

Key achievements and accomplishments of the 2022–2026 policy plan

(For a detailed survey, see opvolgplan to policy plan, sub '2022-2026')

1. Faculty policy

1.1 Accessible and open participatory governance

The faculty board has 10 ZAP members and is expanded to 16 members when representation from all sections (ATP, ABAP, Students) is included. Representatives are consulted separately two weeks before each board meeting. Core team meetings with the dean, representative meetings of each section with the dean, open board meetings, weekly consultation hours and the allocation of specific tasks and powers in three core teams (research, education, and internationalisation) within the board and under the coordination of the respective vice deans, ensure well-supported and transparent decision-making.

1.2 Financially sound faculty with a balanced budget

Despite university-wide cutbacks, the faculty managed to balance its budget. The clear and transparent handling of accounting units, including the decision to communicate financial aspects clearly to the faculty community, reflects the commitment to open governance.

1.3 Sustainable staff statutes and clarification of unclear situations

Various ambiguous staff regulations were clarified, leading to sustainable contracts and permanent appointments. By way of example, I refer to study career guidance, for which permanent professional staff are now responsible, under the coordination of a head of this department. This offers certainty, clarity and continuity to all involved. Long-term successive temporary contracts for some ATP and ZAP staff were also reviewed and converted into (extended) permanent contracts and permanent appointments. Chair agreements were renewed and extended or even continued until the retirement date of the person concerned.

1.4 Well-being and diversity brought to the fore

The faculty has explicitly placed the themes of social safety, well-being and diversity on the agenda, even though this is accompanied by growing pains. A specific policy officer for this area, annual training courses for ATP, ABAP and ZAP, a structured framework for discussions and career interviews with a focus on well-being, training in prevention when preparing promotion application files, and the IDEWE-RASAS survey: all help to lay the foundation for a preventive culture that requires further deepening and a well reflected implementation.

1.5 Transformation of the physical working environment and meeting places

Numerous spaces have been embellished and functionally improved with great attention to quality and comfort: the student lounge (dining area, sitting area, study area), the staff room

with a new lounge, the ZAP workroom, the renovated dean's office as a meeting room for board-related meetings, the Romero room, and MTC 02.15 with state-of-the-art digital infrastructure. The meeting areas in the library (second floor, sitting area) and the entrance hall (seats, vending machine) promote community building. Efforts were made to ensure the availability of a chapel. Various areas for silence and reflection were set up (quiet room, Islamic prayer room, Christian prayer room). Several spaces were also given a warmer decor: new crucifixes, photos of honorary doctors, renewal of the overview of female doctors, etc.

1.6 Complete renewal of the faculty web pages

The faculty web pages were completely renewed, including the staff pages, after consultation with the concerned various sections and the respective parties involved. The website is now more accessible, more transparent, and provides relevant daily updates and a broader range of news and activities on the home pages.

2. Research

2.1 Fundamental reform of doctoral training and career guidance for junior researchers

The doctoral regulations were completely revised. Supervision committees were created for each doctoral student. Career guidance was initiated and further professionalised and a renewed framework for talks with junior scholars. Separate initiatives were also taken for postdocs, including meetings with the vice dean of research and a postdoc lunch. The junior graduate conference or 'research happening' strengthens the academic community. For female junior researchers, there was the 'ladies lunch' initiative.

2.2 An enriched research climate: Theo Teams and team science, project orientation, and successful project acquisition

The Theo Teams initiative (2023–2026), with impulse funding for bold and new interdisciplinary research, promotes collaboration, the initiation of team science, and the exploration of new partner constellations in an atmosphere of trust. The ZAP support team (2022–2025) supported professors in their efforts to increase research time. By means of 'project orientation', great efforts were made to connect available opportunities with various researcher profiles and to personally approach those concerned. A newsletter with regularly updated information on research opportunities was initiated and distributed on a regular basis. Support for professors and assistants in preparing applications for research projects was intensified, resulting in a large number of successful research projects. The training cycle on data management, NVivo training for all staff, the appointment of an RDM contact person, the update of the LITaRS list with more journals from the Global South, and targeted support for project applications (peer review, mock interviews) strengthen the research climate.

2.3 Maurits Sabbe Library as an international heritage centre

The Google Books digitisation project has been extended until 2026. Valuable religious heritage collections were acquired (Dominicans, Assumptionists, Scheutists, Illuminare, Keizersberg Abbey, Salesians Don Bosco, etc.). The core facility VIEW for book heritage is being expanded and the extension to the Coal Museum is in preparation. The library remains our pride and joy as a leading international theological library. The staff has been expanded. The celebration of 50 years of the Maurits Sabbe Library was a memorable, historic moment that was attended with great interest. Several videos on various aspects were produced. Various exhibitions attracted the attention of the wider public, and a special archaeological donation enriched the collection. Its accessibility at the festive kick-off of the celebration of 600 years of KU Leuven elicited much admiration from the numerous visitors and put the Faculty in the spotlight.

2.4 Strengthened international positioning and cooperation networks

The faculty strengthened its position within FUCE, IFCU, and COCTI, with consistent representation of the university and faculty, culminating in the organisation of FUCE 2025 in Leuven. New cooperation agreements with leading universities (Gregoriana, Boston College, ACU, Notre Dame, Loyola Paris, etc.) and ICM exchanges with partners from the Global South testify to growing international recognition. Affiliation contracts with partners have been renewed or are still in progress via the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

3. Education

3.1 Successful review and accreditation

The faculty passed the review with flying colours during this policy period, receiving positive reports for both the Research Master (REMA) and the Educational Master (EMA). This confirms the quality of our programs.

