



*Strategies for gender  
balanced higher education*

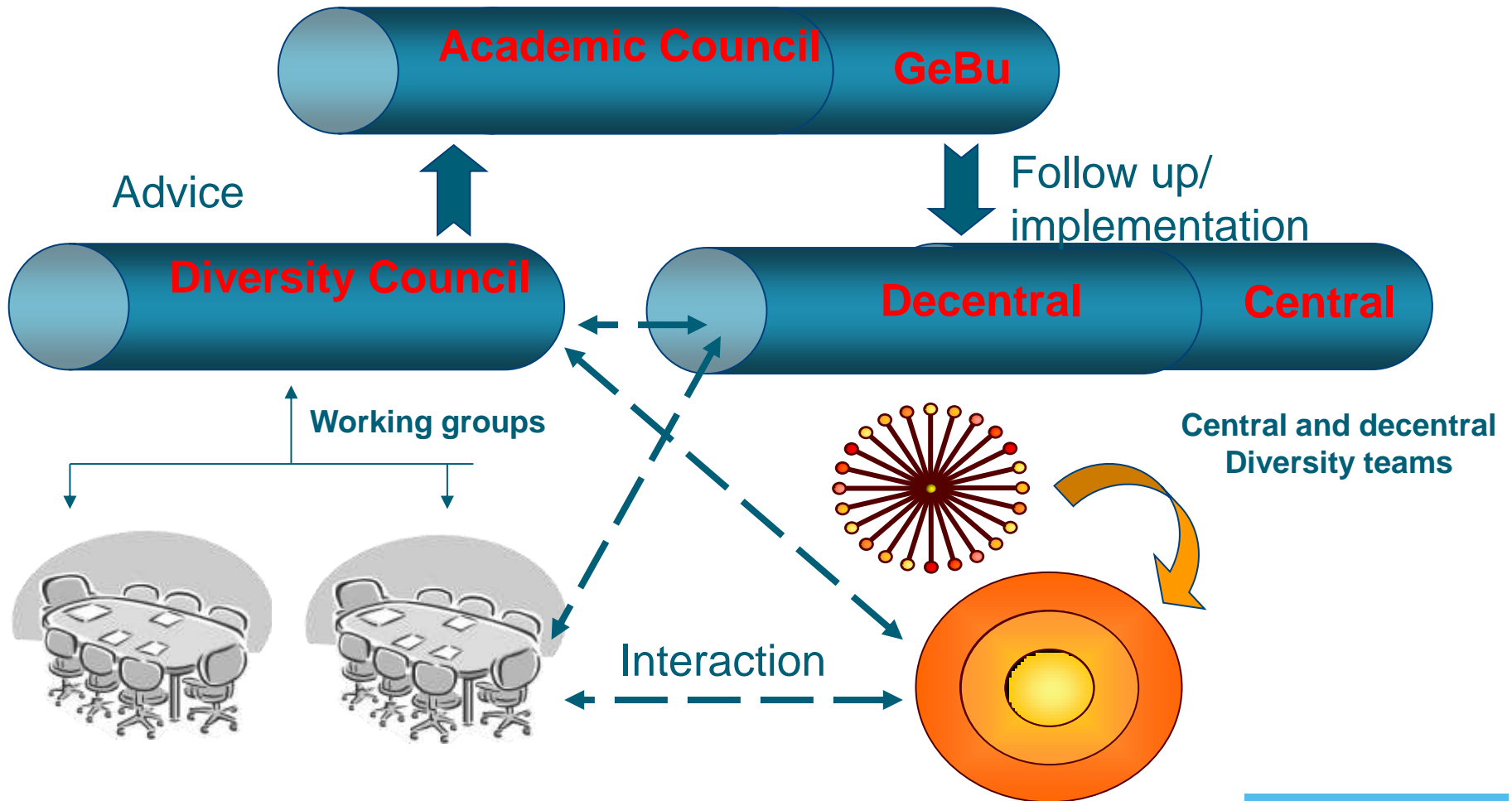
Prof. Veerle Draulans &  
Vice-Rector Prof. T. Baelmans  
Brussels, November 30 th, 2012



