

Vision Internationalisation – Faculty of Sciences and Bioengineering Sciences

05/12/2016 – Marjan Maes and Prof. Beat Signer

The Faculty of Sciences and Bioengineering Sciences aims to provide an *international environment* for students as well as staff and a core priority is to carry out *top international research*. We strive to prepare our students for an international career, both in Belgium and abroad, and equip them with the necessary skills and competences to be competitive in an international job market.

Academia and research are in essence international fields. This is why we aim to offer a welcoming environment for international staff in order that they can further develop their career and infuse students as well as young researchers with new ideas. We work hard to attract international talent and to bring Belgian or former VUB staff back to our faculty after they spent a research period abroad. Competitive funding schemes such as Odysseus, Marie Curie and Brains Back to Brussels enable such incoming researcher mobility. On the other hand, we encourage our PhD students, postdoctoral researchers as well as professors to actively seek experience abroad via different forms of staff mobility. This not only broadens their mind but equips them with the necessary skills to teach in an international classroom. We want our faculty to be a place where international students and staff members are welcome and supported, and where mutual interaction is stimulated.

Our faculty offers a wide range of English-taught Master's programmes and aims to attract a fair number of international students. The objective is however not to attract as many *international students* as possible, but to have a healthy mix of both Flemish and international students in our Master's programmes. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasised that we aim for quality rather than quantity when it comes to student recruitment. As a faculty advocating excellence in research and education, we value a thorough selection of applicants based on merit and motivation. This makes it possible for international students to follow a continued trajectory (PhD) at our faculty and limits any potential negative influence on the study success rate ('studierendement'). At the same time, the recruitment of talented PhDs as well as postdoctoral researchers contributes to the same healthy mix of local and international students we also aim to achieve at the level of postgraduate researchers. Incoming international students should be offered the possibility to actively participate in governing bodies at the department, faculty as well as at the university level through instruments such as the International Student Platform (ISP).

We further value the contact with our *international alumni* and wish to preserve the connection they have with our faculty. Input from international alumni can provide insights in processes or curricula that might need to be improved or adapted. In addition, they can play a crucial role in setting up partnerships with higher education institutions, research institutes or private partners abroad as well as in student recruitment.

Through the influx of international students in our Master's programmes and the international research and teaching staff, students will be confronted with people from different cultural backgrounds and traditions. This is a reflection of life as it is, and will better prepare students for their professional career. We therefore aim for all of our students to have an *international experience* throughout their studies, be it through student exchange or internationalisation@home which are supported by the International Relations and Mobility Office (IRMO). Ideally, students can spend a

period abroad for either studies, traineeship, fieldwork as well as international workshops or summer schools. Students are encouraged to participate in exchange programmes and activities throughout their entire study cycle. We aim to facilitate student mobility through the introduction of Mobility Windows, a period of time reserved for international student mobility that is embedded into the curriculum of a study programme, as well as through shared courses or programmes with specific partner universities. However, depending on the specific situation of a student and the specificities of a study programme, it might sometimes be more suitable to focus on internationalisation@home activities. These internationalisation@home activities might, for example, include the attendance of an international conference or summer school, being taught by international staff and working with international researchers, working on an online project with students and staff from an international partner university or doing some group work with fellow students from a different background.

Development cooperation is considered a strategic priority for our faculty. This translates both in the influx of incoming students through programmes such as the International Course Programmes (ICP) and Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses (EMMC), but also in research and capacity building in the South. Our faculty has a strong tradition in development cooperation through funding programmes which are, for instance, initiated by VLIR-UOS and BELSPO. The different departments and research groups are encouraged to maintain their efforts and to strengthen, deepen and expand their partnerships with strong and reliable partners in the South. Whenever possible, the faculty encourages and supports development cooperation by offering sustainable administrative support for the involved research groups. The faculty further defines the overall strategic goals for development cooperation and helps in communicating these goals within the university as well as outside of the university environment.

When it comes to international partnerships we want to aim for quality. The key to successful internationalisation lies in the contacts made by our teaching and research staff. Their reputation is an excellent basis for cooperation in research and education. Rather than the number of partnerships, it is the nature and extent of the cooperation that matters. Ideally this cooperation is strategic, structured and long term, so that a synergy between research and education can be created. The cooperation with strong and attractive partners leads to a strengthening of our own educational offer and can take different forms or shapes such as joint PhDs, joint programmes or a structured exchange of students and staff, and may eventually result in the establishment of international joint research groups. Furthermore, staff members are also encouraged to act as representatives in committees. By using existing research contacts in setting up a broader cooperation framework, the relevance of the partnership for both staff and students is guaranteed.