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Toledo as the Common Virtual Learning Environment of the Association K.U.Leuven

In Flanders, associations in higher education have been formed in order to implement the **Bologna Declaration**. The Flemish Government's decree on higher education (2003) translates the principles of the Bologna agreement into a Flemish code of practice, contributing to the European space for higher education and research. One of its key elements is co-operation, in the form of associations, between universities and institutions of higher education. The **K.U.Leuven Association** is based on a close co-operation between the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and 12 other institutions of higher education ("hogescholen"), with a total of 70,000 students in 23 cities across Flanders. **Co-operation in education** is at the top of the association's agenda. Each of the partners offers its own expertise and experience, and together they invest their highest efforts to improve the standards and quality of teaching, to increase flexibility, to implement internationalization, to stimulate study- and student-guidance, and to enhance curriculum development and innovative forms of working.

In September 2004, the Association K.U.Leuven joined forces in the domain of e-learning. From then on, all partner institutions invested together in a flexible, state of the art **common virtual learning environment** ('GDLO'). The nucleus of the GDLO is **Toledo**, the digital learning environment at the K.U.Leuven, which has been gradually implemented in all institutions of the association. This wide-scale deployment called for a restructuring of the user support on several levels. The **Toledo-team,** consisting of system administrators, software developers, data managers and application managers, is responsible for the central technical management of the GDLO. The **advisory board** consists of representatives from each institution and from the Toledo-team. They meet regularly to report and discuss problems, to evaluate the GDLO and to determine its future. Every institution and faculty has its own team of **local administrators**, who help students and teachers in their daily use of the GDLO and are the linking pin with the central Toledo-team.

The **benefits** of the GDLO are ample. **Staff members** can communicate with students and with each other, and exchange experiences, over the boundaries of their own institution. They can develop (interactive) course materials together, and make them available for others in the association. **Students** have access to a one common e-learning environment during their whole educational career. They can easily come into contact with fellow students from other study programs or even other institutions. As course materials are stored in a central place and available for everyone, students can take a course at another institution without moving physically, and teachers can observe students throughout their whole curriculum, wherever they are. Content of courses, organized by different institutions within the association, can be attuned to one another, facilitating the flow of students from one study program (or institute) to another,

enhancing transparency between programs. And finally the **institutions** benefit from an educational personalized portal, providing an open door towards the Association. The use of the GDLO results in a gathering of strengths with regard to pedagogical and technical aspects of the electronic learning environment, thus providing a global quality solution for staff and students.

This coherent and comprehensive approach, with special attention for strategy, technology and human resources, proved to be the right formula for our association and for the time being.