

GAME CHANGERS

Chairs at Ghent University: partners for research and teaching



By establishing a chair you are choosing to create and strengthen connections with the academic world, giving you a number of advantages. For example, knowledge transfer, which benefits the university as well people within your organisation (p. 6-9). It can also be a way of approaching societal problems in an in-depth way (p. 17-19). Or driving progress forward in your own field of research (p. 20-22).

A research partnership is something that builds on your expectations (p. 10-15).



Creating added value. By **changing things. By **improving** things. That's how we get the world moving. Pushing boundaries. Making your mark on the **future**.**

This is what your organisation is striving for.

And it's our aim too. Ghent University is active in almost every possible academic discipline. Yet despite the range of expertise amongst our more than 6,000 professors and researchers, they all have at least one thing in common: they want to investigate, describe, and shed light on society and the world. Moreover, they all also share the aim of truly changing and improving the world through their expertise.

For that's what we do at Ghent University. By offering quality education for many thousands of students. Through ground-breaking research that makes us one of the top 100 universities in the world. With original innovations and progressive applications that provide solutions to the medical, economic, technological, or societal challenges of this and future generations.

And if we work together and combine forces, we can do all this even better. By establishing a chair, you're not only drawing attention to the name of your company or organisation but also creating opportunities for researchers who want to tackle complex research questions, thereby creating new paths to innovation and valorisation. In addition, you will give students and researchers a unique opportunity to put their scientific knowledge to the test by facing real-life challenges in your sector, company or organisation. In return, you get to know students and researchers who may just be your promising interns and employees of tomorrow.

Establishing a chair can make all the difference. For us, for you, and for the society in which we both live and work.

Because with a chair at Ghent University, together we can get the world moving. Together we can push boundaries. And thus, together, create added value.

Rik Van de Walle
Rector Ghent University

SEAS OF KNOWLEDGE

WHY THE PORT OF GHEENT HAS BEEN WORKING WITH **GHEENT UNIVERSITY** FOR YEARS

“The link with a university helps you view innovation differently as a company”

DAAN SCHALCK



Is the water between Ghent University and the North Sea Port really too deep, to paraphrase the lyrics of a well-known Flemish singer? Quite the opposite! And the proof is in the long-term cooperation between the two organisations. “Ghent University has been one of our chosen partners for many years,” North Sea Port CEO Daan Schalck tells us. →

“Our relationship with the academic world is extremely important in encouraging our people to keep on learning, and also share their own knowledge.”

The North Sea Port Chair was launched in 2016, but Ghent University has been collaborating with North Sea Port for much longer than that. Why?

DAAN SCHALCK “We have already been collaborating for over ten years on the professional training programme in Port Management at the Ghent University Maritime Institute. The chair grew out of this close collaboration, with the aim of further expanding expertise and research into port development. That knowledge, in turn, is directly used in the inter-university Masters of Science programme in Maritime Science. Ghent University is strong on the legal and technical side, but less so when it comes to port economics. To boost the latter, I became a visiting professor, while chair holder Professor Theo Notteboom was also appointed.”

This offers a wide-ranging opportunity for knowledge transfer, involving everyone from North Sea Port. Employees can follow the training programme or help promote knowledge transfer through the chair. It is clear that lifelong learning is paramount at North Sea Port, but why is that?

“It’s very important. Over the past ten years, our organisation has evolved considerably from an operational company to a service provider. In the past we had our own ships, but now our main work is in service provision, and in many more fields than before. This means we have to expand our knowledge. In other words, continuous learning is part of the job for our people. The port of ten years ago was nothing like the port of today, and in ten years it will be completely different again. Our relationship with the academic world is very important in encouraging our people to keep on learning and also to pass on their own knowledge. Ghent University is one of our preferred partners in this area, and has been for years.”

What added value does establishing a chair bring for a port authority?

“In order to strengthen our social role and local networks, we want to support a few major pillars of our city, ranging from maritime labs to maritime agencies to maritime training. If you are looking for enrichment and added value for society, you must above all avoid getting stuck within the same professional field. We could have set up a similar training programme together with the ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge rather than with Ghent University, but then you are only sharing knowledge

from within your own sector. While it is precisely this academic aspect that provides the enrichment.”

Are there any other benefits?

