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Walloon higher education on route for super fast internet

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From next year and for a period of twelve years, BELNET will provide internet access with very high bandwidth for the 17 Walloon colleges of higher education and one university yet to receive 1 Gbps internet access, the Faculté Universitaire des Sciences Agronomiques de Gembloux. Of the 17 institutions, 14 will have become BELNET clients for the first time. The internet access will benefit the 36,000 students enrolled at the colleges of higher education and the 5,000 students of the Gembloux university. Until now, the majority of the 17 colleges of higher education have only ever had an ADSL connection. The most progressive institutions use an expensive 2 megabit per second leased line and pay around € 7,000 per year for the privilege. From next year on, their internet access will be 500 times faster with savings of up to € 5,000 per year to boot. In order to attain a capacity of 1 Gbps, the institutions and the university will be connected to the BELNET research network via the closest BELNET internet access point or 'point of presence' (POP). The government institute currently has six POPs in Wallonia. Four are installed at the universities of Mons, Louvain-La-Neuve, Liege and Namur whereas the other two are located at Charleroi-Gosselies and Arlon. Investment: around 1 million euro BELNET is investing € 1.2 million in the project. € 1 million will be earmarked for the 10 km of fibre optic cable needed to connect the colleges of higher education and the Gembloux university with the existing Walloon fibre optic network --property of the Walloon Regional Authority (specifically the Ministry for Infrastructure and Transport). The expansion of the fibre optic network will be carried out from September 2006 by SOFICO (Société de financement complémentaire des Infrastructures). SOFICO will be responsible for network maintenance during the 12 year period and guarantees the quality of the optic fibres. BELNET will devote the remaining € 200,000 to the routers and switches, equipment used to direct internet traffic across the fibre optic cables. The connection with the BELNET research network means the colleges of higher education and Gembloux university will be connected at very high speeds with other institutions and universities, but also with international research networks such as the European Géant2 and the American Internet2. Via the equilibration of internet bandwidth between the universities --who are already BELNET clients-- and colleges of higher education, the latter will be able to conduct scientific research and collaborate with universities, as prescribed under the Bologna reforms of higher education in Europe. 1 Gbps internet suddenly makes new applications possible, such as 3D applications, video conferences, e-learning and e-teaching, computer telecommunications and grid computing. A leap forward "The Walloon colleges of higher education will be able to make a real leap forward," says Pierre Bruyère, general manager of BELNET. "They're now riding a 'penny-farthing'. Next year they'll be driving a fast sports car. The initiative is part of our core objective to provide a network for institutions of higher education in the interests of promoting academic research." "The project with BELNET is useful for Wallonia and the leaders of tomorrow who study at our colleges of higher education," says Marie-Dominique Simonet, Walloon Minister for Research and New Technologies. "We have fulfilled our side of the bargain and now call upon the respective institutions to allocate sufficient manpower and resources to ensuring the optimal use of the super fast internet

access."The 22 Flemish colleges of higher education will also receive internet access with a capacity of 1 gigabit per second from 2007. To that end, BELNET has already concluded a cooperation agreement with Flemish Minister for Science and Innovation, Fientje Moerman. About BELNET - "The knowledge network" see also <http://www.quadrantcommunications.be/downloads/index.htm?c=Belnet&l=fr> 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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