

At European level, UZ Leuven is the **second largest academic hospital**, with **8,521 FTE** (10,001 employees) in which **62 nationalities** are represented. With this team, we perform 15 million laboratory tests every year, more than 700,000 consultations, receive more than 70,000 people in the emergency department, organise more than 50,000 hospital admissions and perform almost

60,000 surgical procedures. Even more important for UZ Leuven is our leading position in organ transplantation, care for patients with rare diseases and specialised oncology programmes. Innovation is central to this and clinical and translational research is therefore essential to continue playing that leading role, especially at European level. We are currently number one in Europe for clinical trials per capita and second worldwide, and have world-leading research groups in many disciplines that contribute to innovative medical care.

Despite impressive achievements, researchers and collaborators today experience that scientific research on humans or human material is becoming very difficult to sometimes impossible, due to excessively stringent European regulations, national legislation, increasing administrative burdens and burdensome and delaying processes around legal, financial and ethical approval. This is perceived as a major pain point by a lot of researchers. Continuity of collections in biobanks is a concern and continued investment in them is crucial for future research. We will address the efficiency of these processes in the coming policy period.

1. **The basic idea should be to provide maximum support to our researchers for their clinical trials, instead of seeking to control them.** In the processes and flows for studies, it should be clear that the clinical trial centre (CTC) hould take up its service and support role in an efficient manner . Also, through optimal coordination and integration with the other support services, the Biobank and the respective Ethics Committees, approval processes should become more efficient, flexible, transparent and, above all, faster. This for both commercial (contract research) and academic studies. The latter generate less financial resources for the hospital, the university and the researcher, but are absolutely indispensable as breeding grounds and incubators for further research. Moreover, they give by far the greatest satisfaction to our staff. In addition, academic research forms the backbone of many master's theses and doctoral projects. If we ask researchers to make a big effort for this, it is only fair that they can count on an efficiently functioning and facilitating system for this, without frustrating delays and obstacles.
2. **We are strongly committed to clear guidelines and secure infrastructure for the legal, ethical and technically accessible use and reuse of health data** for scientific research. The same applies to improving quality within care and safety of our operations. UZ Leuven has many sources of **health data, stored in the digital patient file, the clinical workstation (KWS)** but also in other locations (secure registers at researchers). This software for the KWS was developed by UZ Leuven and is now owned by Nexuzhealth. There is frustration about the use (or rather, not being able to use) of data from the KWS, due to technical, legal and ethical reasons. Following the very recently implemented European Health Data Space (EHDS) Regulation 5 March 2025), we are making the transition to secure, reliable and responsible (re)use of electronic health data for research, innovations and decisions in our organisation. To this end, we cooperate with the federal Health Data Agency (HDA) and other relevant agencies. We participate in data platforms formed by consortia of hospitals such as Levilo Health, **Federated Health Innovation Network (FHIN)**, and groups of healthcare facilities in Flanders that have the ambition to harmonise, standardise and

make their data available according to the prevailing ethical principles and with a guarantee that each hospital retains full control over its data. The Observational Medical Outcomes Partnership (OMOP) data model and FHIR stores guarantee standardisation of data and storage to enable comparisons and collaborations between hospitals, to optimise care, organise prevention, enable early detection of syndromes, guarantee safety and improve clinical decisions. All this should contribute to excellent care and research at UZ Leuven.

