



# Supporting the entrepreneurial potential of higher education

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## Case Study No. 9:

# University of Liège, Belgium: VentureLab – establishing an entrepreneurial ecosystem at a university

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### About the sepHE Study

The study "Supporting the entrepreneurial potential of higher education" was based on a contract between the European Commission, Directorate General Education and Culture (DG EAC), and empirica Gesellschaft für Kommunikations- und Technologieforschung mbH (co-ordinator – Bonn, Germany) as well as the University of Wuppertal, UNESCO Chair of Entrepreneurship and Intercultural Management (Wuppertal, Germany).

The study's main purpose was collecting 20 case studies about insightful practice in entrepreneurship education at European universities. This is one of them. The findings from a cross-case analysis are included in the Final Report which is available at the study's homepage and at DG EAC's website.





# 9 University of Liège, Belgium: VentureLab – establishing an entrepreneurial ecosystem at a university

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## Abstract



*Entrepreneurship education (EE) at the University of Liège (ULg) is initiated, driven and implemented by the University's management school HEC (École des Hautes Études Commerciales). At the heart of EE at ULg is the VentureLab, a non-profit entity linked to HEC-ULg. It maintains an ecosystem of EE to, firstly, encourage students to become engaged in entrepreneurial activities and, secondly, support students who are developing an entrepreneurial project. The principal elements of EE at ULg are the Master level programme HEC-ULg Entrepreneurs and an incubator. Further important elements include entrepreneurs in residence, a special university status for student entrepreneurs, a system of vouchers to consult experts, events like "the corner of opportunities", a club of student entrepreneurs, the "student entrepreneurial passport", the showcase for entrepreneurial projects, and a Master programme in creativity. The status of a student entrepreneur may be particularly innovative: It provides students who are seeking to start a new enterprise with specific advantages and support in their pursuit of a study programme. While fully supported from the university's top, EE at ULg takes a bottom-up approach. It is initiated by a group of enthusiastic people around the Chair of Entrepreneurship, and from there spreading throughout the university. HEC-ULg considers its approach as easily transferrable to other universities.*

## Case study fact sheet

■ Full name of the university, location:	University of Liège (ULg), city of Liège, Wallonia, Belgium
■ Legal status:	Public
■ Campuses:	Two campuses: Liège city centre and Sart Tilman university campus. The Gembloux site (Province of Namur) hosts studies in agronomy sciences and biological engineering. Establishments in South Belgium: Arlon and Mont-Rigi, High Fens Oceanographic base Stareso in Calvi, Corsica
■ Year of foundation:	1817
■ Number of students (year):	More than 20,000 (2014)
■ Number of employees:	5,000 employees 3,300 faculty members (both teaching and research) 1,700 administrative and technical support staff
■ Budget in most recent financial year:	Operating income 2008: 314 million euro
■ Academic profile (departments, major awards, role in national or regional higher education system):	Nine Faculties (Philosophy and Letters; Law, Political Science and Criminology; Science; Medicine; Applied Science; Veterinary Medicine; Psychology and Education; Agro-BioTech; Architecture), one School (HEC-ULg School of Management), one Institute (Institute for Human and Social Sciences)
■ Entrepreneurship education profile:	ULg's Management School maintains and develops an informal entrepreneurial ecosystem at ULg
■ Activities focused in this case study:	VentureLab and master programme HEC-ULg Entrepreneur
■ Case gatekeeper:	Prof. Dr. Bernard Surlmont, Full Professor for Entrepreneurial Skills at ULg's Management School (HEC-ULg)

Information included in this case study is from end of year 2014 unless stated differently.



## 9.1 The university's entrepreneurial profile

### 9.1.1 The university's overall approach to entrepreneurship education

#### Key characteristics of ULg's entrepreneurial ecosystem

The University of Liège (ULg) is the only full public university of the French Walloon-Brussels community in Belgium. Entrepreneurship education (EE) at the University of Liège (ULg) is part of a concept of an **entrepreneurial ecosystem**. The ULg's EE protagonists have established this ecosystem over many years and are seeking to develop it further continuously. ULg apply the biological notion of an ecosystem – a community of living organisms in their nonliving environment – to entrepreneurial activities at their university. The ULg's entrepreneurial ecosystem has emerged from and consists of networks of actors, such as academic staff, students, administrative units, partner entrepreneurs and companies, and activities related to entrepreneurship education.

The heart of the ecosystem is called the "**VentureLab**"<sup>1</sup>. The VentureLab is an entity located at ULg's Management School (HEC-ULg – HEC is the abbreviation of "Hautes Études Commerciales"). According to the Academic Director of the Venture Lab, Prof. Bernard Surlémont, the VentureLab's overall objective is twofold: First, motivating students to become engaged in entrepreneurial activities, and, second, supporting students and young alumni (until two years after graduation) from all over the university in their entrepreneurial activities. The VentureLab represents the institutionalised interface between entrepreneurial education and the stakeholders of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. This means in particular preparing for and starting a new company. At its location, adjacent to the business school – almost next door on the same street - VentureLab provides the physical infrastructure for many EE activities.

