

KU Leuven seals partnerships with top Chinese universities

Rector Mark Waer and a delegation of KU Leuven leaders travelled to China in late October to finalise new partnerships with four Chinese universities and extend its Memorandum of Understanding with Tsinghua University. Rector Waer's visit signals both a deepening of existing ties and a diversification toward new partners and policy priorities.



Rector Mark Waer and Chen Jining, President of Tsinghua University, sign a new Memorandum of Understanding in Beijing

In the last several years, KU Leuven's partnerships with top Chinese universities has focused on strengthening collaborative research ties. Two previous missions to China laid the groundwork for a partnership with Tsinghua University, which eventually led to the signing of a wide-ranging Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two universities in 2007. That agreement was up for renewal in November 2012.

MOUs

Rector Waer and Tsinghua University President Chen Jining signed the new MOU on Monday, 22 October. It solidifies the cooperation between the two universities, supports research collaborations and stimulates student-, staff- and researcher mobility. Proposals for an increased number of co-led PhD projects and a more intensive use of summer schools were also discussed.

Currently, KU Leuven hosts 15 students from Tsinghua University, but mobility from Leuven to Tsinghua remains limited. Summer schools are one potential way to provide an initial experience for KU Leuven students considering a longer stay in China.

According to a recent evaluation of the partnership with Tsinghua University, the quality of projects financed under the partnership was exceptionally high. Diversification remains a central theme as the partnership moves forward.



In a concrete example of the partnership, Rector Waer and the KU Leuven delegation attended the degree conferral ceremony for graduates of the ‘Dual Master in Electrical Engineering’ programme (*photo left*). The group, the second to complete the programme, began as first-years in Leuven and finished the remaining two years at Tsinghua University. The programme was formally extended yesterday.

KU Leuven has also been working to expand and formalise its cooperation with four other top Chinese universities. During scheduled visits this week, the KU Leuven is finalising implementation agreements with Peking University, Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and East China Normal University. MOU’s were signed with each of these universities in Leuven in April during [the visit of Ms. Liu Yandong](#).

In the coming days, the rectoral delegation will meet with Mr. Hao Ping, China's Vice-Minister for Education. The delegation will also take part in the 60-year anniversary celebration of the School of Medicine at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, an important partner of the Biomedical Sciences Group at KU Leuven.

Star strategy

An individualised but encompassing cooperation strategy has been laid out between KU Leuven and the five Chinese partner universities under the Leuven Sino-Euro EDGE Platform. The so-called ‘star strategy’ calls for the stimulation of research cooperation with an emphasis on advancing common, interdisciplinary ties between KU Leuven and each of its Chinese partners.

To achieve this, the platform supports joint research, mobility projects for young researchers, exploration projects for senior staff members and priority cooperation in speciality areas of the partner universities. Other bottom-up initiatives within the broad EDGE network are also anticipated.

KU Leuven has a long-standing relationship with China and has hosted Chinese students for 35 years. The KU Leuven – China Alumni Club is KU Leuven’s first country-wide alumni organisation. 550 Chinese students are currently enrolled at KU Leuven, making China the second-largest international student group by nationality after neighbour The Netherlands.