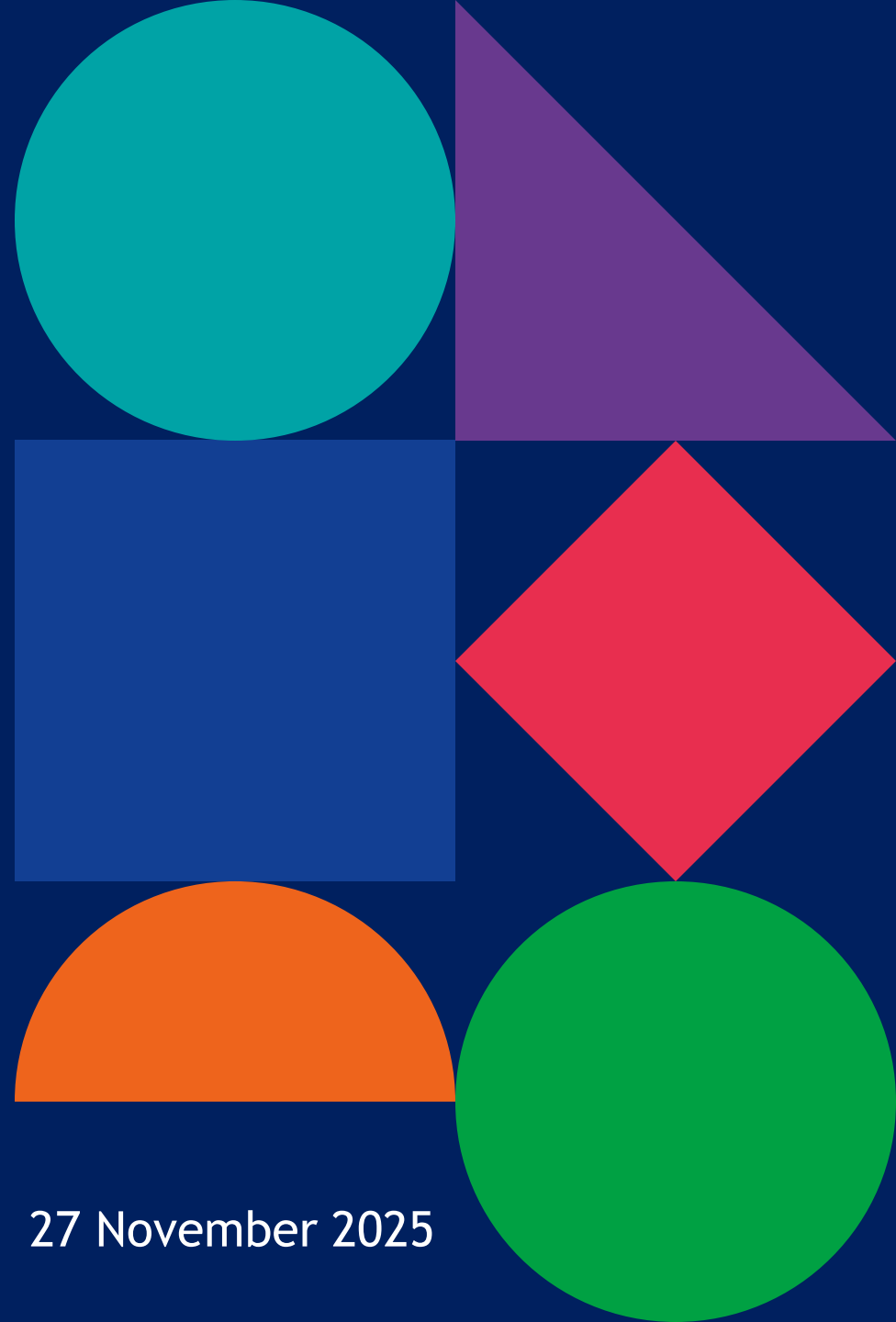


# Kickstart your career in BioBusiness - **Business Developer**