The VentureLab has three **missions**: (1) supporting the transition of students' and young graduates' entrepreneurial activities into employment creation; (2) contributing to the economic revitalisation of the Liège region and; (3) providing answers for social questions.

A key task of the VentureLab is to provide orientation to students so that they connect with other actors needed for funding, coaching, grants, and other resources. VentureLab's **activities** include organising seminars for students and entrepreneurs, offering start-up weekends, and providing coaching for current and former student projects. It is located in an adjunct building to the management school and provides seminar rooms and co-working space for students of entrepreneurial programmes. In November 2014, VentureLab was launched as an institution of the University. This formalisation is meant to improve efficiency and increase the capacity for supporting entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, VentureLab is currently expanding its services to educational institutions in the Province of Liège and in Luxembourg.<sup>2</sup>

Further **core components of the ULg's entrepreneurial ecosystem**, related to the VentureLab, are a Master-level study programme named HEC-ULg Entrepreneurs

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.venturelab.be>.

<sup>2</sup> Comprising Haute Ecole de la Province de Liège, Haute Ecole Libre Mosane, Haute Ecole de Namur-Liège-Luxembourg, Haute Ecole Charlemagne, Haute Ecole Robert Schuman, Haute Ecole de la Ville de Liège, Conservatoire royal de Liège, Ecoel Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc et l'Ecole supérieur des Arts de la Ville de Liège.

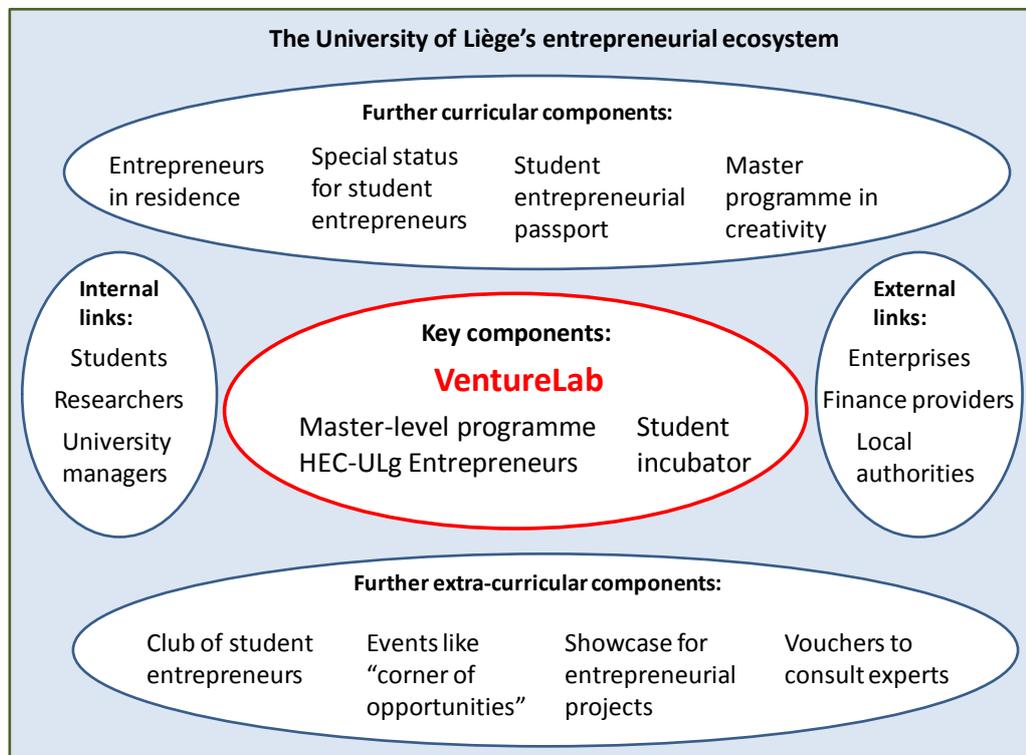


(Entrepreuriat) created in 2005, and a student incubator. The students of the HEC-ULg Entrepreneurs Master programme can use the VentureLab’s facilities. The VentureLab provides the interface between the entrepreneurs and practitioners teaching in the MSc programme. Further components of the ecosystem include (details provided further below in this case study):

- (1) Entrepreneurs in residence.
- (2) A special status for student entrepreneurs.
- (3) Vouchers to consult experts, which allow students to use a certain number of hours in which they have access to experts, such as consultants, lawyers, technical experts and IT specialists. These external experts offer their expertise for free.
- (4) Events like “the corner of opportunities”, where students meet entrepreneurs to discuss entrepreneurial issues and receive feedback on their project and initiatives.
- (5) A club of student entrepreneurs.
- (6) The “student entrepreneurial passport”.
- (7) Master programmes in entrepreneurship and in creativity.
- (8) A network of partnering enterprises and other cooperation partners, including local authorities.

Some of these components are more than ten years old; others have just been put into place. Exhibit 9-1 shows an overview about ULg’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

**Exhibit 9-1: Overview about the University of Liège’s entrepreneurial ecosystem**



Source: empirica

This case study explores how the ULg developed entrepreneurship education within its entrepreneurial ecosystem, paying particular attention to the question whether and how it is possible to deliberately implement such an ecosystem.



