An Interview with Dr. Marius Gilbert

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What are the key figures and the strong points of research at ULB?

ULB represents more than 4,000 researchers and professors, 2,000 PhD students, 230 theses defended each year, and over 200 research units and interdisciplinary research institutes. By 2023, the university had obtained 53 ERC grants and prestigious scientific prizes such as the 2013 Nobel Prize in Physics for François Englert, several Francqui Prizes and Wolf Prizes, as well as 21 FNRS five-year prizes. It also counts 5 Highly Cited Researchers™ ranking in the top 1% by citations for their field(s) and publication year in the Web of Science™ over the past decade.

Focused on scientific quality, ULB's research strategy provides a fertile environment for the research community by helping them to seek funding, contributing to the administrative management of projects, promoting independence and academic freedom, and providing support infrastructures. In addition, ULB occasionally offers internal funding (theses, equipment) to encourage the exploration of early-stage ideas and facilitate access to external funding.

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Could you give us some examples of ongoing research projects in

the field of human health?

ULB develops a “canceropole,” a hub of scientific and clinical expertise with 27 research units, H.U.B-Bordet, and H.U.B-Erasme. This initiative aims to improve patient survival, enhance cancer treatments, refine screening and diagnostic techniques, and ensure optimal care and a better quality of life for patients.

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One of their ongoing projects, ONCO.CARE, seeks to develop an integrated and personalized survivorship program for adult patients at the end of their oncology treatment. ULB also inaugurated the European Plotkin Institute of Vaccinology (EPIV) in 2023. Supported by federal funds and patrons, this institute focuses on the molecular mechanisms behind vaccine development and carries out clinical research in collaboration with UAntwerpen.

The ULB Center for Diabetes Research (UCDR) is also internationally recognized for studying various aspects of diabetes while participating in therapeutic and disease prevention projects.

Could you present some examples of European ongoing projects?

ULB leads or collaborates on various European projects in fields such as health, IT, sustainable development, and humanities. In collaboration with VUB, Brussels Capital Region, and Europe (FEDER), ULB created Usquare.Brussels. This hub brings together citizens, the city, and academic knowledge. It houses USET (Urban and Socio-Environmental Transformations Research Hub), FabLabs, Openlab, BrIAS (Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies), and Europe’s Civic University Alliance, CIVIS.

Additionally, in partnership with VUB, ULB develops FARI, an initiative focused on AI for the common good in Brussels. FARI brings together world-leading researchers and experts in AI (Explainable and Trustworthy AI), Data (Open Data), and Robotics (Human-Centric Robotics) to tackle local challenges.

Could you give us some recent examples of the valorization of ULB's research work?

Research valorization at ULB takes multiple forms, including laboratory-industry collaborations, intellectual property transfers, expert consultancy roles, and spin-off creation. Here are five recently established spin-offs:

- **NeuVasQ Biotechnologies:** Founded by Prof. Benoit Vanhollebeke, this spin-off focuses on neuronal development, the interactions between vascular and nervous systems, and innovative therapies to restore lost nervous system functionality.
- **Santero Therapeutics SRL:** Established in 2021 by Profs. Cédric Govaerts and Abel Garcia-Pino, this biotech company leverages over a decade of research to develop innovative drugs targeting highly antibiotic-resistant pathogens.
- **Snellium:** Launched in December 2021, Snellium specializes in designing laboratory and production line devices, integrating advanced solutions for optical quality inspection and analysis.
- **Rehal-IT:** Founded in 2022, this company provides therapeutic virtual reality software ("serious gaming") for assessing and rehabilitating patients with cognitive disorders.
- **Secoya Technologies:** This spin-off integrates high-efficiency microfluidic technologies into robust stainless-steel equipment, optimizing pharmaceutical industry production processes.