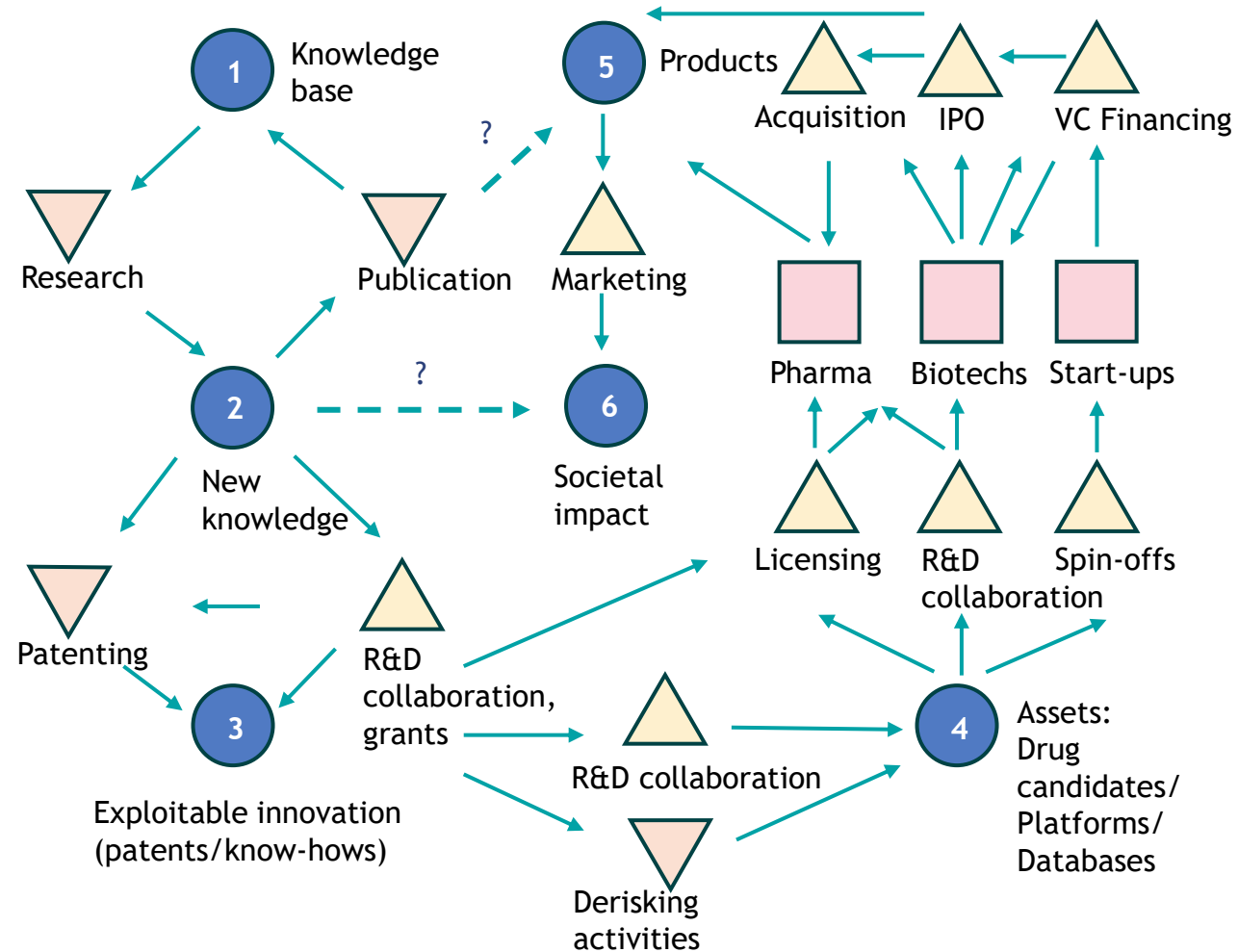
**Ethan Kuo**, Business Development Manager  
VIB | Innovation and Business