## Ecosystem history and outreach

The history of entrepreneurship education at ULg dates back to the early 1980s, when ULg established the technology transfer office to commercialise research output. As a result, the rectorate felt that such commercialisation would be facilitated by educating and supporting students in entrepreneurial activities. Later on, the idea of entrepreneurship education was spread across all faculties and became an accepted part of the University. Today, the University of Liège considers itself as a pioneer in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education in Belgium.

### 9.1.2 Leadership and governance

#### Importance of government strategies

The ULg's approach toward entrepreneurship education is initiated and implemented by a group around Professor Bernard Surlemont, Professor for Entrepreneurial Skills at the ULg's Management School.

While the VentureLab receives financial support from private sponsors, a charity foundation (InBev Baillet-Latour) and structural funds (ESF and European Fund of Regional Development), EE initiatives are independent of government policies.

#### Importance of entrepreneurship in the university's strategy

In its **mission statement**, ULg as a full university with several faculties emphasises the two traditional pillars of a university, research and teaching. In addition, it prides itself on a third pillar that is aimed at valorisation of research for the benefit of society: "The ULg also stands out through its very wide and very varied range of scientific and valuation society-oriented activities. (...) These activities include the active policy of ULg as regards highlighting the importance of research, resulting in the creation of more than 80 spin-off companies and the implementation of tools and services accompanying the various valuation stages (intellectual property, management training, financing, partner research, ...)".<sup>3</sup>

The **strategy of the Management School** HEC-ULg is more explicit and specific about EE. Among its five core values the HEC-ULg emphasises "creative entrepreneurial audacity" which aims to educate and support students to become entrepreneurs after the completion of their degree programme.<sup>4</sup> According to the Dean of HEC, Wilfried Niessen, entrepreneurship is firmly embedded in the strategy of the management school.

#### Extent of high level commitment to implementing entrepreneurship

The top-level university leadership team, including the rectorate, supports EE. While there is no specific budget or functional responsibility dedicated to entrepreneurial education at the university level, the university provides for work space for EE activities – especially the VentureLab – and human resources in terms of a chaired professorship and university assistants.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/a\\_16259/en/missions](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/a_16259/en/missions).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.hec.ulg.ac.be/en/node/1232>.



## Level of faculties' and units' autonomy to act

The entrepreneurial ecosystem around VentureLab is embedded within and supported by HEC management school, which within the university enjoys almost full autonomy about its initiatives, budget, and personnel decisions.

Similar to other full public universities, the faculties at ULg are largely independent and are managed in a decentralised way. This has implications for initiating and implementing EE: Each faculty targeted for EE activities needs to be lobbied and convinced about the merits of each EE initiative in order to be approved and implemented at the faculty level.

Bernard Surlemont illustrates this with the example of the entrepreneurial passport, a certificate students are awarded if they accumulate a certain number of credits for participating in entrepreneurial activities. While HEC-ULg has taken the lead in initiating and implementing the entrepreneurial passport, each faculty needs to be convinced of the merits of the certificate and subsequently approve and implement it for its students. This has proven challenging in those faculties which are rather alien to the idea that knowledge should be used for business purposes, e.g. in the medical faculty and in the philosophical faculty.

## University's importance for driving entrepreneurship in its environment

Since the 1950s, Liège has been severely affected by the decline of the coal and steel industries. The University plays an important role as an educational institution providing the skills basis to counter the negative effects of the industrial decline of the region. Entrepreneurial education and the VentureLab – especially with its links to the local educational institutions - also contribute to revitalising the regional economy.

In addition to private-sector entrepreneurship, HEC-ULg maintains a so-called “Peak of Excellence” in the area of Social Enterprises and Social Economy. Since the 1990s, the ULg's Centre for Social Economy (CES) deals with the topics of social economy and social entrepreneurship.<sup>5</sup> There is some degree of cooperation with VentureLab in terms of sharing of access to each other's networks. CES is, however, not dealt with in this case study. Beyond the confines of ULg, HEC also co-operates with polytechnic universities in Liège and the Liège region.

### 9.1.3 Resources: people and financial capacity

#### Human resources for entrepreneurship education

Entrepreneurship education at ULg is implemented by several key actors. The General Director of the VentureLab is **Bernard Surlemont**, full Professor for Entrepreneurial Skills at the ULg's Management School. He is also Academic Director of the Master HEC-ULg Entrepreneur programme. Surlemont has been building the ecosystem since the mid-1990s. He is the single most important actor of EE at ULg.

An additional manager of the project is **Hubert Brogniez**, who is also entrepreneur in residence in the VentureLab. Professors Sybille Mertens (Cera Chair in Social Entrepreneurship) and Benjamin Huybrechts (SRIW-Sowecsom Chair in Social Economy Management) are responsible for the topics of social economy and social entrepreneurship.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.academie-es.be](http://www.academie-es.be).



Other elements of the entrepreneurial ecosystem are the **entrepreneurs in residence**, who are nominated and selected by the VentureLab based on their experience, their speciality and talents. They are expected to co-operate with VentureLab.

