Thanks to high-quality programmes and, above all, practice-oriented programmes, Vlerick Business School can call itself the best management school in Belgium. It extends this reputation to its research activities that can be perfectly described by four Rs: Relevant, Reliable, Responsible and Reach. In short, in an academic way, Vlerick's researchers are invariably looking for applicable solutions to real business problems. The school also engages its stakeholders to create synergies between research and learning activities.

Every year, the three campuses (Ghent, Leuven and Brussels) of Vlerick Business School prepare around five hundred (international) students for a master or MBA degree. In addition, a multitude of people follow a short open enrolment management programme, aiming to boost their careers, gain a better understanding of their tasks or optimise their management skills. "All functional areas within business and management are covered," says research manager dr. Eva Cools. "From marketing and HR, over accountancy and finance, to operations and people management. On top of that, we offer customised programmes for companies and organisations that want a tailored programme for their specific needs."

Determinants of future economic climate

This same broad focus is also used in the research activities, albeit topped off with a sauce of digital transformation and entrepreneurship. "These are the trends that determine the current economic climate. Digital transformations accelerate business opportunities. Strong entrepreneurship ensures business continuity."

Since 2019, Vlerick is an institutional partner of the Responsible Research in Business & Management (RRBM) network. "We are one of the few business schools in the world to be recognised as a RRBM Pioneering Institution. This testifies that we are a source of best practice. It also highlights that we strive to have societal impact through our research and teaching programmes. As signatories of the RRBM vision paper, we endorse the principle that academic research should play a role in developing knowledge that benefits businesses and wider society."

Double engagement

"We're engaged in both fundamental academic research and research for business and society. This means we involve our stakeholders," says dr. Cools. "This may appear to be obvious. In the academic world however, this isn't always the case. We are always alert to gaps that exist in fields of knowledge highlighted by stakeholders – and we explore them with academic rigour. We know that the world needs research that makes impact – and we are committed in delivering it. Our doctoral research, for example, should have

broader business application. At the same time, our joint research with companies is based on the rigour of sound academic practice. This makes our research for business approach unique. Via our research centres and long-standing partnerships and memberships, we create truly practical relevance for the business community."



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Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinary research is becoming ever-more important in finding answers to today's business challenges. "Because of this, we join forces across our own domains – and with external international professors and professors from our parent universities in Ghent and Leuven. We then integrate knowledge gained from solid research into our education activities, by developing tools, business games and simulations. The need for sound academic practice is also something we instil in our students – with critical reflection and business research methodology being essential components of their projects."

Interesting mix of researchers

Vlerick Business School has fifty professors who are expected to spend about 40% of their time conducting academic research. "They often start from a practical problem that is then embedded in a gap in academic literature," says dr. Cools. "In addition, we have about sixty researchers, a mix of (post)doctoral students and junior/senior researchers. These researchers are consciously looking for partnerships with companies. To finance the research, but also to keep a finger on the pulse. We believe that understanding what is going on within companies and identifying the most pressing challenges together is the first condition for providing research with added value."

Vlerick research charter

To make sure our research strategy is widely supported within the school, the Vlerick Research Charter was created. "It sets out the ways we work to produce credible research. It safeguards our robust academic practices – and it provides a framework for academic integrity and ethics. All faculties, researchers and DBA participants sign our charter as a commitment to adhere to its principles of sound academic conduct. As an institute, we take responsibility to create an environment that supports and stimulates

sound academic practice with training, mentorship, necessary infrastructure and guidelines."

Vlerick Business School supports the push towards open science. "We believe that the exchange of information is at the heart of science itself. In line with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity code, we adhere to the principle: 'As open as possible, as closed as necessary.' We take a pragmatic approach and implement policies around open access and data management sensibly – and in support of the open science movement."

Broad dissemination of results

One of the most important objectives is to ensure that research results reach as wide an audience as possible. That is why Vlerick Business School translates them into white papers, articles or reports that are distributed free of charge. "Regularly, the research also leads to the development of a tool that allows companies to check how far they are in a particular area," says dr. Cools. "In addition, we sometimes work out cases that other educational institutions use in their programmes. Furthermore, companies can come to us for tailor-made research."



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International level

Over the years, Vlerick Business School has built up a solid reputation that goes far beyond national borders. Not surprisingly, the research team is increasingly involved in European research projects. "Our practice-oriented approach in particular is praised internationally," explains dr. Cools. "This is why we are regularly asked to develop the business model behind a research project or to develop a concept that allows us to translate the results into useful tools. For example, we were involved in STORY, a European pilot project investigating the technical possibilities of energy storage in batteries. This in itself has nothing to do with management. Nevertheless, we have an important role to play. After all, we are developing a business model with which the financial feasibility of a wider dissemination of the technology can be calculated. Ultimately, this broad applicability always remains the key question within a project. It is precisely in this area that Vlerick Business School has built up enormous expertise and knowledge. It is an added value that we are happy to bring research and practice

together as much as possible.”



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