27 November 2025



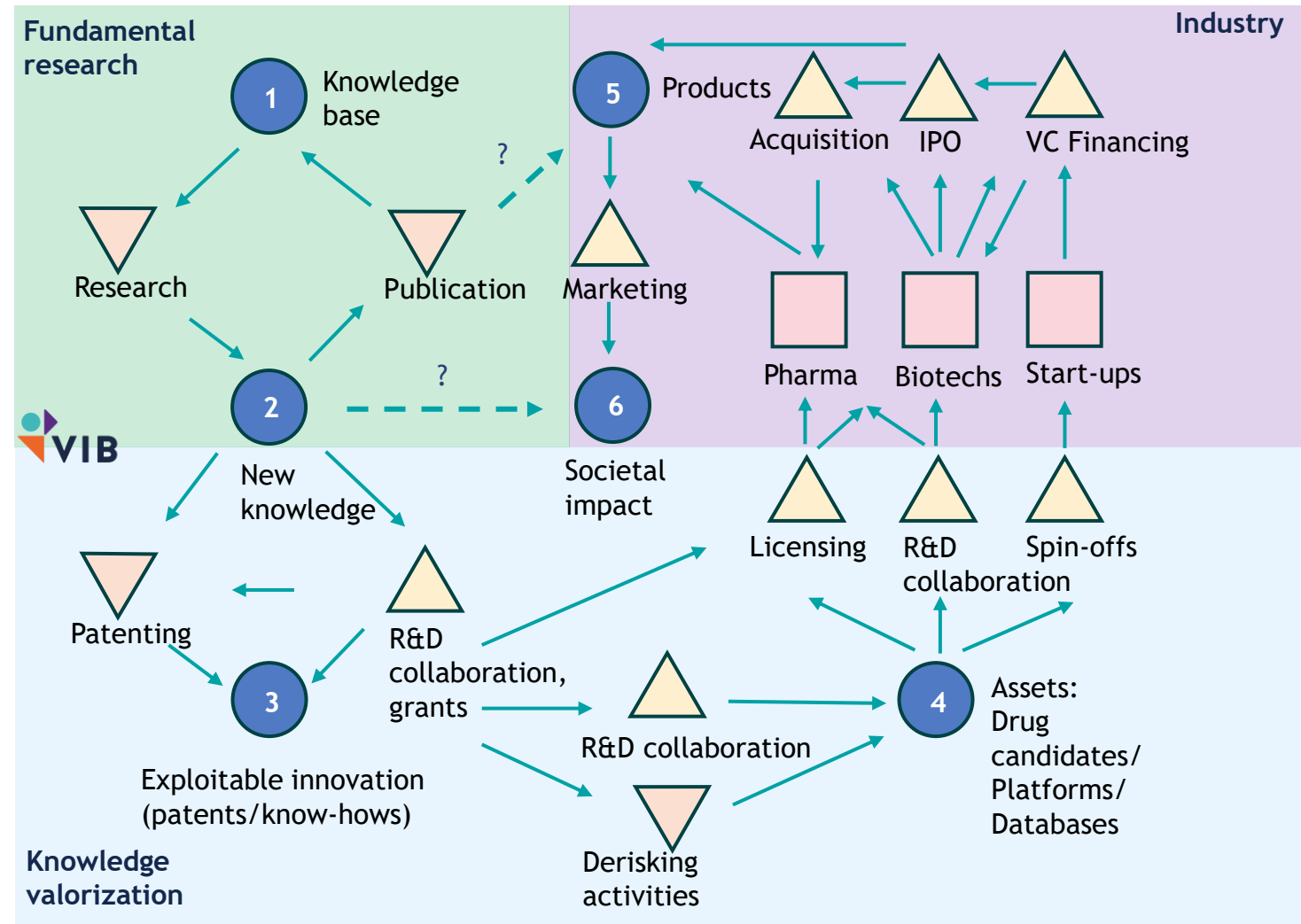
# Thought exercise: How does scientific research *actually* translate into societal impact?

- Academics prioritize research and publications
- Scientists aspire to see their work create tangible societal impact...
- However, this does not happen spontaneously
- In most cases, practical applications are essential
- Achieving impact requires many more steps beyond fundamental research



# Thought exercise: How does scientific research *actually* translate into societal impact?

- Academics prioritize research and publications
- Scientists aspire to see their work create tangible societal impact...
- However, this does not happen spontaneously
- In most cases, practical applications are essential
- Achieving impact requires many more steps beyond fundamental research
- **Business development in the life sciences includes:** R&D collaborations, grant applications, licensing, acquisitions, spin-offs, and marketing



# Business developers in biobusiness



- **Profile:** Scientifically trained (PhD) with strong business acumen



- **Responsibility:**

- Scouting and evaluating business opportunities from research programs
- Building connections between ideas and stakeholders
- Facilitating and executing agreements between parties