HEC-ULg is also tapping expertise through **partnerships** with a vast number of experts from finance, legal services, technology, and commerce. They are, for example, involved in the process of coaching students and participating in juries for evaluating entrepreneurial projects of students.

### **Financial resources for entrepreneurship education**

As a non-profit organisation, VentureLab seeks funding through financial support from companies (e.g., BNP Paribas Fortis, Rossel RTL Group) and public policy programmes, such as the EU structural funds. The University provides a physical infrastructure and human resources to several EE-related activities.

## **9.2 Entrepreneurship in curricula and teaching**

### **9.2.1 Overview about curricular offers**

#### **Curricula offers and units providing them**

All curricular offers in entrepreneurship education at ULg are run by the HEC-ULg Management School. HEC-ULg integrates curricular EE offers at other faculties and schools. It offers courses at all academic levels, from Bachelor to Master and executive education, as well as PhD.

- At Bachelor level there is also an “Introduction to Entrepreneurship” course, which is an elective for the “Economics in Management” degree.
- There are six courses in entrepreneurship, most of them for Master degree students in Management seeking to specialise in entrepreneurship.
- Two Master courses deal with social entrepreneurship and target students in Population and Development Studies as well as Labour Sciences.
- Two courses are for students at the executive level which deal with creativity.
- One course is at the PhD level, which is a doctoral seminar about entrepreneurship.

Almost all courses are taught by Bernard Surlemont (two of which are taught in collaboration with Professor Huybrechts). The only exception is the two courses in social entrepreneurship that are taught by Sybille Mertens.

In line with the overall educational strategy of the school as part of a university, the emphasis of entrepreneurship education is at master level. The areas of entrepreneurship and innovation are so-called “transversal elements” across all four master programmes. Exhibit 9-2 shows an overview of the curricular offers in EE at the University of Liège.

**Exhibit 9-2: Overview about curricular EE offers at the University of Liège**

No.	Name and teacher	Objectives	Target group	Offered since [year]	No of participants in 2014/15
<b>Bachelor level</b>					
1	GEST0006-2 Introduction to entrepreneurship (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>6</sup>	At the end of this course, students will be able to: - Identify their strengths and weaknesses in terms of entrepreneurial abilities - Understand the implications of an entrepreneurial approach - Apply what they have learnt to identify an entrepreneurial opportunity - Use positive psychology theories to construct their own entrepreneurial approach - Better understand the current societal stakes	Elective Bachelor degree in Economics and Management, 3rd year, Elective Bachelor degree in Business Engineering, 3rd year	2002	45
<b>Master level</b>					
2	GEST0214-2 Personal project (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>7</sup>	This course aims to enable students to implement a personal, concrete project through the creation of a business plan.	Master degree in Management, professional focus in Entrepreneurship, 2nd year	2010	5
3	GEST3050-1 Creativity and design (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>8</sup>	- Being capable of professional team work - Developing a critical sense (arguing) - Creative conception of solutions	Master degree in Business Engineering, professional focus in Intrapreneurship, 2nd year	2010	20
4	GEST3156-1 Opportunity identification (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>9</sup>	n.a.	Master degree in Management, professional focus in Entrepreneurship, 2nd year	2014	18
5	GEST3157-1 Business Model Generation (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>10</sup>	n.a.	Master degree in Management, professional focus in Entrepreneurship, 2nd year	2014	18

<sup>6</sup> See <http://progcours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST0006-2.html>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://progcours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST0214-2.html>.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://progcours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST3050-1.html>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://progcours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST3156-1.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://progcours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST3157-1.html>.



7	GEST3158-1 Mission creation (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>11</sup>	n.a.	Master degree in Management, professional focus in Entrepreneurship, 2nd year	2004	18
8	GEST3160-1 Networking and financing (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>12</sup>	n.a.	Master degree in Management, professional focus in Entrepreneurship, 2nd year	2014	18
<b>Executive level</b>					
9	GCER0119-1 Creativity (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>13</sup>	Introductory course to introduce aspects of creativity.	Executive master students	2014	15
10	GCER0120-1 Enlarge Creativity (Bernard Surlemont, Emilie Vandemeiren) <sup>14</sup>	Advanced course to elaborate on further aspects of creativity.	Executive master students	n.a.	n.a.
<b>PhD</b>					
11	GDOC0010-1 Doctoral Seminar in Entrepreneurship (Bernard Surlemont) <sup>15</sup>	The objective of the seminar is to give students insight about the major theoretical subjects and methodologies in the field of entrepreneurship.	PhD Students of the HEC Doctoral Programme	n.a.	n.a.

Source: University of Liège

## 9.2.2 Target groups

### Main target groups of entrepreneurship education

The ULg's entrepreneurial ecosystem is available to the whole university. EE at ULg targets students and recent graduates (up to two years after graduation) from all faculties. At the master level, roughly one third of EE participants come from HEC-ULg Management School, while two thirds are from other faculties (one third engineers and one third from other fields such as law). This has to do with the structure of master programmes. To start with, there are master students who study exclusively with HEC for two years to obtain the master, e.g. in entrepreneurship. In addition, there are students, who have already completed a two-year master programme, and study for a third year at HEC to obtain their second master degree.