“The big advantage is that you help contribute to the sharing of knowledge, and this is particularly important to us, due to the specialised nature of our sector. We need specialised employees, because the port is a very small world. So it is in our interest to be able to attract employees who graduated from Ghent with those specialisations, and whom we have partly trained. In addition, you see the university network

opening up. A chair is not a lobbying machine – far from it – but it does make certain contacts easier. Companies shouldn’t underestimate this. When you work with a university like Ghent University, it reinforces the fact that your partnerships are serious. In the world of business it is often said that science should be more at the service of companies. That is up for discussion. But, in any case, it goes both ways. Companies may also be engaged in scientific and academic work, and there is nothing wrong with that. As a company, being connected to a university helps you regard innovation differently.”



IN PRACTICE Chairs



“The connection between external partners and academics is a win-win.”

“Society is struggling with a number of major problems that cannot be solved by one person or one field of expertise. Our multidisciplinary chairs make contributions based on different areas of expertise,” says Dr Hilde Willekens. As a policy advisor at the bioscience engineering programme with experience in academia, business and consultancy, she is involved in setting up internal and external collaborations, amongst other things. This also includes the chairs, which bring significant added value both to the business world and to Ghent University.

Why are chairs important?

“The unique thing about a chair is that a close collaboration develops between the partner and Ghent University. The partner is part of the steering group for the chair and there is a clear and transparent line of communication. Society is facing various major challenges such as global warming, the development of sustainable agriculture, or pandemics. These cannot be solved by one person or one field of expertise. It is important that a group of experts with different backgrounds approach the issues, and experiment, analyse, and communicate the possible impact.”

Why is it interesting for a company to finance a chair?

“In the first place, a chair develops the connection between external partners and academics, leading to cross-pollination. They learn from each other and discover what possibilities, limitations, and needs there are. I am thinking, for example, of the

Milcobel Chair and research into food technology. This chair may lead to the launch of new products, or make the current production processes more efficient.”

“A chair also increases cooperation between different partners and other stakeholders. Thanks to the Bayer and Crelan chairs, we can conduct experiments on a working farm with smart farming tools such as drones, sensors, and biodiversity strips. We then communicate these results with other networks in agriculture. And of course we also take into account the farmer’s own possibilities and limitations, seeing as they ultimately have to run a profitable business.”

What makes this successful, in your opinion?

“Success is due to the combination of a few essential factors. There is the two-way communication, and the sharing of knowledge, and opening of doors for each other. Scientists also expand their network by working with the business world, while the chair’s sponsor is involved and gets consulted about the progress of the academic research. In this way, expertise is shared from theory to practice, and vice versa. So it’s a win-win.”



“The Crelan Chair in the faculty of Bioscience Engineering has added value thanks to the effective cooperation with Ghent University. It brings us and our bank agents into regular contact with stakeholders within the sector, ensures we stay informed about current themes, and drives us to adjust our policy accordingly.”

— Philippe Voisin
CEO Crelan

“So that we can offer the right, informed support, and also make a real social difference, we are happy to be working together with a reputable scientific partner like Ghent University to conduct research into the happiness of Belgians. The research team also supports us in sharing our insights in an accessible way with the Belgian population, via www.gelukkigebelgen.be.”

— Jan Van Autreve
CEO NN Insurance

“The Agrotopia Chair is investigating a new form of greenhouse horticulture. We build directly on the current ideas about urban agriculture that are gaining ever more ground. In this way, we help contribute solutions to provide safe and fresh food for the growing urban populations.”

— Bart Nayaert
President Inagro

“The South Africa Chair is an ideal lever for offering cooperation and support to cultural and social projects in South Africa. In addition to university education, the South African colleague is involved in academic research. And thanks to the chair, an interuniversity network is also being developed.”

— Prof. Dr. Yves T'Sjoen
Supervisor of the South Africa Chair: languages, literature, culture and society



“For us, a chair starts with the expectations of the partner”

Companies, organisations, or individuals who are looking to finance a chair at Ghent University will almost certainly come into contact with Liesbeth Plovie. Together with the rest of the External Relations team, she is working on what she calls ‘long-term relationships in the making’. “It’s a matter of trust. Companies or organisations that want to set up a chair together are not just another partner for us.”

What do you do when a company, person, or organisation wants to establish a chair at Ghent University?