- **Impact:**

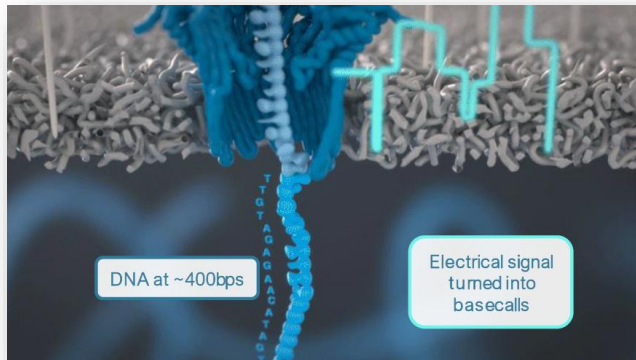
- Transforming research programs into business opportunities for societal benefits
- Making key connections to move the needle
- Maximizing returns while minimizing risk for all stakeholders (win-win)

What drives us?

# From bacterial proteins to user-friendly DNA analysis

## VIB-VUB developed bacterial pore protein CsgG

- CsgG-derivatives give stable currents and generate data of superior quality compared to other nanopore sensors



Prof. Han Remaut,  
VIB-VUB Center for Structural Biology

## Oxford Nanopore Technologies in-licensed CsgG nanopore in 2016

- Co-developing CsgG properties for optimal nanopore sequencing data
- CsgG sensing nanopore used in ONT's DNA/RNA sequencing devices



## Globally commercially available since 2016

- **Real-time analysis of native DNA or RNA of anything, by anyone, anywhere**
- Available in >100 countries
- **MinION®**: the only portable, real-time DNA/RNA sequencer (first product, launched in 2016)
- **GridION®**: benchtop device to run up to five MinION Flow Cells at once
- **PromethION®**: cost-effective, high throughput sequencing (e.g., population genome projects)

# Advancing novel immuno-oncology assets

## VIB-KU Leuven identified novel targets to enhance T-cell response in cancer

- Targeting key metabolic and immunological pathways in the TME
- Inhibiting these targets allows for reprogramming of cancer cell metabolism, pro-inflammatory macrophages and natural killer cells
- Potential new treatment for checkpoint inhibitor-resistant tumors



*Prof. Max Mazzone,  
VIB-KU Leuven Center for Cancer Biology*

## Strategic partnership with Italian-based Lever Bio in 2025

- Lever Bio (launched in 2024) is focused on developing next-gen immuno-oncology therapies
- Agreement provides access to VIB's IP to further develop 4 first-in-class VHH antibody assets
- Lever Bio will further progress assets through pre-clinical development

## Towards the clinic: IND-enabling studies expected in 2026

- Lead program originating from VIB
- Validate therapeutic potential and positioning in solid tumors

“



*Dr. Chiara Donini  
Project Manager, Lever Bio*

Prof Mazzone's groundbreaking work in immuno-metabolism and tumor immunology provides a strong scientific basis for these innovative VHH antibody programs.

”



# A dedicated incubator enabling AgTech start-ups to grow

**INARI**™

## Attracting US based company to Flanders

- **2016:** Inari founded in the US, pioneering multiplex gene editing in plants
- **2018:** First research projects with VIB
- **2019:** R&D site opened in Flanders
- **2021:** Expansion of greenhouse operations to the VIB agro-incubator
- **2025:** Fully established in Flanders, with proprietary greenhouse R&D facilities



**zymofix**

## Scaling its beneficial microbes for agriculture

- **2022:** Local start-up supported by Biotope <sup>by VIB</sup>, using biomass residues to cultivate beneficial microorganisms
- **2023:** Access to offices, labs and greenhouse space in VIB's agro-incubator
- **2024:** Additional funding secured; expanding activities in agro-incubator



 **RAINBOW CROPS**

## Launching new VIB Agtech spin-off

- ERC funded research at VIB results in a breakthrough crop engineering technology 
- Technology scaled up through VIB's agro-incubator automated phenotyping capabilities
- **2025:** Rainbow Crops launched, combining multiplex genome editing, breeding and AI to engineering complex traits in crops