The Technology Transfer Office's responsibilities also include continuous education.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://progscours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST3158-1.html>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://progscours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/en/cours/GEST3160-1.html>.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://progscours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/cours/GCER0119-1.html>.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://progscours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/cours/GCER0120-1.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://progscours.ulg.ac.be/cocoon/cours/GDOC0010-1.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/a\\_16290/interface-entreprises-universite](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/a_16290/interface-entreprises-universite) and <http://www.interface.ulg.ac.be/>.



## 9.2.3 Designing lectures and courses – basic curricular decisions

### Objectives

The overall objective of EE at ULg is to support students in developing and implementing entrepreneurial activities. This also applies to curricular offers. The key vehicle towards this objective is the creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem at the University. ULg's approach is to seek establishing long-term relationships between students and the ecosystem, covering not only the period of education but also extending to entrepreneurial activities after students completed their study programme.

### Key curricular offer: Master programme HEC-ULg Entrepreneur

The **flagship** programme for EE at ULg is the Master-level **HEC-ULg Entrepreneurs programme**, which is bilingual (French and English). It has the explicit objective of developing entrepreneurial skills and is characterised by practical learning and teaching methods. The Entrepreneurs programme includes courses and business co-operation. The number of students in the Entrepreneurship programme is limited because the pedagogical approach and related coaching activities are resource intensive. Existing resources allow for a capacity of about 30 students per year.

#### Business co-operation in the Entrepreneurs programme

The programme involves extensive contacts and co-operation with businesses, for example through in-company missions. Students work in interdisciplinary teams, which include students of management, engineering, law, and/or other backgrounds, on real projects, connected directly to the entrepreneurial community of the region and coached by professionals and entrepreneurs. Five juries in a total of about a hundred professionals assess the project presentations of students at the end of the taught units.

In addition, during a six-week "Right-Hand-Man" mission, individual students are shadow a company director every day and learn about his or her life as an entrepreneur. Finally, as part of a project, students are provided with the opportunity of developing their own business, coached by an experienced entrepreneur.<sup>17</sup>

#### Courses in the Entrepreneurs programme

The HEC-ULg Entrepreneurs programme includes various courses for developing entrepreneurial skills. In the **Business Creation** course (five weeks), students work on a business-creation project. This course is supported by Sowalfin, the Walloon SME finance and guarantee company (in French: Société Wallonne de Financement et de Garantie des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises). Supervised by a mentor, student teams must draw up a comprehensive business plan detailing all aspects of a real creation: testing and validating the idea, establishing a management team and organising human resources, studying the market and competitors, deciding on the financial model and the strategy, registering the establishment as a legal entity, and developing a comprehensive financing dossier.

Another course is **Business Takeover and Transfer**. It involves teams of students to determine the conditions for the sale or purchase of a successful business and the development of a business plan for the future enterprise under the supervision of a specialist in sales and acquisitions (five weeks, November – December).

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.hec.ulg.ac.be/en/HEC-ULg/programs/business-school-programs>.



During the course **Sale and Negotiation** (two weeks, December), participants are split up across different points of sale within the EuroCenter network, a retail store chain.<sup>18</sup>

The **Growth Strategy** course (eight weeks, January – February) involves, first, to draw up an (e)valuation of a business company and, second, decide on a strategy for growing or repositioning the enterprise or a part of its activities.

Finally, students can voluntarily choose "**Marketing**" and "**Development of an Individual Project**" as course units.<sup>19</sup>

### Further important element: Master programme in Creativity

The Master of Creativity is an executive master programme with 60 credit points according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). It is organised around the themes of understanding the creative economy, inspiring and initiating creative services, building creativity and implementing creative ideas in a project context.

### Entrepreneurship education at PhD level

Entrepreneurship education at ULg is also firmly established at the PhD level. At the end of 2014 there were two doctoral seminars in the field of entrepreneurship. First, the **Doctoral Seminar in Entrepreneurship**, run by Prof. Bernard Surlemont, provides students with insights into the major theoretical subjects in the field of entrepreneurship. It also examines the methodologies used in this area. Students learn about various perspectives, examine different methodologies, explore some original empirical research and make connections between theory and empirical research. The pedagogical approach implies student presentations and interactive discussions.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the **Doctoral Seminar in Social Entrepreneurship**, run by Prof. Sybille Mertens & Prof. Benjamin Huybrechts, focuses on the social enterprise and social entrepreneurship. Based on the critical analysis of theoretical and empirical literature, students become acquainted with several research avenues in the field. They are then asked to locate their own research project regarding the extant literature and to discuss their upcoming research agenda with the teachers and the other students.<sup>21</sup>

### Entrepreneurship education at Bachelor level

At the bachelor level, the learning outcome "creativity and entrepreneurial spirit" is embedded in the overall learning outcomes for the programme. Furthermore, all students participate in a business game, where they have to manage a small enterprise. Finally, there is the course "Introduction to Entrepreneurship" which is an elective for the "Economics in Management" degree.