3. **Clinical department heads should be given a framework to align the clinical and academic time commitment of their clinical ZAP so that the 30% academic time, as calculated by the allocation model, can be safeguarded**. The engagement measurement among the doctors and an analysis by the internal audit committee have made it clear that fulfilling the three-pronged mission is not a given for the clinical ZAP for whom clinical duties often take the upper hand at the expense of their teaching and research. It is the role of the head of department to ensure that there is a proper balance within the department for each individual staff member between clinical work and time for teaching and research. We recognise that differences may remain between clinical services, although the target figure of 30% academic time should be pursued. Clinical ZAP who bring in a funded mandate from the Clinical Research and Training Council (KOOR), the Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) or BOF-FKO should be given real time off for the time the mandate provides. To implement this, it is necessary to make both clinical and academic expectations explicit at the service level. We see this as a core task of the clinical service head as integrator. If output (both clinical and academic) falls below expectations, the time allocation should be adjusted.
4. We must **strategically cooperate and coordinate with regional and supra-regional networks to safeguard UZ Leuven's leading role as a university hospital**. UZ Leuven's position is challenged by a strongly changing hospital landscape. For example, we are facing a wave of consolidation, leading to the formation of a number of large merger hospitals and highly integrated hospital networks spread across the Flemish landscape. This consolidation gives these players the scale to invest in expensive and complex treatment modalities. This allows them to offer highly specialised care to patients, but also to recruit doctors with academic interests, who previously could only treat such complex pathologies in university hospitals. This complicates the recruitment and retention of doctor-specialists at UZ Leuven, especially for specialisms where the salaried status of UZ Leuven does not outweigh the financial incentive experienced by independent colleagues. By cooperating strategically within the new hospital landscape, we transform these challenges into opportunities. We must continue to pay attention to the status of the permanent medical staff (VMS) UZ Leuven in order to remain competitive with the large peripheral centres.
5. **Together with our partners in Plexus, the regional hospital network in East Flemish Brabant,** our core mission is to provide quality care as close as possible to where patients live. Important challenges are the limited scale of the regional hospitals in the network and the capacity limitation at UZ Leuven, the different mission of the three regional hospitals

compared to UZ Leuven, and differences in statutes. Further integration is therefore necessary but equally challenging. This integration offers important opportunities such as capacity expansion within the locoregional network so that sufficient space is safeguarded for our tertiary pathology at UZ Leuven. Cooperation is the way forward, for both UZ Leuven and our surrounding locoregional hospitals. We are transparent about how efforts and resources can benefit doctors.

6. **Regarding a potential joint master's in medicine at Hasselt University, it is crucial that KU Leuven makes good agreements on the quality of this programme. This will be done openly and based on international standards.** Hasselt University has a preliminary agreement with KU Leuven to jointly develop this master's degree. However, Hasselt University has not yet been granted decretal teaching competence for this master's degree. If this competence is granted, we will examine, on the basis of the preliminary agreement with Hasselt University, how we can organise an evidence-based master's programme with concrete translation of scientific insights into practice, so that our university also benefits. After all, we must avoid fragmentation and extra workload at all times. Additional resources will therefore be a central requirement, including for the assignments that will be delivered by KU Leuven to the new joint programme. We are confident that this is indeed possible. After all, we also have excellent cooperation with Hasselt University in other fields.
7. Nurses and other crucial staff at UZ Leuven and KU Leuven have to cope with housing and mobility issues. We must provide effective, structural and sustainable solutions in consultation with the government and the city of Leuven. **The structural shortage of healthcare providers** is the biggest challenge for healthcare in the next decade and is already leading to an underutilisation of capacity on campus Gasthuisberg. The sky-high real estate prices in the Leuven region make it very difficult for many employees to rent or buy affordable housing in the reasonable vicinity of Leuven. For those who live further away, smooth mobility is hampered by traffic congestion and insufficient expansion of public transport. We must work together with the city of Leuven and the surrounding municipalities to provide affordable housing.
8. **We are further strengthening the embedding of UPC KU Leuven.** Mental healthcare requires strong anchoring within the broader UZ Leuven network and within the university. Mental healthcare is important for the entire university and also offers opportunities for interfaculty and interdisciplinary research. We will also use all the expertise within UPC and Z.Org but also the Faculty of Psychological and Educational Sciences to see how we can expand counselling within our organisation given the high need for psychosocial support. By making UPC and Z.Org more visible within the university and hospital structure, we will improve collaboration and increase impact in this vital area for our students and staff.
9. **We pursue a policy of sustainable employee engagement**. UZ Leuven has more than 10,000 employees, 3 out of 4 of whom are women. We work on a healthy workload, career perspectives for and diversity among all these employees. Our employees are passionate about serving patients and supporting clinical research. An ageing population and more complex care demands are increasing the pressure on our hospitals and employees. We

are additionally focusing on increasing **well-being** and developing initiatives to reduce the workload. Here, we are thinking of flexible working hours, better career development and a stronger diversity policy. We will also implement technological innovations such as sensor technology and AI to give healthcare providers more time for their core tasks again. The Leuven ecosystem including the S&T and Human Sciences groups and Imec offer unique opportunities here

8. Dare to question

Our society, including the university, is subject to ever-increasing regulations and administrative procedures. We need to give **people confidence** while **daring to question existing processes**, coupled with **adequate risk management** (e.g. cyber security, data protection).

