

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Election Manifesto 2026–2030 — Bénédicte Lemmelijn, candidate for Dean

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies · KU Leuven

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This programme builds on four years as Dean (2022–2026: [www.benedictelemmelijn.be](http://www.benedictelemmelijn.be) and sub ‘2022–2026’ on <https://benedictelemmelijn2026-2030-be-747b49.webnode.be/>) and sets out an ambitious yet realistic course for 2026–2030. In addition to presenting the achievements and results of four years of policy, a summary of realisations and a detailed follow-up plan accompanying the policy plan (sub ‘2022–2026’), a personal account outlining the sound reasons for choosing to continue my deanship (sub ‘about us’) and a confident outlook on the future (sub ‘scaffolding hope’), the main starting point for the vision statement (sub ‘2026–2030’) is the RASAS review conducted by IDEWE, which provided valuable insights into areas for growth in well-being, trust and governance culture. The eight recommendations are translated into eight concrete areas of action: in each case moving from the vision to action; not as a promise, but as a work programme, against the backdrop of the ‘credentials’ which I present. The programme also ties in with the draft of the university’s strategic plan ‘Trust as a Foundation’, which I have already been able to review in my capacity as the current dean, and sets a course towards a faculty that is internationally recognised for both its excellence and its humanity.

## I. FUNDAMENTAL OPTIONS

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Building on the path set out in the vision and policy over the past four years, seven fundamental options once again form the compass of the programme: servant leadership; an a priori of trust; excellence and well-being as a synergistic duo; existential balance; a safe working environment; diversity as enrichment; and participatory and polyphonic governance. These options are being continued and deepened/refined in the light of four years’ experience.

## II. EIGHT AREAS OF ACTION (RASAS WORK PROGRAMME)

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- **Strengthening trust:** external dialogue facilitation, structured meeting opportunities, conflict management guidelines, bystander training for all staff, training in a feedback culture at all levels
- **Inspiring and supportive leadership:** leadership programme for ZAP, raising awareness of power issues in an academic context, peer review, integration into career reviews, leading with vulnerability and connection
- **Constructive feedback culture:** safe environment, two-way communication, structurally embedded in project discussions, career and annual reviews, team meetings, representative meetings, open consultation hours, open meetings
- **Early-career researchers:** optimisation of welcoming and supervision, effective supervision teams as standard, buddy system, anonymous annual survey independent of supervisor, framework for discussions (including exit interviews), personal trajectory guidance, project orientation, community building, intensifying contact and introductions between junior researchers across OEs, continuation and further implementation of initiatives such as research happenings, doctoral day, career day; clear procedures and prospects regarding contracts and the future ...
- **Support:** clear pathways to help, proactive and regular communication, accessibility as an explicit priority, integration into the onboarding process, clear role descriptions
- **Diversity as a strength:** faculty diversity plan, openness to different worldviews, inclusive communication as standard, periodic evaluation
- **Strengthening connections:** welcoming new colleagues, attention to the needs of international colleagues and students, meeting places, community building across research units, both through sharing content/research and social events, celebrating collective successes
- **Clear structures:** evaluation and refinement of the current policy and innovative decision-making structure, communication of transparent procedures, clear roles (including for representatives on consultative bodies), data-informed and data-driven decision-making

## III. RESEARCH, TEACHING AND INTERNATIONALISATION

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**Research excellence is strengthened by cultivating, recognising and sharing it.** Specifically, this includes: safeguarding research time, optimising ZAP support, continuing Theo Teams, further developing project orientation including support for project applications, and actively (and collectively) recognising achievements. **In education, the rationalisation of the programme offering is central,** including through better alignment between Dutch- and English-taught programmes, greater congruence with requirements for canonical degrees, re-profiling of the initial Master’s, AI integration and student wellbeing. **Internationalisation is based on two complementary pillars:** strategic partnerships (joint degrees, joint research) and solidarity with the Global South through a growing scholarship fund and differentiated financial support (scholarship vs tuition waiver). Lifelong learning — MOOCs, microcredentials, academies — will become a fully-fledged faculty offering.

## IV. IN LINE WITH THE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

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**The programme aligns with ten domains of the forthcoming KU Leuven plan ‘Trust as a Foundation’:** AI literacy as a core competence alongside critical thinking; re-profiling and rationalisation of the programme offer, service-learning and sustainability (SDG’s); internationalisation with a strategic focus, well-being, workload and social safety as faculty priorities; recognition of diverse forms of academic output and impact; interdisciplinarity and collaboration (psychology, law, philosophy, arts, social sciences, biomedicine, etc.); diversity, inclusion and religious literacy (FTRW as a university centre of expertise);

lifelong learning and community service, improved governance (committees reviewed, decision-making processes clarified) and all of this as part of the development of a long-term vision leading up to the faculty's 600th anniversary in 2032.

## V. SPECIFIC FOCUS BY SECTOR

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**ATP:** task allocation tailored to talents, continued improvement of career sustainability, scope to set boundaries, direct consultation via representative meetings and annual conversations/reviews, recognition and consultation on expertise.

**ABAP:** structural safeguards against power dynamics, guidance as a right, recognition for work delivered, professional development, training and mentoring, consideration of (discussions regarding) future prospects, mutual responsibility and accountability between ZAP and ABAP.

**ZAP:** leadership development, opportunities for reflection and open dialogue, appreciative and empathetic career discussions, recognition of a broad range of academic output, fostering collegial solidarity.

**Students:** active participation and accessibility in all governing bodies (including fortnightly meetings with the dean), fostering a sense of belonging in terms of well-being and connection (including further facilitating, supporting and optimising a better-integrated community of Dutch-speaking and international students), ensuring the preservation of a welcoming student space and areas for personal reflection and prayer in all their diversity, greater integration of Dutch/English programmes, optimisation of the development and functioning of ACIS as a platform for international students, with Dutch-speaking representation.

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Bénédicte Lemmelijn is standing as a candidate with, by next year, 40 years of faculty experience, including 34 years of institutional knowledge and involvement/responsibilities in a wide range of governance roles; an internationally recognised research profile with an ongoing output of publications of various kinds and a significant number of (including recent) PhDs; very broad, long-standing and highly valued teaching experience (including more than twenty years of teaching large groups of RZL students); a remarkably extensive outreach in the social sphere and presence in the written and audiovisual press as well as numerous podcasts, four years' experience as dean, and a unique position in two Vatican dicasteries (the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the Dicastery of Faith and Doctrine and the Scientific Council of AVEPRO in the Dicastery of Culture and Education). She combines continuity with optimisation and innovation, the identification of areas for growth with a concrete action plan, and academic ambition with warm humanity. The full vision text, her achievements and her personal profile are available at <https://benedictelemmelijn2026-2030-be-747b49.webnode.be/>, in Dutch and English.