**Anticipating the future, that is Howest's ambition. With a mission-driven research policy, the university of applied sciences is now clustering its research activities into five strategic domains: digital, ecological, health, learning and social, all linked to concrete societal missions. This approach not only brings a sharp focus, but also translates into tangible investments. In 2026, with support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF/EFRO), Howest opens two new labs: the Circular Solution Lab in Kortrijk and the Digital Health Lab in Bruges.**

What should our region and society look like in five, ten or twenty years' time? What role can a university of applied sciences play in shaping that future? Howest answers these questions with a mission-driven, impact-oriented research policy. "We choose to cluster our research projects into five domains with clear societal missions," says Geoffrey Hamon, research manager at Howest. "These missions align with Vizier 2030, the Flemish translation of the Sustainable Development Goals and with Vision 2050, the long-term strategy of Flanders, as well as with Europe's Green Deal."




We're on a mission. © Howest

#### Supported by the region

Within the digital domain, Howest focuses on topics such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and innovation through game technology. The ecological domain centres on sustainable energy and the circular economy. The other domains address the healthcare of tomorrow, lifelong learning and social resilience.

"In developing this mission-driven research policy, we worked closely with partners such as TUA West (Technical University Alliance for Economic Transformation in West Flanders) and POM West Flanders (the Provincial Development Agency of West Flanders). We want our research to be supported by the region. For companies and organisations, this approach offers clear added value. As a university of applied sciences and a neutral knowledge partner, we can objectively analyse what an organisation truly

needs to grow."

**Local and international**

This close alignment with the professional field is a deliberate choice. Howest explicitly starts its research from the region in which it is embedded. In West Flanders, and more specifically on the Kortrijk Weide site, the university is part of a unique ecosystem. On one compact campus, educational institutions, research and innovation partners and creative hubs work closely together, including Ghent University, Flanders Make, Sirris, Hangar K and Designregio Kortrijk. Research, education and entrepreneurship are literally within walking distance of one another, which accelerates innovation.

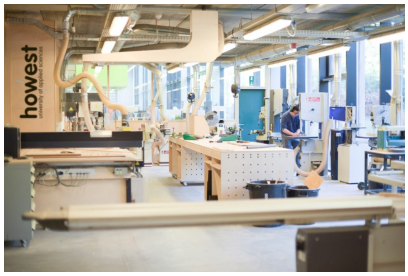
From this strong local anchoring, Howest simultaneously builds robust international connections. The university is a partner in RUN-EU, a European University enabling collaboration between ten regional universities of applied sciences and universities from nine countries: Spain, Portugal, Finland, the Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Romania and Belgium. "RUN-EU serves as a catalyst for knowledge sharing, but also for innovation through European research projects that strengthen our own region," says Hamon.

In practice, this means research projects across five domains, each aligned with the needs of its respective sector. In 2026, with support from ERDF/EFRO, Howest will open two new research and demonstration labs: the Digital Health Lab in Bruges and the Circular Solution Lab in Kortrijk.

**Circular Solution Lab (Kortrijk)**

As part of the R3PACK research project – Reduce, Reuse, Rethink PACKaging – the Circular Solution Lab will open in March on the Howest campus in Kortrijk. With new European legislation, the challenge of advanced recycling for companies is becoming increasingly urgent. A key measure is the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR), which sets targets for reuse, recycling rates and the implementation of recycled content in packaging.

"The focus here is on non-household packaging, ranging from industrial packaging to drink cups and pizza boxes," says Katrijn Sabbe of Howest. "These types of packaging often remain under the radar, but given their large volumes, they are crucial to achieving Europe's recycling targets."




Circular Solution Lab. © Howest

**Industrial reuse of residual material streams**

Within the Circular Solution Lab, the Industrial Product Design (IPO) programme investigates how these residual material streams can be used more intelligently and sustainably. Today, residual materials from smaller manufacturing companies are still too often sorted, stored and removed for recycling or incineration. The Circular Solution Lab opts for an alternative: reuse within the industry itself. Through research and practice-oriented demonstrations, IPO feeds these insights directly back into industrial product development processes.

“To support companies even better, the Circular Solution Lab is being further expanded with research into the reuse of waste and residual streams, with a strong focus on thermoplastic materials, whether or not combined with other materials,” Sabbe explains. “These residual streams are processed into workable forms such as pellets and granulates, which then serve as the basis for new products or semi-finished goods. This approach significantly extends the lifespan of materials and reduces the environmental impact of what was previously considered waste.”

**The Circular Solution Lab opens on 26 March in Kortrijk, during Howest Research Day**

**Digital Health Lab (Bruges)**

In the Digital Health Lab on its campus in Bruges, Howest collaborates with POM West Flanders to research, demonstrate and valorise advanced digital tools. “The Digital Health Lab will become the centre of expertise where preventive healthcare and technology come together,” says Sigrid Van den Branden, research coordinator active health at Howest.

The lab welcomes healthcare professionals who want to learn more about digital tools and innovative technologies and about how to integrate them into their daily practice. In addition, the Digital Health Lab also acts as a partner for technology companies and

digital health start-ups seeking insights into the latest trends or support in testing their technologies.



Digital Health Lab. © Jolien Chielens / Howest

“In the healthcare sector, there’s a strong demand for supportive digital technologies. The results of the lab can help alleviate the high pressure the sector faces due to the combination of increasing care needs with relatively limited staff.”

**The Digital Health Lab in Kortrijk opens on 7 May. More info can be found here**

**More research projects of Howest, the University of Applied Sciences, can be found here**

#### Want to know more? Join the Research Day on 26 March in Kortrijk

On Thursday 26 March 2026, Howest organises a Research Day on its campus in Kortrijk. Researchers, partners, companies and other stakeholders are invited for an inspiring day full of innovation in five strategic domains. Dutch spoken event.

**Curious? More information is available here**

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