Our society, including universities, is increasingly confronted with a growing complexity of rules, which limits the space for creativity, flexibility and effectiveness. This can hamper innovation and initiative, often losing the opportunity to come up with new ideas and improve processes. Instead of blindly following all processes, we should ask ourselves whether each rule, procedure or working, consultation or sounding board group actually contributes to the realisation of our common goals. A simplification of processes urges itself.

We also have to dare to question procedures and structures within our organisation. The three groups are a tailor-made solution for a large organisation like KU Leuven. The appropriate scale of each group and an assigned vice-rector per group with great autonomy in terms of policy allow the necessary flexibility. The more we work at group level, the less coordination effort is needed between central services and decentralised entities. However, it is important to bring together certain services and competences within each of the groups, such as communication, personnel management or human resources (HR), finance and information and communication technology (ICT).

In addition to this optimisation, we need to be mindful of cybersecurity. Figures show that the number of cyber attacks in academia has increased, often because of interesting personal and research data, or because some research systems are less secure. It is certainly not only the less organised institutions that become victims. Moreover, a cyber-attack can cost the university very much, both in terms of material damage and reputation. Therefore, robust risk management is urgent.

1. We want to **give confidence to people**, giving them room to innovate, experiment and, in some cases, even fail. **We question processes, regulations and ways of working, where it can lead to greater efficiency, greater employee engagement, or a more innovative working environment.** We must dare to take a **flexible approach to regulation**.
2. At the same time, we need to apply **adequate risk management**. This applies not only to traditional risks, but also to the new challenges of our digital world such as **data protection**

and cyber security. KU Leuven and UZ Leuven are currently going through a European NIS 2 (Network Information Security Directive) accreditation process to maximise data protection for our university and university hospital. UZ Leuven must (compulsorily) meet the highest "essential"-level accreditation while KU Leuven is working out a plan of action with a view to an "important"-level accreditation.

3. **We apply subsidiarity in a deliberate way**, by taking decisions and actions at the appropriate level as much as possible. This supports the autonomy of different parts of the university. Essentially, we work towards **effective policy implementation** rather than mere perception. For example, a certain degree of autonomy and freedom of faculties, departments and campuses must be guarded: they must be able to set their own emphases in teaching and research within a well-defined framework. However, the individuality should focus on the content: administrative and support processes should be standardised as much as possible. Only then will we have the means to innovate in terms of content. We also have to accept that sometimes we won't get out of it through consultation: rather than organising another round of consultations, the manager(s) must dare to take a decision at that point. Naturally, this decision must be substantiated and evaluated after a while. But we must avoid a situation where continuous consultation leads to de facto stagnation.
4. **Within our own organisation, we are evaluating the governance of KU Leuven. For example, the functioning of the Academic Council (AR) should be reviewed.** The AR is chaired by the rector, and has as members the vice-rectors, the deans, the general manager, the academic administrators, staff and student representatives. According to KU Leuven organic regulations, the AR takes policy decisions to implement the university's strategy. However, today this AR is too little involved in strategic reflection and is rather an endorsing body, for the most part a formality in the decision-making process. In itself, this should not be a problem: it shows that governance works, with the AC as the end point of a path along working groups, group boards, advisory councils such as the Education Council, the Research Council, the Council for International Policy (RIB) and then the Common Bureau (CFU). But there is more potential in the AC and its members, especially the actual reflecting, discussing and deciding of strategy. To this end, above all, sufficient time is needed that allows more than 50 people to actually debate important issues and strategic choices. Formalities that are purely for info or ratification only need to be discussed if there are questions. The 2-3 topics that are discussed in the remaining time can then mainly serve as input or guidance for further policy development. The size of the AR may be a hurdle as it is difficult to guarantee the seclusion and discretion required for this. But it is essential to do this exercise. There are initiatives at KU Leuven that show it can be done: for example, at the extended group S&T meeting, most strategic themes are discussed with all department chairs, campus chairs, deans and members of the group board. This has certainly led to better decision-making but, at least as importantly, to greater engagement and interaction between all these entities.
5. We are putting together a policy team that **actively speaks to policymakers at European and national level** with the aim of accelerating the valorisation of results of innovative