# Structure of our presentation

- 1) brief received from Leuven Diversity Council and the reason for the Diversity Council's instruction
- 2) the vision and method of the temporary 'gender and students' working group
- 3) facts and figures
- 4) possible initiatives

# Diversity at KU Leuven



# Brief ad hoc working group 'gender and students'

- (1) to examine whether it is up to the university to provide steering in gender imbalances among students on certain courses
- (2) to compile a list of best practices for this country and abroad
- (3) to recommend the feasibility of and methods for increasing recruitment from the underrepresented group and how the minority group concerned is best dealt with in courses with a gender imbalance

# Answer working group

Yes, it is up to the university

- to study gender imbalances on courses
  - to pinpoint problem areas
  - to initiate actions where this is advisable and required
  - to co-ordinate and/or support, respecting the final individual choices made by students
- debate: how forceful is 'steering'?

# Answer working group

Clearly consensus :

- 1) non-desirability of a binding steering mechanism, since the students' individual choices need to be respected
- 2) KU Leuven: social responsibility; must encourage its departments to ensure the student population reflects social ratios and dynamics.

# Working group: process

- collect facts & figures
- comparison facts & figures Flanders & abroad
- literature study
- needs workplace
- pre-existing initiatives (focus: European context)
- proposal recommendations



# Figures: looking at study subjects, not at faculties

-In 2011-2012,

women slightly overrepresented inflow & outflow

-54.9% students embarking on higher education ♀

-54.4% bachelor's students ♀

-56.1% of master's students ♀

-68.4% teacher training ♀

-57.4% master's degrees 2010-2011 issued to ♀

# Figures: looking at study subjects, not at schools or faculties

-conclusion: analysis ♂/♀ ratios student population:  
level of specific academic training programs

-e.g.:

-inflow in bachelor's courses in the Faculty of Arts: fairly evenly balanced gender distribution.

