

**VUB MAIN CAMPUS
BUILDING I**

**12:00 | Networking
lunch & Poster
gallery**

**13:00 | Plenary Opening:
Welcome &
Panel discussion**

**14:15 | Parallel sessions:
Inspiring
practices
from and for
VUB-educators**

**16:00 | Plenary Closing:
Connecting &
Looking forward**

**16:30 | Reception &
Poster gallery**

VUB EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2026

26 MAY 2026



**VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
BRUSSEL**

OPENING PLENARY SESSION

FUTURE-PROOF EDUCATION: THE ROAD TO 2030

13:00 – 14:00 | 12.03

During the plenary opening session, **Vice Rector for Education and Student Affairs Nadine Engels** will elaborate on trends, opportunities, and challenges that will shape the direction of our education in the coming years. We will zoom in on the external institutional review scheduled for spring 2027 and highlight several institution-wide initiatives.

Afterwards, we will engage in a discussion around a central question: what are the key challenges for future-proof education at the VUB? We will highlight three themes through an expert video. A moderated panel discussion will bring together different perspectives.

THEME 1: New technology and academic education

Introduction by **Kateryna Osadcha** (Guest Professor, VUB Department of Electronics and Informatics)

New technologies and generative AI are rapidly transforming how information is shared, processed, and evaluated. What does this mean for the core values of academic education: critical thinking, authenticity, and integrity? What does research say about the opportunities (e.g., personalized learning, support for complex cognitive tasks) and risks (e.g., dependency, superficial thinking processes, challenges related to truth claims and fraud)? What foundational knowledge should we still provide to students? Which skills must not be outsourced? How do we promote critical AI literacy? How do we avoid both technophobia and blind enthusiasm? How do we combine virtual learning environments, AI, and physical learning environments?

THEME 2: Critical thinking as a buffer against polarization

Introduction by **Christophe Busch** (Director, Hannah Arendt Institute)

In a context of increasing polarization and social tensions, the role of the university as a training ground for critical thinking is under pressure. How do we guide students toward “reasonable nonconformity”: the ability to develop their own viewpoint while remaining open to dialogue? Research on citizenship education and diversity-sensitive teaching offers useful insights, but practice remains complex. This theme focuses on the role of higher education as a beacon for critical thinking and constructive disagreement. Which didactic principles foster multi-voiced dialogue? How do we create a learning environment that is both safe and challenging? What is the role of the teacher: moderator, expert, or facilitator?

THEME 3: Future-proof education policy in challenging times

Introduction by **Nic Van Craen** (General Manager, VUB)

Future-proof education requires not only vision and pedagogy, but also staff, systems, infrastructure, IT, spaces, and support. It is precisely this “backbone” that is currently under significant pressure, confronting us with a fundamental question: where do we invest, and what do we phase out? How can we implement forward-looking and efficient policies without compromising educational quality and accessibility? Where are the greatest levers for impact? How do we reconcile efficiency with educational quality, accessibility, and feasibility?

PANEL: Ann Demeulemeester (former vice-chair of the NVAO, external expert in the VUB Education Quality Council), Leon Bauweraerts (VUB Student Council), Kim Willems (lecturer and chair of the faculty education committee ES), Francis Berghmans (dean of IR)

MODERATOR: Peter VAN ROMPUY (senior advisor, MarCom)

PARALLEL SESSIONS

STRONGER STUDY SUCCESS

14:15 – 15:45

The parallel sessions are thematically aligned with the overarching conference theme of study success, with each session examining the topic through one or more design domains that influence outcomes. Each session aims to strike a balance between theoretical framing, practice-based examples, and evidence. Deliberate space has been built in for exchange, enabling participants to translate insights into their own teaching context.

SESSION 1: Educational Technology as a Partner in Student Ownership

12.01 | **Speakers:** Free DE BACKER (PE), Steven VERBEYST (RC) and Filip VAN DROOGENBROECK (ES)

Large student cohorts, declining pass rates, and increasing workloads are placing our education system under considerable strain. How can lecturers continue to provide high-quality guidance while simultaneously giving students greater ownership of their learning?

In this session, three lecturers share how they are investing in scalable, well-considered support: an AI chatbot that provides formative feedback on papers and dissertations, virtual study coaches that support students through independent study and exam preparation, and a modular learning platform for research methods. Together, these cases illustrate how AI and educational technology can function as a learning partner – not as shortcuts, but as levers for more effective learning.

Following the presentations, participants will have the opportunity to engage in hands-on guidance with practical tips for those who wish to get started themselves.

Study success domain: Student ownership

SESSION 2: Shaping a Learning-Enhancing Assessment Practice

12.02 | **Speakers:** Daphné COOMANS (OS), Charlotte LEWYLLIE (OS), Stijn VAN ACHTER (OS), Marijke VAN VLASSELAER (ES) and Elke VERBEKE (OS)

How do we organise assessment in ways that genuinely promotes learning and provides insight into the extent to which students are achieving the intended learning outcomes? This session explores that question from the perspectives of policy, research, and practice.