3.2 Solid repositioning of RZL in all faculties

The course component Religion, Meaning and Philosophy was firmly anchored throughout the university, also through the specific portfolio of a policy officer on the board. Eleven university-wide modules, funded by the Voorsprongfonds, have been completed and are operational, offering interdisciplinary learning opportunities for all KU Leuven students. A new vision statement was developed and staffing was optimised through inventory and targeted changes. The coordination and maintenance of the modules is now handled by one of the educational support staff.

3.3 Innovative educational offerings: microcredentials and short trajectories

The development of academies and microcredentials opens up faculty training programs in newly-composed constellations to new target groups and responds to the social demand for flexible and accessible lifelong learning. Accessible and high-quality, they are attractive to anyone interested in theology and religious studies, anyone who wants to continue their

professional education, or even all KU Leuven students who want to deepen their budding interest in RZL in a highly flexible manner. The course component “Learning from ancient wisdom” and the renewed contacts with religious congregations strengthen the connection with the broader professional field.

3.4 Transparent teaching assignments and high-quality teaching culture

The guidelines for assigning teaching assignments per staff status (approved by the FR, 2023), consultation per OE, teacher days, ZAP evening, and didactic infrastructure. Faculty-wide rationalisation exercise with regard to areas of expertise and educational focus per research unit, including educational assignments within the research units.

3.5 Enhanced student participation and structural consultation

Structured consultation moments with students at all levels: representative consultation with the dean, vice dean of education, POC, and ACIS.

3.6 Strengthening digital competence and supporting teachers

Toledo training courses, NVivo training, AI cobra sessions and media training.

4. Student policy

4.1 Maintaining and strengthening student intake

Despite the challenging context, student enrolment was maintained and has even increased. Targeted communication, new brochures and videos, a pronounced, regular and strengthened presence in the press, microcredentials and academies, and a target group policy for both Flemish and international students contributed to this.

4.2 Diversity and decolonisation as a cross-cutting theme

The Thomas Feast 2025 and a teachers’ day were dedicated to diversity and decolonisation. The Mentorship Program for students of colour, the Call for Arts with an exhibition in the Saint John the Baptist Church in the Grand Beguinage, and the interactive ACIS-POC reflect the continuing attention to this theme in education and research. Also the Maurits Sabbe Library’s acquisition policy takes the theme into account. Guest Professors (alumni from the Global South) were appointed as substitutes or collaborators to courses or in doctoral jury’s.

4.3 Sacred spaces and spirituality

The faculty created three sacred spaces: a quiet room, a redesigned Islamic prayer room, and a Catholic prayer room. New crucifixes were installed in the classrooms. After the tragic fire in January 2025, the chapel of the Pope College was renovated and will be operational again as a faculty chapel before the end of the academic year. In addition to the coach for the

international sisters, a faculty pastor was also appointed as a volunteer to provide spiritual care for all students. The consultation hours are well attended, and personal guidance is being set up.

5. Service to the Church and society

5.1 Strengthened relations with ecclesiastical institutions and the Vatican

The bond with the universal Church, the Roman authorities, and academic institutions has been strengthened: visits to and cooperation with dicasteries, participation in conferences in the Vatican, membership of AVEPRO and the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Church of the Sheaves project with the Dicastery for Evangelisation (2026–2028), a cooperation agreement with Vatican university Gregoriana (a first in the history of the faculty) ... The reception of Archbishop Terlinden as the new archbishop – upon his appointment to formally introduce himself to the faculty, a second time to meet informally with the students, and a third time in the context of the Christmas celebrations – as well as consultations with the Higher Institutes in the context of shared concern and commitment, strengthen the faculty's local ecclesiastical roots.

5.2 Successful profiling during Pope Francis's visit, September 2024

The papal visit put the faculty prominently on the map. The preparations included a position paper that received international acclaim and was widely distributed, a book by Leuven theologians and numerous, intensive press contributions. The dean acted as coordinator of the writing committee for the rector's speech, working together with several colleagues. Several faculty members actively served as experts in the media and society, based in part on an available list of "Vatican watchers," and were also very active in the audio-visual press in that context following the death of Pope Francis.

5.3 Thomas and Elisabeth platforms extended and integration of continuing education initiatives

The contracts for Thomas (2026–2030) and Elisabeth (2026–2030) were extended, ensuring the continuity of these crucial bridges to the professional field. New pages were developed to promote the teaching profession in religion and the pastoral profession, and coordination with Didachè, Katechetika+, Logos, Peace Day, Amos, and other continuing education initiatives was established. The Didachè brochure was transformed into a clear and concise flyer.

5.4 Science communication and social impact

The faculty focused strongly on science communication: publications and press contributions, exhibitions in the library, monthly contributions to Thomas and Elisabeth, TRN and the activation of social media. The faculty newsletter was opened up to all possible faculty initiatives; news could be submitted by anyone on a daily basis. A weekly newsletter provided an overview of the past week. Teachers were encouraged and trained to act as experts in the media. Science valorisation and impact were strengthened in this way.