### Methods and media

HEC-ULg implements an active learning approach, which is based on real cases and project-oriented teaching at the Master level. It encourages students to take part in

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.eurocenter.be>.

<sup>19</sup> See [http://www.hec.ulg.ac.be/en/students/becoming-entrepreneur\\_7151](http://www.hec.ulg.ac.be/en/students/becoming-entrepreneur_7151).

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.edtgestion.hec.ulg.ac.be/?q=7&course=31>.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.edtgestion.hec.ulg.ac.be/?q=7&course=37>.



national and international competitions. Especially noteworthy is the support to so-called junior companies, run by students and coached by members of faculty through HEC service facilities: HEC Consulting Group, HEC-ULg Investing Group, and HEC-ULg Advisory.<sup>22</sup>

## 9.2.4 Setting of entrepreneurship teaching

### Locations

Entrepreneurship teaching and learning either takes place in lecture halls and classrooms or, if it is practical work in companies, on the premises of the co-operating enterprises.

### Timing

All EE courses are normally offered each study year. Some last several weeks, others take the whole year. Sessions normally take several hours per day, no matter whether it is classroom work or visits to external places.

## 9.2.5 Instructors: teachers and mentors

### Academic staff of the university

There are only a few professors teaching entrepreneurship at ULg. Most courses are taught by Bernard Surlemont who is the Professor of Entrepreneurship and also Academic Director of the Master HEC-ULg Entrepreneur and Director of VentureLab.

Professors Sybille Mertens (Chair of Social Entrepreneurship) and Benjamin Huybrechts (SRIW-Sowecsom Chair of Social Economy Management) are responsible for the topics of social economy and social entrepreneurship.

### “Real entrepreneurs” as teachers

At ULg, entrepreneurship education to a large extent involves outside practitioners: they take over approximately 90% of teaching. The remainder of 10% of EE activities are taught by faculty members. The external teachers are experienced and successful entrepreneurs. VentureLab involves three entrepreneurs in residence, i.e. entrepreneurs who have office space and a contract with VentureLab for teaching at HEC-ULg.

### Mentors

Mentoring is considered an essential component of entrepreneurial education at HEC Liège. It is performed by experienced entrepreneurs and organised through VentureLab.

## 9.2.6 Management of entrepreneurship education

### Teacher and trainer management

The choice of teaching staff is based on several selection criteria, including relevant experience and systematic student feedback. The teaching staff does not receive any

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<sup>22</sup> See [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c\\_45415/les-atouts-de-hec-ulg](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_45415/les-atouts-de-hec-ulg).



training, but is involved in a comprehensive **mentoring system** with members of the faculty. Mentors are following seminars on mentoring techniques.

### Managing student support

As of 2014, the University of Liège introduced a new category of student status, the **student entrepreneur**. The idea behind the student entrepreneur status is analogous to a special status some universities award to students who are, at the same time, pursuing sports or artistic activities at an international level. The student entrepreneur involves an officially recognised special student status that enables the students increased flexibility during the period of their studies. This new status is targeted at students wishing to start a new enterprise and provides those students with specific advantages and support in their pursuit of a study programme, for example by offering them to do parts of their studies through projects related to their start-up, increased flexibility in exam scheduling, providing infrastructure in terms of special access to the services provided by VentureLab, tutoring and coaching facilities through specialists linked to VentureLab, privileged access to the university's incubator and advice. They also have preferential access to study guidance services ("Guidance etude") and employment support ("ULg Emploi"). They are especially supported by the co-ordinator for student living quality and have special arrangements in terms of scheduling their exams or practical projects. The new status was initiated by HEC-ULg and approved by the ULg's Administrative Council. Students can apply for this status for a period of twelve months and later renew the status.<sup>23</sup>

The decision about the status of student entrepreneur is left with a committee consisting of representatives of the University, faculty and entrepreneurs. So far there have been thirteen applicants, eleven of whom have been accepted by the committee. Two applicants were rejected based on lack of motivation.

Student entrepreneurs are coached through the VentureLab and the University's non-profit incubator.

### Internal and external network management

The HEC Alumni organisation maintains close relationships with alumni with regard to their role as parts of the ULg's entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, the most important factor for maintaining relationships related to EE are networking activities organised and managed by Bernard Surlemont.

In terms of international outreach, the ecosystem involves an informal network of academic institutions from France, Switzerland and Finland, mainly for the purpose of sharing experiences.

<sup>23</sup> See [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c\\_4164841/en/l-ulg-adopte-un-nouveau-statut-d-etudiant-entrepreneur?hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_4164841/en/l-ulg-adopte-un-nouveau-statut-d-etudiant-entrepreneur?hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact), [http://le15jour.ulg.ac.be/jcms/c\\_46633/fr/quand-dji-vou-dji-pou](http://le15jour.ulg.ac.be/jcms/c_46633/fr/quand-dji-vou-dji-pou), [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c\\_4168566/fr/les-avantages-du-statut-etudiant-entrepreneur-ulg](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_4168566/fr/les-avantages-du-statut-etudiant-entrepreneur-ulg), [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c\\_4135247/fr/etudiant-entrepreneur-ulg](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_4135247/fr/etudiant-entrepreneur-ulg), and [http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c\\_4168475/en/la-commission-etudiant-entrepreneur-ulg?hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact](http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_4168475/en/la-commission-etudiant-entrepreneur-ulg?hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact&hlText=entrepreneur&hlMode=exact).



