Great ideas don’t always start in a laboratory. Sometimes, they begin with a simple question from a business, a healthcare professional or a local community. Across Flanders, 13 universities of applied sciences and arts are turning such questions into research, innovation and practical solutions that make a difference.

Research is about more than generating new knowledge. Its true value often emerges when that knowledge is put to use in everyday life. When a small business becomes more efficient, healthcare professionals find better ways to care for patients, or when new technologies help build a more sustainable society.

This is where **applied research** comes into its own.

Across Flanders, more than 2,500 researchers at universities of applied sciences and arts work closely with businesses, public authorities, non-profit organisations and other partners. Their goal is clear: **to turn scientific knowledge into practical solutions that address real-world needs**.

Research rooted in the real world

Applied research starts with a challenge. Rather than working in isolation, researchers engage directly with the people and organisations facing it.

How can artificial intelligence help a small company improve production? Can innovative materials reduce waste? How can healthcare become more accessible? And how can we create safer, healthier and more inclusive workplaces?

Combining scientific expertise with hands-on experience, researchers develop and test solutions in the settings where they are intended to be used. This helps ensure that innovation is not only scientifically sound, but also relevant, feasible and fit for purpose.

Stronger together

Today’s challenges rarely fit neatly within the boundaries of a single discipline or institution. That is why the 13 Flemish universities of applied sciences and arts are increasingly joining forces, aligning research priorities and combining complementary expertise.

Through a shared strategic agenda, they are strengthening their collective research capacity and creating new opportunities for collaboration. The aim is not to make every institution do the same thing, but to build on each institution’s strengths and make better use of the expertise available across Flanders.

This approach is taking shape through **Communities of Practice** focusing on four major societal transitions: digitalisation, climate and energy, the circular economy, and healthcare innovation. By connecting researchers, sharing knowledge and identifying opportunities for joint projects, these communities help turn individual expertise into collective strength.

Initiatives such as **Projectmakers** extend this collaborative approach by bringing together universities of applied sciences and arts, other knowledge institutions and innovation partners to develop new research opportunities around shared challenges.

Making knowledge accessible

Even the most valuable research can have limited impact if the people who could benefit from it cannot find it.

That is why the Flemish universities of applied sciences and arts are working to make their expertise more visible and accessible.

The **Expertise Finder** brings research projects from all 13 institutions together on a single searchable platform. It helps businesses, organisations and researchers discover existing knowledge and identify potential partners.



© Vlhora

Through **Blikopener** (Eyeopener), businesses and organisations can connect directly with researchers, explore innovative ideas and seek solutions to practical challenges. Since 2019, the initiative has opened doors to thousands of organisations, particularly SMEs that may not always have their own research facilities.

Thematic roundtables and knowledge-sharing activities create further opportunities to exchange insights, explore common challenges and develop new partnerships. Publications such as the **IMPACT magazines** also showcase the potential of applied research and the opportunities it creates for businesses and society.

Turning collaboration into impact

The ambition goes beyond making knowledge available. It is about translating research into practical results.

By involving researchers, businesses, public organisations and innovation partners from the outset of a project, the Flemish universities of applied sciences and arts help ensure that research addresses genuine needs and that its findings can be put into practice.

The benefits extend well beyond individual projects. Businesses explore new opportunities, professionals gain new skills, and students learn from the latest developments in their fields. Society benefits from innovation that contributes to economic resilience, social progress and a more sustainable future.

Looking for expertise or a research partner in Flanders? Discover here how the Flemish universities of applied sciences and arts can help turn your challenges into opportunities.

Council of the Flemish Universities of

Applied Sciences and Arts

www.vlaamsehogescholenraad.be/en/

Contact:

Werner Dua

stakeholder relations officer research & innovation

T: +32 472 70 44 28

E: werner.dua@vlaamsehogescholenraad.be

Ria Bollen

Blikopener project coordinator

T: +32 476 31 00 90

E: ria.bollen@vlaamsehogescholenraad.be