

Information

Hugo Thienpont

Position:

Vice-Rector of Innovation and Industrial Policy

Title:

Prof. dr. ir.

Academic position:

Head of the Applied Physics and Phototonics department and director of the B-PHOT VUB Brussels Photonics Team

Place and date of birth: Ninove, August 20, 1961

Education: Civil Engineer Mechanical-Electrical Engineering and Doctor of Engineering

Brief overview of academic career:

Hugo Thienpont is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Engineering at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). He obtained a degree in Civil Mechanical-Electrical Engineering, in the Applied Sciences option, at the VUB in 1984, and a PhD in Applied Sciences at the Applied Physics and Phototonics Department (TONA) in 1990, which was then headed by Prof. Roger Van Geen. Hugo was appointed TONA department head in 2003 and founded the B-PHOT VUB Brussels Photonics Team in his capacity as director of research. This research team, which today has 70 members, has completed ground-breaking research in the field of light technology, or phototonics. Hugo Thienpont became responsible for innovation and industrial policies in 2012, and he has been the vice-rector of innovation and industrial policy since 2015.

Breakthrough moment in academic career: That moment when the European Commission selected our "Network of Excellence" NEMO project proposal (6,4 MEuro) as the best project proposal in December of 2013, leading our B-PHOT research team to oversee the coordination of the largest European Phototonics Network. This marked the beginning of a long list of major European projects that we coordinated and that put the VUB's research and innovations in phototonics on the map globally.

Hobbies/interests: Ancient civilisations, European wines, my mother's cooking / the VUB B-PHOT research team and the VUB TechTransfer Team

What are the biggest challenges you see as part of your new position? My primary and also most tricky challenge as a vice-rector of Innovation and Industrial Policy continues to be to raise awareness among all VUB researchers that their efforts to valorise research results both at the industrial and societal level are just as important as the research results they obtained. By pointing to the success stories of the different VUB research groups, I would like to show them that the best and most successful research groups at the VUB are the ones that combine and seamlessly integrate fundamental and applied/industrial research.

What do you hope to have achieved four years from now? Four years is a long time. Certainty and stability at the political and economic level have become a rare thing in this day and age. That's why it's important to constantly keep track of developments in this complex world, and to make adjustments or improvements to our innovation and valorisation approach accordingly. We should genuinely be proud that our VUB researchers gave excellent performances in these last few years, which were marked by great changes in innovation and government subsidies. It's a sign of how flexible our researchers have become and how much more they have started to focus on external funding. At the same time, we should realise that many promising VUB research groups will only achieve their full potential when they too start to pursue external funding. We want to lower the threshold to seek external project funding for these groups so that, four years from now, the VUB is

seen a force to be reckoned with in the Flemish, Brussels and European fields of innovation and valorisation.

How do you view the university's future? The VUB is an excellent university with a tremendous potential for growth. Continuing advances in excellence and capacity as well as a pioneering mindset, however, can only be achieved when hardworking, talented individuals are given all the opportunities they deserve, and when an entrepreneurial spirit is adopted that is invested in new learning techniques, sustainable high-tech facilities, new research infrastructure, as well as in individuals that dedicate themselves to the VUB, fully and unconditionally.

Finally: what is your motto in life? "Plus est en vous"