# Optimizing ovarian cancer therapy with in-house HRD test

## VIB-KU Leuven & UZ Leuven developed HRD test

- PARP inhibitors can prevent relapse of ovarian cancer after surgery and chemotherapy
- Only HRD+ patients benefit from PARPi therapy (50% of patients)
- HRD test to identify responders / non-responders to PARPi



Prof. Diether Lambrechts  
VIB-KU Leuven Center for Cancer Biology



Prof. Dr. Toon Van Gorp  
KU Leuven, UZ Leuven

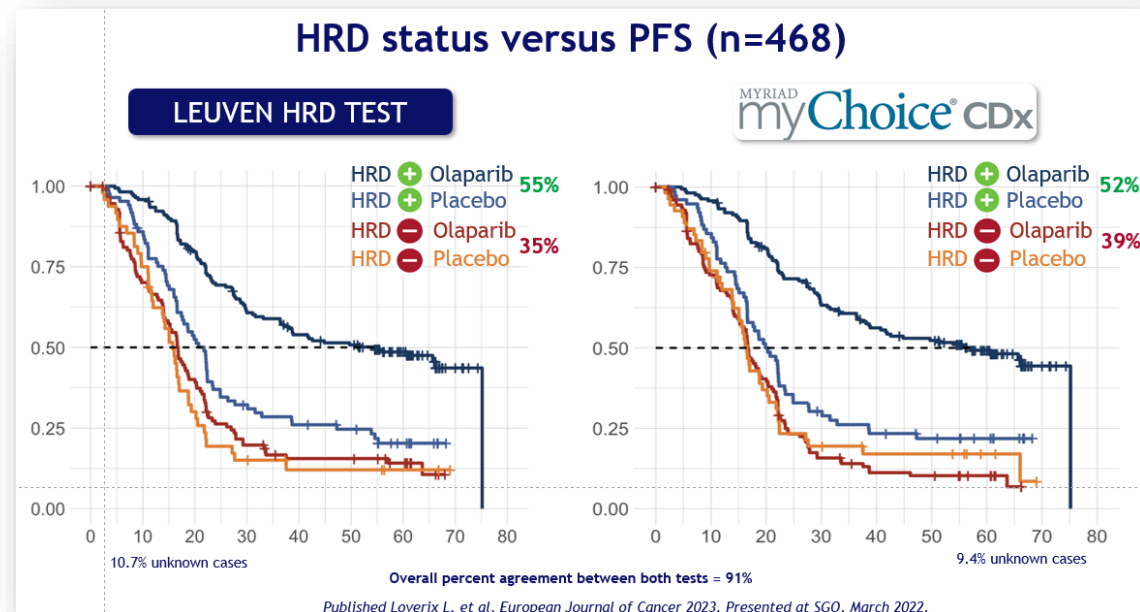
**HRD:** Homologous Recombination Deficiency test

## European alternative for US test

- Myriad's MyChoice® CDx: gold standard FDA approved test (since Oct 2019)
- Leuven HRD test: cost-effective, rapid results, GDPR- compliant

## Reimbursed and available for Belgian patients

- Est. >90% of all HRD tests in Belgium performed with Leuven HRD test
- In 2024, over 400 patients tested across Belgium



# OPENPichia® strains – Open, industry-ready *Pichia* chassis for recombinant protein production

## VIB's long-standing expertise in Pichia

- Two decades of pioneering work in *Komagataella phaffii* engineering by the **Nico Callewaert Lab**
- Advances in glyco-engineering, secretion pathways & strain optimization
- Numerous peer-reviewed publications and industrial collaborations



## OPENPichia® strains and toolkits

- Licence-free **type strain & engineered HOC1<sup>tr</sup> strain**
- **Improved transformability & secretion** for selected proteins
- **Equivalent or higher titers** at bioreactor scale vs. parental strain
- **Modular MoClo toolkit** for fast, multi-gene construct assembly
- **Open access licensing** for academia & industry