## Management of curricular integration and attracting new groups of students

Curricular integration of entrepreneurship courses is most advanced in management school programmes. For other faculties, entrepreneurship education is on a voluntary basis.

## Evaluation of courses and programmes

The development of the flagship programme (HEC Entrepreneurs) involves a focus group which involves representatives from the School, former students, entrepreneurs and two external academics. A commission is responsible for the redesign of the programmes. In terms of key performance indicators, the activities are measured by looking at the number of start-ups and job creation in the respective start-ups.

## Management of continuous education

Recent graduates – up to two years after graduation – are offered the possibility to obtain support for their entrepreneurial activities from VentureLab.

## Formal evaluation of learning outcomes

The assessment of and feedback to students with respect to EE is organised around three pillars: First, a jury consisting of practitioners assesses project presentations delivered by the students. Second, Bernard Surlemont and other assistants assess project report documents. Third, there is usually a written final examination.

## 9.3 Extra-curricular activities related to entrepreneurship education

### Overview about extra-curricular EE activities at ULg

Extra-curricular activities are an important part of entrepreneurship education and the entrepreneurial ecosystem at ULg. Activities include the “entrepreneurial passport” for incentivising participation in such activities, such as an “opportunities café”, an entrepreneurs club and the “corner of opportunities”.

### Relationship between curricular offers and extra-curricular activities at ULg

The master-level HEC Entrepreneur programme does not involve any extra-curricular activities, as the projects themselves require extensive time beyond what would be considered normal in academic programmes, requiring the full engagement and involvement of students.

### “Entrepreneurial passport” for incentivising participation in extra-curricular activities

A relevant offer to all students from all faculties is the **entrepreneurial passport**, which students of any faculty can receive once they have accumulated a sufficient number of points. Points can be obtained by participating, for example, in extra-curricular entrepreneurial events, courses, and activities organised by the incubator, by participation in entrepreneurial conferences and by participating in the activities organised by the junior entrepreneurs. Depending on the number of points, a bronze, silver or gold



certificate is awarded by HEC Liège. The intention of this passport is to encourage students to become involved in entrepreneurial activities and to compensate students for their input in those activities. For students, the entrepreneurial passport can be useful in the application processes to signal entrepreneurial spirit and engagement.

#### **Further extra-curricular activities**

At a very basic level, there exists an “**opportunities cafe**” which allows students to meet entrepreneurs and involves presentations from external experts.

## **9.4 Institutional aspects of entrepreneurship education**

### **9.4.1 Organisational set-up and change**

#### **Organisational implementation**

EE at HEC-ULg follows a centralised organisational approach. Academic resources concerning the entrepreneurial ecosystem are organised from within the management school. VentureLab’s aim is to receive a budget covering three years, for example through private fundraising and European Union funding. The VentureLab itself is run as a non-profit organisation, with the involvement of the management school and educational institutions of the Province of Liège and Luxembourg.

In terms of governance, several stakeholders are involved. The Rector represents the University, while the regional high schools are represented by their directors. In addition, entrepreneurs (Mr. Brogniez, Mr. Woitrin and Mr. Pire) are represented on the VentureLab’s board. Funding is partially secured through financial support from private and public institutions (see above).

#### **Measures for coordinating and integrating EE across the university**

Entrepreneurship education, while supported by the rectorate, is usually initiated, implement and co-ordinated by members of the management school HEC Liège, and here especially by the group led by Bernard Surlemont.

#### **Managing the acquisition of resources**

The University funds a chaired professorship and university assistants in the field of entrepreneurship, which represents the labour input into entrepreneurial education. There is no specific additional budget available for entrepreneurship education.

### **9.4.2 Laws, statutes and codes**

#### **Incentives for staff to engage in or support entrepreneurship education**

There are no specific material or immaterial incentives for staff to engage in entrepreneurial education.



### 9.4.3 Mindsets and attitudes

#### Raising awareness for the importance of entrepreneurship

Bernard Surlemont's mission and the intention of all EE activities at ULg is to raise awareness for the importance of entrepreneurship among all stakeholders of the university and beyond, including students, faculty, administration, alumni, and co-operation partners.

The idea of the VentureLab ecosystem is based on three pillars:

(1) A set of **coherent actions** which reinforce each other and fit together, including events for raising awareness, teaching for education, student-entrepreneur status to be more flexible with studies, and incubation. "Hardware" for incubation is provided in the form of co-working space and "software" through coaching by entrepreneurs in residence.

(2) A **culture of "responsibility"** which HEC-ULg wants to instil in its students. HEC-ULg seeks passionate students who take the steering wheel of their life and project and make sure that the "incubee" does not expect "cocooning".

(3) A strong articulation with the regional ecosystem that supports entrepreneurship. The mission is also to guide students and provide a bridge from the VentureLab to all other activities and devices that can support entrepreneurship in the region.

#### Encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour

All EE activities at ULg aim at emphasising the relevance and importance of entrepreneurial activities and the University's support of entrepreneurship. Apart from the ecosystem's many activities in this respect, the recently established status of student entrepreneur may be particularly innovative and noteworthy.

## 9.5 Outreach to external stakeholders of entrepreneurship education

The HEC-ULg Management School manages the University's entrepreneurial ecosystem in close cooperation with external partners. The ecosystem maintains close links with numerous institutions:

- Enterprises: e.g. RTL GROUP.
- Financial institutions: e.g. SOWALFIN.
- Support services: e.g. CIDE-SOCRAN.
- Incubators, accelerators, science parks and technology parks: e.g. LEANSQUARE.
- International partners: Venturelab.ch in Switzerland and Start-Up Sauna in Finland.

CIDE-Socran is a particularly interesting case, as it is a spin-off company initially established by Bernard Surlemont, who is still a member of the Board. CIDE-Socran is a non-profit organization engaging in coaching and consulting activities, especially marketing strategy as well as commercial and financial management. Its Board includes representatives from ULg, the Walloon region, public investors and large private companies. CIDE-Socran is involved in a partnership with the HEC entrepreneur programme. It provides projects, three to four colleagues for mentoring, and lecturers for



teaching. It benefits from the relationship as it recruits up to two HEC entrepreneurship graduates per year.

## 9.6 Impact and lessons learned

### 9.6.1 Evaluating impacts of the entrepreneurship education approach

#### Overview of impact evaluation methods applied

At the programme level, HEC-ULg systematically measures intended learning outcomes with respect to entrepreneurial spirit in the master thesis. In addition, there are annual student and lecturer feedback surveys, which form part of a feedback loop connected to HECs strategy.

As the entrepreneurial ecosystem organised around and formalised through VentureLab is in the process of being firmly established, a more thorough evaluation system is currently in the process of being developed. According to Bernard Surlemont, it is part of the “to do list” to measure the impacts of the VentureLab.

The HEC’s Dean, Wilfried Niessen, stated that HEC is currently developing a balanced scorecard, which will also include references to educational elements of innovation and entrepreneurship. However, this will not only focus on entrepreneurship in the narrow sense but also include social entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship. A Business School Impact Survey will measure the number of start-ups, professional networking activities, job creation related to university spin-offs and the position and organisation of alumni.

### 9.6.2 Lessons learned

#### Summary of lessons learned from this case

The case of ULg-HEC highlights several points about critical success factors and contingencies in relation to entrepreneurial education, which can be divided into three categories: administration, teaching, and resources.

##### (1) University administration and intra-university relationships

At ULg as well as at other full universities, the establishment and operation of activities related to entrepreneurial education faces the challenge of a cultural gap or distance between the bureaucratically organised public administration and the entrepreneurial spirit and culture of the entrepreneurial activities. In public administration, decision-making processes are lengthy and time-consuming; and they require the signatures of several actors. Entrepreneurs are not used to these constraints and perceive them as restrictions that affect their performance negatively.

In addition, the independence of the different faculties requires effective co-operation between all organisational units involved, despite potential differences in academic approaches and philosophies. In the case of ULg, this relates to initial scepticism EE was facing at the medical and natural sciences faculties.

At ULg, the issue of a cultural gap between EE activities and public sector governance structures is also visible. However, several factors can moderate potential tensions and frictions. First, ULg-HEC as a faculty is fairly autonomous within the university (governance) system with respect to strategy development, decision making, budget



allocation and personnel decisions. Second, aspects of EE are firmly embedded within the mission statement and the teaching strategy of HEC-ULg. And, last but not least, HEC's Dean is very supportive of EE activities as he is an entrepreneur himself and is involved in EE activities of the ecosystem.

### **(2) Teaching- and curriculum-related factors**

The integration of curricular and extra-curricular activities involves a number of challenges. In comparison to "management science" courses, entrepreneurship education may face the challenge of being based less on theory and empirical research, and focused more on practical, hands-on activities. While this may increase employability and chances of setting up a company; the nature, content and approach of EE may vary significantly from the more academically oriented management courses.

In relation to the European Credit Transfer System as well as with respect to the accreditation of the programmes, aspects of assessing outcomes and workload of EE-related courses may present a challenge.

### **(3) Personnel and resources**

In the case of HEC-ULg, most entrepreneurial activities are initiated, implemented and co-ordinated by the network of people around Bernard Surlemont. This highlights the importance of individual persons and networks for the success of entrepreneurial education.

## **Transferability to other universities**

In terms of evaluation of the venture lab ecosystem, HEC-ULg considers the model as "100% transferable". It does not involve specific resources or preconditions. However, from an outside perspective it seems that a strong personality with a long experience and a wide network contacts, such as Bernard Surlemont, would need to be in place to run similar activities.

## **References**

Research for this case study was conducted by Stefan Zagelmeyer, Manchester Business School, on behalf of empirica for the study "supporting the entrepreneurial potential of higher education" (sepHE). Sources and references used include desk research plus:

### **Interviews**

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