We begin with a brief overview of our revised assessment policy, followed by insights from research into innovative alternatives to the traditional dissertation. In an age of AI – which can effortlessly generate written texts on students' behalf – the validity and reliability of written assignments warrants particular scrutiny. Drawing on this research experience, we engage in dialogue about the choices made and explore the opportunities and challenges that emerge.

The session invites exchange and offers inspiration for those who wish to contribute actively to forward-looking assessment. We close with an out-of-the-box brainstorm on alternatives to the written assignment as a final assessment.

Study success domain: Curriculum and teaching

SESSION 3: Diversity Sensitivity as a Lever for Academic Success

11.04 | **Speakers:** Nele ADRIAENSSENS (LK), Amber WERBROUCK (GF), Alessandra BLONDA (GF), Julie BERTONE (OS)

Our world is globalising at a rapid pace. This is reflected not only in our increasingly diverse student population, but also in the labour market for which we prepare our students. This reality calls for purposefully designed curricula, thoughtful instructional design, and inclusive learning materials.

In this parallel session, we work with concrete dos and don'ts, drawing on experiences, tools and evidences from a wide range of projects. We invite lecturers and educational support staff to reflect critically on potential barriers to inclusion. How do you open up sensitive topics for discussion? How do you create a learning environment that is both safe and challenging? How do you ensure that teaching materials and curricula are accessible to everyone? And how do you help students themselves become more aware of diversity?

This session offers both inspiration and practical tools for those who wish to embed inclusion structurally within educational design and student support. In doing so, we harness diversity as a strength and work together towards equitable, high-quality higher education.

Study success domain: Belonging and welcome programme

SESSION 4: Harnessing Peer-Assisted Learning

11.05 | **Speakers:** Els CONSUEGRA (MILO), Inge BOGAERT (MILO), Ann VAN SLIJCKE (BRUTUS), Annelies DEBOELPAEP (SB), Pascale PETIT (SB)

Peer-assisted learning and tutoring are powerful levers for both the social and academic integration of students and are gaining importance in several programmes at the VUB. In this session, we start from research insights on what works in tutoring initiatives in higher education. These insights are linked to concrete success factors, pitfalls and conditions for the sustainable embedding of peer-assisted learning in the curriculum. We will also present an open Canvas module designed to support tutoring initiatives. This module includes an e-course for organisers and flexible, thematic modules for tutors that programmes can deploy in a targeted and selective way. In addition, we will demonstrate how participating programmes can contribute to the further development of these materials, provide feedback on existing modules and help build a VUB-wide network around tutoring initiatives.

By connecting practical examples with the underlying scientific knowledge base, participants will gain a clear and practical framework to support informed decisions about integrating tutoring into their own courses or programmes.

Study success domain: Belonging and welcome programme

SESSION 5: From Course Choice to Academic Success

11.06 | **Speakers:** Ioanna ATHANASSIU (SB), Charlotte TARRAS (OS), Stefanie CEUSTERMANS (ES), Ilse SCHEERLINCK (ES)

When students' expectations fail to match the reality of a programme, the effects are felt in enrolment, progression, and academic outcomes. A strong onboarding experience begins with a well-informed course choice and calls for swift, targeted reorientation or remediation where necessary. But how can curriculum renewal support this process?

In this session, we work actively with data-informed tools and exchange experiences and teaching interventions through interactive formats. Participants will leave with concrete inspiration and practical takeaways. Bring your own questions and experiences – because this session is designed as a genuine exchange.

Study success domain: Intake and orientation

SESSION 6: Co-Creative and Interdisciplinary Education as a Competitive Advantage

11.07 | **Speakers:** Dirk AERENHOUTS (LK), Colin Jakob RITTBERG (LW), Hebe SCHAILLÉE (LK), Frederik D'HONDT (RC), Ann PEETERS (LW)

How do you shape co-creative and interdisciplinary education without compromising coherence and manageability for students? This session draws on experiences gathered within a range of curriculum renewal projects (CVM & EUTOPIA). We explore how co-creative curriculum redesign can lead to a more contemporary and effective course offering, how interdisciplinarity can be developed while accounting for diverse student intakes as well as infrastructural and technological constraints, and how international collaboration can be sustainably embedded within a programme.

The session opens with five short project pitches, after which participants rotate in a carousel format to speak with project leads and exchange experiences, challenges, and practical tips. Participants will leave with fresh ideas, concrete examples, and tools to get started themselves.

Study success domain: Curriculum and quality of education

CLOSING PLENARY SESSION

16:00 – 16:30
| 12.03

The closing plenary session will bring together the insights gained throughout the day. We will connect the questions and ambitions that participants take away from the parallel sessions and place them in a broader perspective.

Rector Jan Danckaert will close the event with an overview of the new policy framework within which we will continue to build high-quality education in the years ahead.

RECEPTION & POSTER GALLERY

16:30
| ATRIUM