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High-speed internet for Flemish colleges of higher education

Flemish minister MOERMAN and Federal institute, BELNET making sure Flemish colleges of higher education are up to speed with the universities for high-speed Internet

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Following the lead of the Belgian universities, all 22 Flemish colleges of higher education will also be able to access the Internet via very high bandwidth connections. From 1 January 2007, they will be connected to the world wide web, other campuses and institutions, universities and worldwide research networks, all with a capacity of 1 gigabit per second. It is the result of an investment worth € 3 million by Flemish minister for Science and Innovation, Moerman and the Federal institute, BELNET. While the institutions' Internet access is at present relatively expensive and slow, from 2007 it will be cheap and super fast. Flemish minister, Moerman has earmarked € 2 million for the project. Together with BELNET's contribution of € 1 million, it will enable the laying and activation of fibre optic cable between 22 colleges of higher education and BELNET network connection points. Five connection points (or POPs, points of presence) are installed at the universities of Louvain, Ghent, Antwerp, Kortrijk and Hasselt. The remaining two are located in Geel and Bruges. The 22 colleges of higher education will be connected to BELNET's research network via fibre optic cables running directly from their campus to one of the five connection points, providing a capacity of 1 gigabit per second (the capacity of around 300 ADSL connections). Until now, each college of higher education had to arrange its own connection to the closest university's connection point. In each case, the institutions made use of a leased line from a telecom operator. Leased lines, however, are relatively expensive. By way of illustration, the Karel de Grote Hogeschool needs a lot of bandwidth for the research activities of its Industrial Sciences and Technology campus. For a fibre optic connection with the BELNET connection point - offering a capacity of maximum 100 megabit per second - they pay approximately € 30,000 per annum. That is practically unaffordable. From 1 January 2007, neither the Karel de Grote Hogeschool nor the 21 other colleges of higher education will have to arrange or indeed pay for their connection with BELNET's research network. Thanks to investments made by the Flemish Community and BELNET, which amount to around € 30,000 per institution per year for five years, they will now have free access to a high performance 1 Gbps connection. That is around ten times the capacity an institution used to get for the same price. As a result of the new connection, the colleges of higher education will be able to initiate high-speed connections with other campuses, colleges, universities and international research networks such as the European Géant2 and the American Internet2. The institutions can decide themselves what they do with it - wireless broadband access for students via a laptop, for example, will now be made possible - and how the capacity is distributed amongst students, lecturers and administration services. This acceleration of digital exchange is absolutely necessary in light of the Bologna reforms of higher education in Europe. As colleges of higher education develop two tier degree programmes of a more academic nature, we can expect broader research activities alongside increased cooperation with universities. Thanks to the higher capacity line, institutions will be able to work with, to name but a few, multimedia applications, video conferences, computer telecommunications, electronic teaching programmes (or e-learning) and grid computing. The high-speed connection for colleges of higher education is part of the Flemish and Federal governments' initiatives in innovation, research and development, science and education. The project aims to close the gap in Internet access between colleges of higher education and universities. It is also an extension of BELNET's task to further research, training and scientific cooperation. BELNET also aims to realise a similar acceleration of digital information transfer for higher education in Brussels and Wallonia. BELNET is currently engaged in discussions with the respective governments. About BELNET - "The knowledge network" The government agency BELNET

provides Internet access with a very high bandwidth to Belgian educational institutes, research centres and government services. More than 550,000 end-users use bandwidths of up to 2.5 gigabits per second; this is about a thousand times faster than the Internet access for consumers. References include all Belgian universities and most non-university higher education institutions, the computer network of the Federal Government services (FedMAN), all federal scientific institutes, the largest public research centres and various government administrations. BELNET provides high-quality Internet access with access control via the CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team) and a direct connection with world-wide research networks, including the American Internet2 and the European Géant. Internet pioneer BELNET was founded in 1993 at the Federal Research Policy's initiative. The network encourages research, training and scientific co-operation. For more information, please go to <http://www.belnet.be> and <http://cert.belnet.be>

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