research to increase impact. The EU imposes strict regulation on AI. However, it is important not to miss the boat on AI. After all, an immense digital transformation is taking place worldwide and we as KU Leuven/UZ Leuven absolutely cannot be left behind. Currently, we are digitally dependent on third countries above average. Thus, we import more than three quarters of our digital technology (mainly hardware), despite the fact that there is enough innovation and talent to develop this at a high level in Europe and also within our university. In times of political instability, it is crucial to reflect on this technological dependency. In any case, we as a university are not alone in this. The EU has recently introduced several new regulatory frameworks that allow us to use digital technologies in a responsible and controlled way. Nevertheless, each time, it is regulations that come on top of them (such as Clinical Trial Regulation (CTR), Medical Device Regulation (MDR), In vitro diagnostics Regulation (IVDR) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)) that prevent us from marketing and implementing new technologies. As a university, we should therefore enter into dialogue with European policy bodies to underline the importance that these regulatory frameworks should not hinder but facilitate researchers and developers. Only then can innovative initiatives be launched, and used at a reasonable cost.

6. We want to **be** a **service organisation for our employees, creating an efficient and customer-friendly atmosphere within our organisation,** at every level and for every member within the university community. **We want to help everyone apply the rules and procedures and, where necessary, simplify these procedures.** We are thinking, for example, of the procedures surrounding the preparation of vacancies and recruitment or the preparation of cooperation agreements and material transfer agreements (MTAs).

9. Autonoumous, yet together

KU Leuven is an independent institution that acts autonomously, which is at its best in respectful dialogue and intense cooperation with various social actors.

KU Leuven is an independent and autonomous institution steering its own course within the academic world. This autonomous functioning enables the university to make innovative and strategic choices that are in line with its values and ambitions.

The resources we receive as a university from the taxpayer enable us to conduct groundbreaking research and provide high-quality education. Again, a large degree of autonomy is extremely important, to have the space to develop a long-term vision, independent of, but in dialogue with, the funding government.

Historically and also legally, the K of KU Leuven points to the university's Catholic philosophical embedding. Its 'catholicity' is not to be understood as static, but dynamic. This means that over the centuries our university has responded to social processes and innovative movements, inside and outside the Church. Today it is a multicultural institution, and the K symbolises a broad social

commitment, carried by values rooted in a permanently evolving Christian-humanist thinking and action. KU Leuven is a house with many rooms that is open to students, staff and partners regardless of their philosophies.
However, autonomy does not mean isolation. KU Leuven's strength lies precisely in its ability to combine this autonomy with respectful dialogue and intensive cooperation with various social actors. By 2023, for example, the university has concluded more than 3,000 partnerships, often in collaboration with external partners.

KU Leuven has greatly expanded its international policy in recent years. It is a partner in several international networks: LERU, CESAER, Una Europa, CLUSTER, U21, COIMBRA Group, EUA, FIUC/IFCU, FUCE/EFCU, UnILiON, Crowdhelix, CELSA, TenU, EUHA, VIU and most recently the Taillores network of engaged universities. The Interfaculty Council for Global Development (IRMO) and the International Policy Council drive cooperation with universities in the Global South. Such cooperation includes both teaching and research in the form of projects and individual grants, aimed at supporting processes that trigger social change.

In our global society, which is undergoing a profound (r)evolution today, the concept of autonomy is more than ever under pressure. This development forces us to adopt positions and make choices that partly determine the extent to which the university can think and act freely and independently, with the sole - perhaps utopian - aim of making the world a liveable place for everyone. Emphasising the independence of KU Leuven may clash with the need for intensive cooperation with external actors, especially if interests and priorities are not fully aligned.

