

Interview with Prof. Marc Vervenne, Rector of K.U.Leuven

'By joining forces we can put ourselves on the map internationally'

During the coming academic year the first students will move into the refurbished Leuven campus. Encircled by the buildings of K.U.Leuven, the new campus cements the bond between the School and its parent university. A symbolic moment to talk to Rector Marc Vervenne about his views on the collaborative relationship with the School and his hopes for the future.

Synergy

The early years of a marriage of convenience are not always plain sailing, but once the partners get to know one another better they learn how each can complement and strengthen the other. This scenario certainly applies to the relationship between VlerickLeuvenGentManagement School and K.U.Leuven, which signed a management agreement in 1999 and, together with Ghent University, became a parent university of the School. Professor Marc Vervenne, who has been actively involved in the process as Vice-Rector since 2000 and as Rector since last year, still remembers this period vividly: "Within the Faculty of Economics and Applied Economics at that time we had –



Prof. Marc Vervenne, rector K.U. Leuven

and still do have – training and research programmes that tied in with those offered by the School. Our MBA programme was thriving internationally. Integrating that programme into the School caused some friction initially; understandably, as it's not easy to give up something that you've worked so hard to build. Looking at it from a more positive angle, this was a unique opportunity to pool our expertise and raise our European and international profile in the field of management studies. That's why I see it as a challenge to rally faculties and departments and to get them involved in the School so as to avoid unhealthy competition and achieve a win-win situation within a stimulating competitive environment. The Policy Research Centre "Entrepreneurship, Enterprises and Innovation" clearly illustrates that this kind of involvement can yield rich rewards for both the School and the university. To secure the future of the School, it's therefore crucial to fully exploit the research competencies of its affiliated universities so as to build on our present success. I'm very much in favour of developing a partnership structure for the School, in which the universities can take their place as research partners."

Bridge to the business world

The new Leuven campus opens up the prospect not only of more intense cooperation between the School and K.U.Leuven, but also of collaboration with businesses in the Leuven area. The School creates a link between the university and a professional business school. With 70 spin-off companies to its credit,

K.U. Leuven is an important catalyst for the knowledge-intensive industry in Flanders. Firmly established on a strong campus in Leuven, Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School can contribute to increasing the quality and quantity of fundamental university research implemented in practice. Prof. Vervenne: "A university is all about independent research, while a management school is – by its very nature – closer to the business world. As a result of the close ties with its parent universities, the School serves as an important bridge between academic research and the business community. On the one hand, university researchers are in a position to freely conduct research without being bound primarily by commercial considerations and have room to develop their talent; on the other hand, the School's network gives them the opportunity to introduce new management ideas to industry. I like to compare it to the K.U.Leuven chair system where, for instance, pharmaceutical companies invest in the Faculty of Medicine for two or three years, giving researchers the necessary freedom to explore avenues that might not come to anything in the short term. Besides management training and research, I expect new synergies with the School in that field, too." ■

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