“If the request comes from someone we have never worked with before, we first ask about their expectations. How do they see things? We work together with them and the university faculties to consider which areas of research they could invest in, and which professor is able to take on the position of supervisor. A chair is commissioned for three years on average, which often gets extended. So it is important to carefully pay attention from the start both to the external partner’s expectations as well as those of Ghent University. Our task is to bring everything together and to implement the chair in practical terms, together with the partners.”

How do you help the external partners decide what they want to support at Ghent University?

“We have a good overview of what research is happening, and what expertise we have in-house. From the first contact on, we invest a lot of energy into building a good, strong partnership that everyone is happy with. Usually, the companies or organisations themselves already have a very good idea of what they want to support. If not, we look together for an ideal match. This is very important: both parties have to benefit from the match. It has to offer both Ghent University and the external partner the chance to expand their network and expertise.”

Why do companies or organisations decide to establish a chair at Ghent University?

“They can grow their knowledge thanks to the university’s research. On the other hand, our academics get to know the reality of the workplace. The connection with Ghent University opens doors and creates opportunities to collaborate with the academic world. It is also a way for companies to come into contact with students and maybe even recruit them. External partners can also attend or organise guest lectures, symposia, workshops, or courses. Companies that collaborate with the university are opting for a vision that is academically rigorous and sustainable.”

What is the greatest benefit of a chair at Ghent University?

“Ghent University pays a lot of attention on an individual level to the relationships with its partners. This is; and remains a donation, so it’s all about trust. We regularly conduct interim evaluations, looking at what is going well and what could be a stumbling block. Feedback helps trust to grow on both sides. You can see it as a long-term relationship that is under construction.”

IN PRACTICE
Chairs



ESTABLISHING A CHAIR HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are two paths to setting up a chair, and the donors can choose freely between these. Both of these have specific consequences for the donor and the chair.

SCENARIO #1

CHAIR VIA BANK DONATION

In this scenario, the donor opts to make a donation without making any formal agreement, or without it being binding. This means that no formal objectives are set down on paper. Rather, the university draws up a one-sided statement of intention which sets out how the gift will be used, and to what ends.

This type of gift gives the donor the right to a tax reduction, and the donor receives a tax certificate.

The money can be donated through a single transfer, or spread over multiple transfers.

SCENARIO #2

CHAIR BASED ON A FORMAL AGREEMENT

The donor and Ghent University make a formal agreement including a number of arrangements. This makes it possible to establish specific goals or milestones, whether related to students visiting the business, or the business coming to visit a research project. The important thing here is that Ghent University guarantees its academic freedom, and keeps the intellectual rights to any work.

This kind of donation is paid via invoice, and includes 21% sales tax.

“It’s more important than ever to invest in the ‘soft’ sciences.”



Chairs are an excellent way for a company or organisation to fund research on socially relevant themes. Both in the hard and soft sciences. Because research in other sectors also yields results that benefit society.

“Social sciences help organise and shape society,” says Wouter Quartier who is responsible for corporate development at VRT, the Flemish public broadcaster. It’s therefore no coincidence that the broadcaster itself invested in a chair in the social sciences. ‘Media in a society in transition’ is a chair that Ghent University shares with the VUB, focusing on the role that public broadcasting plays in today’s society. “Media offers the most important channels for people to learn about the world around them, but this environment is constantly evolving due to technology, internationalisation, and a changing society. This chair is seeking answers to this,” says Quartier.

Sufficient autonomy

“Chairs are particularly interesting in this respect. They are part of the university, yet they have sufficient autonomy to take into account the societal wishes of the financial backers,” explains Prof. Dr. Pascal Delhey. →



“After all, it’s not a question of a normal ‘sports club’, but of innovative, hybrid organisations that use sports as a tool.”

— PROF. DR. DELHEYE

integration or reintegration into society or the labour market by supporting their personal development. In our practical guide to social and sports work, people working in the field set out their own vision of how projects can have a sustainable basis and keep growing. It is important that academic research also brings benefits in the field, and chairs are great for this,” says Prof. Delheye.

The chance to think further

It shows that even in the soft sciences, research can lead to very concrete and practice-oriented results. Bringing together theory and practice is the very aim of the ‘Media in a society in transition’ project as well.



FRANS VERHEEKE

This chair focuses on the social context in which the public broadcaster operates, changes in how media are used according to technological developments and the evolving media market.