1. **We purposefully strengthen strategic partnerships with international institutions, but moderate less successful initiatives**. The networks in which KU Leuven is involved involve a lot of staff and administration. Continued involvement in these international networks is important for KU Leuven but we should dare to rationalise in networks where the input is greater than the *return on investment*. Moreover, there is substantial overlap of institutions between the various networks and little alignment between the individuals who are part of the working groups within these networks. In an era of scarce resources and savings, the added value **of partnerships** will have to be clearly highlighted and we must dare to discontinue partnerships that do not rise above the concept of talking shops. **A thorough analysis of which partnerships are really needed and where we can make a difference is imperative**. The major university networks (LERU, CESAER and EUA) remain important for KU Leuven, even if their direct impact is difficult to map. In principle, there should also be a direct impact at Una Europa, through collaborations around education and mobility, among other things, but certainly also through the involvement of a broader group of ATP staff who exchange experiences and knowledge at European level, which could also be a great added value for this staff group. However, the visibility of exchanges of students and teachers and collaborations around teaching, research and service as part of or as a direct consequence of these networks could be better, and the *seed funding* for involved teachers is perceived as too little for the efforts made. Nor should we always look far: there

is an opportunity to develop a mini-Silicon Valley in the Low Countries in the coming years based on collaboration with Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e), KU Leuven, and Aachen, imec and ASML. KU Leuven can play an active role in the development of that cluster: bringing actors together, developing vision, seeking complementarities where imec and VIB are central partners.

2. We continue to focus on **supporting minority** and financially weaker students (such as through the Avicenna Fund). The Focus+ Fund is a good example of a recently launched initiative to increase the chances of success of students with a migration background through intensive and personal counselling in order to better connect to university life. Measuring the outcomes of such projects is important to further adjust our policy on diversity.
3. **Naturally, we continue to engage with Flemish universities in development cooperation** with the Global South. The world is changing at lightning speed, and demographic shifts are a powerful example of this. By the end of this century, almost half of the world's young people will be from Africa. The future is global, and so must our approach. If we really want to tackle global challenges, we must continue to invest heavily in global development. This requires clear priorities and sustainable partnerships. Capacity-building is essential, both in the South and here in the North. We should listen to the success stories from the South, because they have the power to inspire policymakers and accelerate change. The solutions to complex world problems require knowledge and a multidisciplinary approach; two fields in which our university is strong. But we cannot do this alone. Collaboration through VLIR-UOS, our association partners, and LUMOS from UZ Leuven are needed to make impact sustainable. Today, funding for these initiatives comes mainly from VLIR-UOS and through our own BOF funds, such as the Zuid scholarships. We need to look wider and actively pursue diversification of funding, including through European projects. By spreading knowledge, research and training in the Global South, we create a solid basis on which our partners themselves will be able to attract international funds. That is sustainable impact. And that is what we want to continue to invest in.
4. **Leuven University is not an ecclesiastical institution. This means that the church authorities do not determine university policy and the relationship with the church is not an obstacle to free scientific research.** Rector De Somer stressed during the Pope's visit to Leuven in 1985 that free research was not in question and that the university **should have "the freedom to err"**. The discussion on the Catholic nature of KU Leuven was held extensively under Rector Waer in 2011. A Metaforum working group consisting of a broad group of academics spent a year reflecting on the university's philosophical identity. The final report suggested, among other things, broadening the content of the Religion, Meaning and Philosophy (RZL) programme component, which has since been done.
5. We must **ensure that own political preferences and free exchange of ideas remain possible at our university.** Each of us has our own political preferences; that is important in a democracy. However, we must take into account that political preferences can colour our views and decisions. A university also stands for truth-telling and free exchange of

ideas, even those ideas that some find unacceptable. The University of Chicago statement says this very explicitly. But a university equally stands for inclusiveness, for caring for each other, for respect and for social safety. There has been a strong commitment to this in recent years, but there is always room for improvement.