## OPEN Access for everyone

- OPENPichia® **removes licensing barriers** and accelerates recombinant protein programs.
- OPENPichia® and the MoClo toolkit provide a **flexible, accessible platform for academic labs and biotech companies.**
- Rapid **global adoption** (>80 orders)
- First clinical/agriculture/food proteins in development



sartorius



MERCK



UNIVERSIDAD DE CHILE



LG Chem



VALIDOGEN

ESTÉE LAUDER

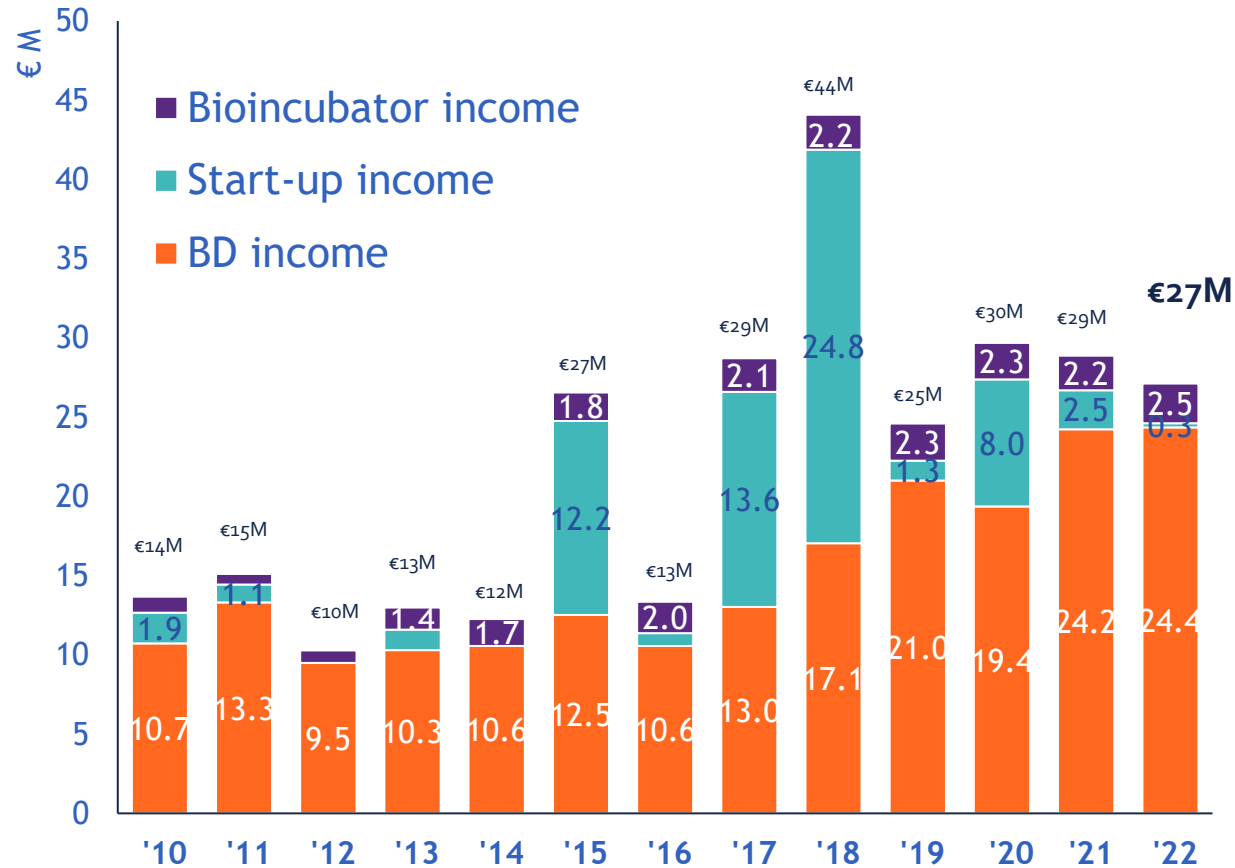


서울대학교  
SEOUL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Global Solution Provider