“There is not very much fundamental research that looks at the entire media ecosystem. A chair gives us the opportunity to think further, to develop hypotheses, and challenge both the VRT and the media ecosystem,” explains Wouter Quartier.

“It is more important than ever that investments are made in the soft sciences. Non-exact disciplines sometimes come under pressure because the results are less measurable or unambiguous. But that doesn’t make them any less interesting. On the contrary,” concludes Prof. Delheye.

He is the named holder of the Ghent University Frans Verheeke chair, and is overseeing the project together with supervisor Prof. Herwig Reynaert. The chair researches sports from a political science standpoint, and it is also committed to empowering disadvantaged groups (www.detoekomstvandesport.be). The chair is supported by partners including VDK bank, CM Midden-Vlaanderen, KAA Gent, vzw De Kade, Volksvermogen, Allianz Benelux & Elco Belgium.

“During the fieldwork, it became clear that social-sports organisations often find themselves in a precarious situation. They have plenty of commitment and enthusiasm, but they lack the structural foundation and finance. After all, it’s not a question of a normal ‘sports club’, but of innovative, hybrid organisations that use sports as a tool.” The ultimate goal is to stimulate people’s

THE ACCELERATOR FOR INNOVATION & KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

“
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a way of encouraging
talent.
”

Leading pharmaceutical company Janssen Pharmaceuticals has been working with Ghent University for years. Presently it has three chairs in the university. Managing Director Sonja Willems explains the importance of this long-term collaboration.

Why do you collaborate with universities for research instead of doing it yourself?

“We face many new challenges and opportunities when it comes to treating diseases – and, above all, preventing them. As a pharmaceutical company, we do not have in-house knowledge about everything, so it is important for us to work together with universities, hospitals, researchers, biotech companies, and others. In this way we can gather knowledge and use it in our development programmes in order to eventually find solutions to health problems worldwide. The collaboration is very broad, ranging from fundamental research to epidemiological research to investigating which patients respond better to certain treatments. Industry and academia play a complementary role that can accelerate innovation and make broader insights available to the world. Setting up chairs in universities is one possible means of collaboration.”

What to expect – and not to expect – from a chair?

“Of course the research has to have an approach that is relevant to us, and thus fit in with the therapeutic domains where we are active. We establish the theme and research question in consultation with Ghent University, but it is the university’s responsibility to decide how the research will be conducted. The university is free to investigate avenues of inquiry within the chosen theme. So we don’t have any guarantees. In the two to three years during which the chair is running, the research is often carried out by a PhD student under the auspices of a professor. A chair is therefore also a way of encouraging talent.”

Why choose Ghent University?

“For the Chair in Systemic Sclerosis, we are working together with Ghent University because the University Hospital is a recognised Centre of Excellence of EULAR (the European League against Rheumatism). Ghent University Hospital received its certification as a Centre of Excellence in Rheumatology Research in 2011-12. Combined with their international expertise, this makes Ghent University the right partner for establishing this chair.”





→ **When did the collaboration with Ghent University start?**

“We started in October 2015. Initially, there was a partnership agreement between Janssen Pharmaceutica NV and Ghent University. In August 2018, this was expanded to include Janssen-Cilag NV and Ghent University Hospital. During this time we have already started many joint projects. For example, we can see that our collaboration is leading to a steady exchange of (post)doctoral talent between the university and Janssen, and together we are organising scientific and careers events for master’s students, PhD students and postdocs.”

JANSSEN PHARMACEUTICALS CHAIRS AT GHEENT UNIVERSITY

- The Psoriasis Chair started in March 2019, with the aim of making progress in the optimal treatment of psoriasis.
- The Haematology Chair has both an educational and a scientific aim within the field of precision medicine for various lymphoid cancers.
- Finally, the aim of the Systemic Sclerosis Chair is to improve patient care by already detecting possible complications during the screening phase.

COLOFON

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DONATIONS to Ghent University

There are a range of ways to support the university. Including simple donations. Gifts support research into innovative and forward-thinking research applications, meaning you can help researchers find solutions for the medical, economic, technological, or social challenges

of today and tomorrow. You decide where your donation should end up. For donations of 40 euros or more you will receive a tax certificate. The message for the transfer depends on the Ghent University goal that you wish to support. Please don't hesitate to contact us about this.

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