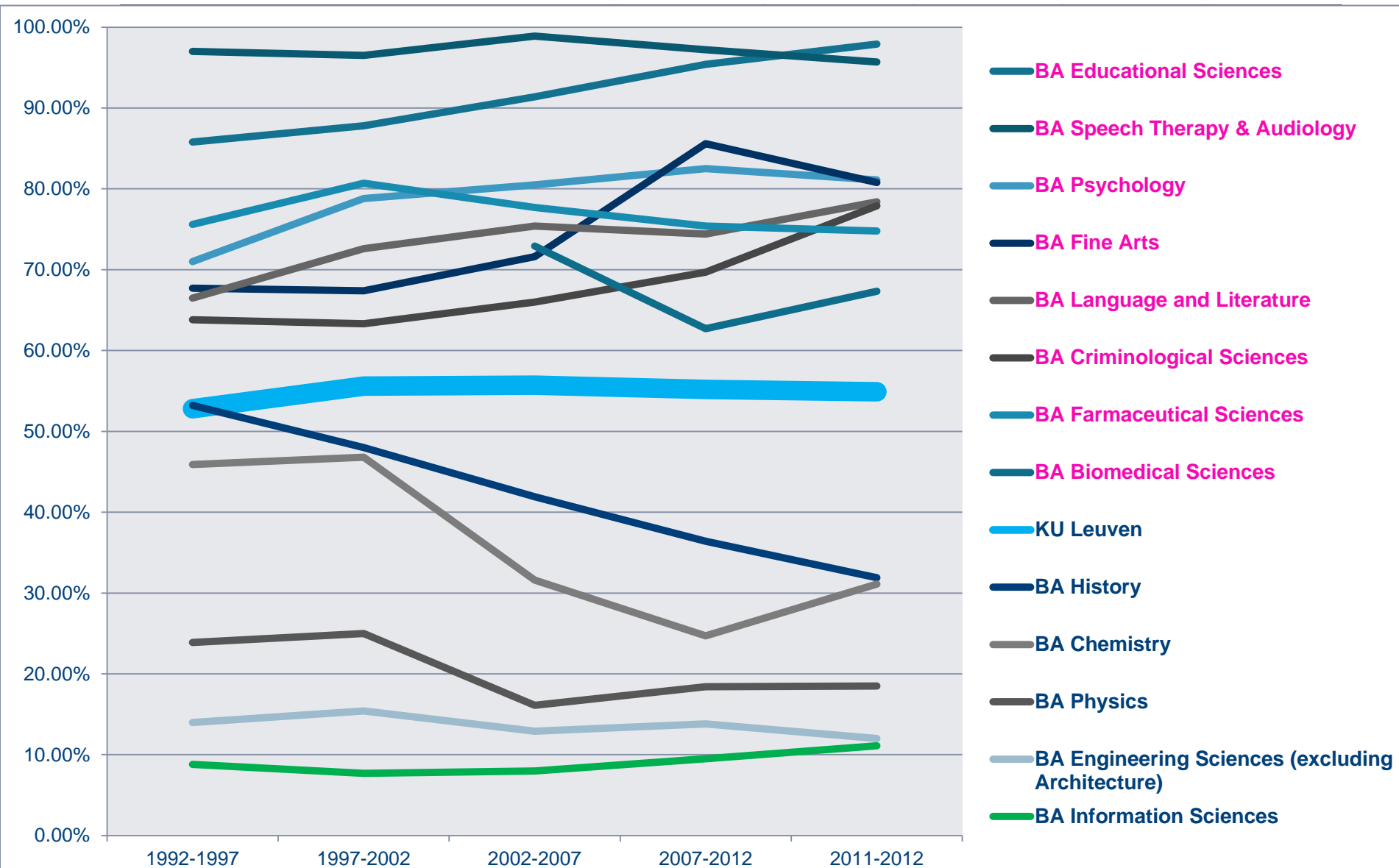
-but: Language & Literature : predominantly ♀

History course : predominantly ♂

-but: ♀ students underrepresented Engineering course

♀ majority Architectural engineering course

# Looking at study subjects, not at schools or faculties: % female students gender imbalance in bachelors courses



# Figures: some results

- over 20 years: no reduction, but an escalation of the gender imbalances for these courses
- other Flemish institutions: similar gender imbalances
- campus size does not matter
- significantly more male students discontinue courses in which they are in the minority

# Why attention to ♀ as a minority?

- ♀ minority in technical and scientific studies: most attention
- ♂ men minority: barely any attention
- however: occupational associations expressed serious concerns: quid male role models?
- factors limiting inflow ♂ students?
- research needed: how male and female students experience being in a small minority on a course

# 2000: KU Leuven: equal opportunities group in sciences, engineering and technology

- purpose: active gender mainstream policy - increasing inflow ♀ students - correcting the negative image of engineering occupation
- numerous initiatives have been developed
- dedication admirable: inflow ♀ +/-unchanged

# Recommendations

## University Services

Diversity policy

Course advice

Communication

‘Education and learning’

Faculties/schools: Councils, Permanent Education Committees,  
Diversity Teams

Teacher training courses

Students and student organisations

Policy makers in our society

# Possible initiatives

1. students & lecturers
2. engagement with the workplace
3. for the university:
  - further investigation
  - training for academic staff
  - communication materials
4. research:
  - stressful: ♀/♂ belonging to minority/ course
  - decisive factors drop out, specifically for members of gender minorities?
  - explanation gender imbalances have increased?
  - research in Leuven: psychology/general engineering



# Our thanks go to

-Tom Bekers

-members KU Leuven 'gender and students' working group

for their tremendous collaboration.