6. We invest in **policy-oriented research,** such as in the Flemish Support Centres for Policy Research, and we **encourage exchanges** between **researchers and politicians**, such as in the Science meets Parliament programme of the Young Academy where a scientist from Flemish universities, colleges or scientific institutions is paired with a member of parliament.
7. As a university, we have a **local embeddedness, we are part of the economic and social fabric**, as an employer and centre of innovation. We also want to be closely involved in that local environment by researching themes and helping to develop innovations relevant to the city and the region. We also pursue close cooperation in the scientific field, such as with the Leuven 2032 Urban Lab, a platform that researches and addresses sustainability challenges in collaboration with KU Leuven, UCLL, imec, City of Leuven and Leuven 2030. We have established the Children's University and organize the Science Day for the public. In the interdisciplinary think tank Metaforum, researchers from different faculties engage in dialogue among themselves and with stakeholders on social issues. For example, reflections on the university of the future were recently elaborated.
8. With **citizen science**, we are also building a direct link with citizens, warming and involving people of all ages and backgrounds in scientific research. This allows the value and nuance of science to receive more attention. We ourselves can capture new social questions and bring them into our research. Citizen science is a way to bring about more inclusion and participation. The Health Pass during the opening weekend of 600 years of KU Leuven is a great example of this.

10. Ready for the future

It is not only important to make our university ready for the next four years, but also for the decades to come. The university must be **resilient** to possible crises, and focus our teaching and research on the **major societal challenges** of the future, such as sustainability and (digital) security.

It is essential to prepare our university for the challenges of the coming decades. KU Leuven must be resilient against all possible crises, be they pandemics, digital threats, climate change or geopolitical conflicts and wars. These include the armed conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and eastern Congo. Furthermore, the evolution of the US economy and democracy and its relationship with academia is unpredictable. Major humanitarian crises are playing out around the world and a record number of more than 300 million people are expected to need aid. In particular, countries and areas such as Gaza, Myanmar, eastern Congo, Ethiopia, Syria and South Sudan are currently experiencing serious and unacceptable humanitarian crises. Nor can we ignore climate change.
To ensure resilience, we need to **focus** our **education and research efforts on the major societal challenges** ahead.

1. **As a university, we must ensure that even in a changing world order with many international tensions, unseen changes at the global level (climate) and rapid technological developments, we remain true to our core values and our function in society.** We must continue to work to bridge ideological and political divides. In a world with increased competition between continents, we need to help think how to prevent or address tensions around trade, technology and territory. We find that in some countries universities are more dictated by national politics and **academic freedom** is under strong pressure. Years of collaborations between universities are suddenly broken, with great impact on research and students. **Mobility** of people is being curbed and **talent exchange** is taking a serious hit as a result. As a university, we have to find a good balance between openness and safety, between competition and cooperation, between innovating with impact in our country versus participating in global networks. We have to adapt and cannot ignore national security concerns, but must dare to propose pragmatic solutions.
2. As a university, we have a **moral duty** to do all we can to alleviate suffering in international crises. We can do this by hosting students from these areas and providing accommodation at our university, by helping rebuild infrastructure in affected areas, or by hosting patients from disaster areas. Inspired by the example of the University of Bologna, we can offer research scholarships for students from disaster areas. The KU Leuven Emergency Fund supports students fleeing from Ukraine. We will also expand initiatives such as Daughters for Life, in which female Palestinian students from Gaza start their education at our university free of charge. We should further strengthen cooperation with the Scholars at Risk programme (SAR).
3. **We are committed to flexibility and adequate crisis response**. KU Leuven has proven to be flexible in times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 80% of academic staff and students switched to fully online teaching in a matter of weeks. In total, more than **50 digital education programmes** were developed, demonstrating how quickly and effectively the university was able to adapt. In the future, we will continue to develop **flexible teaching models**, including hybrid teaching methods, so that we can respond quickly to future crises. Our hospitals have also proven to be resilient in crisis situations such as the 2016 terror attacks and the pandemic. We need to make healthcare delivery even more resilient to crises so that UZ Leuven can continue to ensure continuity of care and patient safety in crisis situations.
4. **We need a new kind of leadership**, where every policy maker in our organisation must be able to react coolly, act flexibly, deal with uncertainties and be able to delegate, inspire and encourage teams. After all, today we live in a world where developments change overnight and upset the balance. To lead and manage an organisation in these circumstances, it is necessary to move away from entrenched structures, and a good dose of empathy and (emotional) intelligence is needed to spur people on, motivate them, make them move and work together.
5. We are putting even more effort into **research on sustainable innovations and digital security.** KU Leuven has invested **€50 million** in this over the past five years. This is just