# The impact: Industry collaboration set up by VIB's BD team fuels future basic research & tech transfer



Johnson & Johnson

SpringWorks<sup>®</sup>  
THERAPEUTICS

FUJIREBIO

sanofi

MESTAG  
THERAPEUTICS

ABInBev

argenx

INARI<sup>TM</sup>

# VIB's Business Development team



**Jan Staelens**  
Head Contracts and  
Alliances



**Erwin Sablon**  
Head Business  
Development



**Griet Verhaegen**  
BD Manager  
Inflammation



**Koen Tyberghein**  
BD Manager  
Medical Biotech/  
Inflammation



**Vincent De Maesschalck**  
BD Manager  
Structural Biology/  
Medical Biotech



**Thijs Vackier**  
BD Manager  
Microbiology



**Sofie Coelus**  
BD Manager  
Technologies



**Yadira Olvera Carillo**  
BD Manager  
Plant Systems Biology



**Michiel Bontinck**  
BD Manager  
Plant Systems Biology



**Veerle Daniels**  
BD Manager  
Oncology



**Laura Lapienyte**  
BD Manager  
Neurology



**Karin Lemmens**  
Assistant  
Innovation & Business



**Ethan Kuo**  
Business Analyst



**Isabel Hess**  
Contract Manager



**Goedele Dedeurwaerder**  
Contract Officer



**Jiska van der Reest**  
BD Catalyst  
Oncology, I&I



**Ana Rita Santos**  
BD Catalyst  
Neurology



**Nathalie Strybol**  
Sr Assistant  
Innovation & Business

# Ethan Kuo - career journey

■ 2012-2019



**Academic scientist (Leiden University, NL)**

- MSc & PhD; background medical biochemistry x chemical biology
- Publication-driven (12 publications, 4 co-authored)
- Niche topic and technical skillsets
- Started networking for career advancement (incl. Biobusiness Summer School 2019)

■ 2019-2020



**Academic/Industry hybrid scientist (uniQure, Amsterdam)**

- Postdoc scientist in a research collaboration
- Preclinical study in AMT-191 (now Ph 1)
- COVID hit

■ 2021-2023



**Venture capital analyst (V-Bio Ventures)**

- Moved to Belgium (with young family) to work at a VC firm
- Screened 400+ deal opportunities
- Contributed to the investment of 4 startups (Corteria, Astrivax, Sibylla, Flindr)

■ 2023-present



**Business development manager (VIB)**

- Business analysis on valorisation potential for early projects (particularly on BD opportunities)
- Other activities: supports a Horizon Europe Teaming for Excellence project (RACE), ecosystem-building
- MBA (Valar by Quantic)



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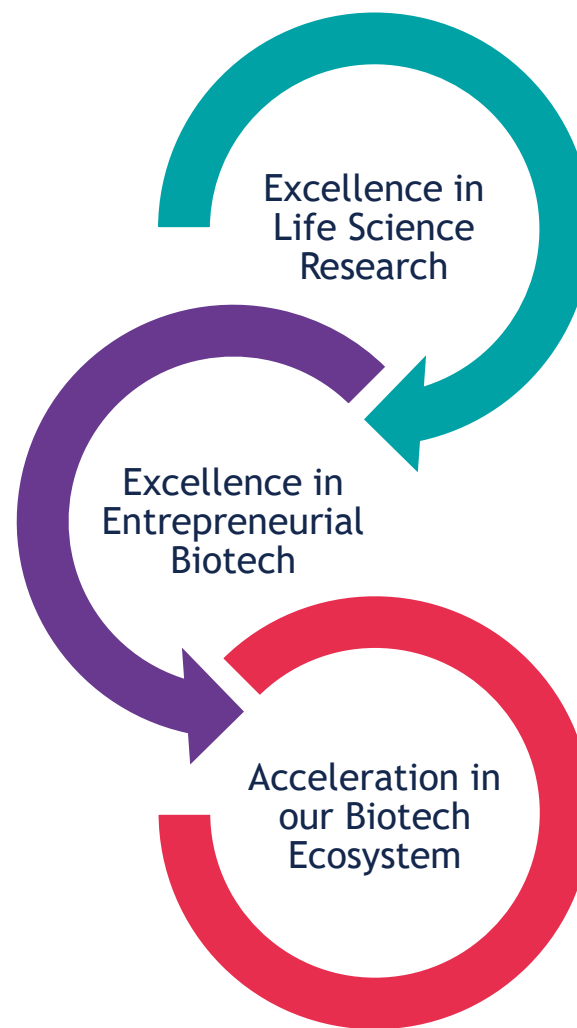
- Transforming research programs into business opportunities for societal benefits
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- **Qualifications:**

- Strong **drive** to turning innovative research programs into societal benefits
- Proven expertise and **credibility** in relevant scientific domains and/or in industry
- **Proactive learner** in science, business know-how, and people skills









Ethan Kuo, BD Manager VIB

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/chi-lin-ethan-kuo/>