the beginning. We will promote the development of **green technologies**, renewable energy sources and circular economy solutions, collaborating with more than **30 organisations worldwide**. In addition, the university will offer **100 courses and programmes** specifically focused on sustainability, digital transformation and security, preparing students for the challenges of tomorrow.

6. **We continue to build a resilient digital infrastructure with a strong focus on cybersecurity.** In recent years, several **millions** were **invested** in strengthening the digital infrastructure. In addition, we work with experts and **more than 30 international partners** to integrate the latest technologies in the field of digital security into our education and research. **We also support entrepreneurship in these fields by setting up spin-offs that market these cutting-edge digital technologies. The developments at our university in GenAI** and digital twins are great examples of this. Moreover, the expertise on ethical, legal and social aspects should be integrated and valorised in these research domains. This multidisciplinary expertise is present and represents a great opportunity to become a world player in these fields. The continuity of the IT infrastructure and cybersecurity deserve due attention because they will be essential for KU Leuven and the university hospitals in geopolitical crisis situations.
7. **Even more, we will focus on education geared towards the society of the future. We are installing a comprehensive model of lifelong learning that starts at the beginning of studies.** We already have **more than 3,000 students** participating annually in programmes focused on sustainability and digital security. KU Leuven continues to actively invest in **interdisciplinary research projects** and **educational programmes** that address both technical and societal aspects of sustainability and security so that our students can not only adequately respond to crises but also acquire the knowledge and skills to proactively help prevent them. In addition, the great importance of being able to deal with moral dilemmas should be pointed out, which is covered, for example, in the postgraduate programme Applied Ethics. Finally, building sustainable quality education means ensuring quality training for education professionals. Our society is experiencing an acute shortage of teachers, with major consequences for the formation of future generations of students, including at our university. It is therefore important that the School of Education (SoE), as an interfaculty centre, continues to offer educational master's programmes in various fields of science.
8. **Sustainability can still be much more embedded in the functioning of our organisation by, among other things, expanding the network of sustainability forwards and eco-teams**, which help promote sustainability in every decision-making body at KU Leuven. We could be more progressive in terms of sustainability, following the example of our northern neighbours such as Utrecht University and TU Delft. We definitely want to work on operationalising a **roadmap KU Leuven climate neutral** but also on a much broader interpretation of sustainability than just climate. We will therefore, among other things, ban the supply of soft drink vending machines and unhealthy snacks on our campus, install more water fountains, offer healthy alternatives to red meat, focus on local food products (short chain), work with reusable materials as much as possible, safeguard the green areas

on our campuses as much as possible and in these ways ensure that sustainability is structurally embedded at KU Leuven.

9. **As KU Leuven, we need to set an example** and be a pioneer when it comes to social change and dealing with crises. We certainly did so in the COVID-19 pandemic and we are currently doing so in terms of sustainability. We must continue these efforts and highlight them even more, for the sake of our conviction and mission, but also to remain attractive to future students and staff.

Summary

By looking ahead and proactively preparing for the challenges of the future, we can not only make KU Leuven stronger, but also further entrench its position as a world-leading and resilient institution.

This requires a relentless investment in our people, our infrastructure and our international collaborations. But above all, it requires a clear vision of the social issues that will shape our future.

Let's build together on trust and strengthen each other
Let's create space together by working smarter and more efficiently.
Let's return together to the core of our mission: INSPIRE, INNOVATE and make an IMPACT.

We can only have impact if we go for it together, and as a rector-designate, I want to put my shoulder to the wheel on this with full conviction, commitment and a great sense of responsibility. It will be an honour to serve you as your Rector.

Together, we can build a KU Leuven that is ready for tomorrow.