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BE CENTRAL

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Press release

DigitalCampus

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How far will BeCentral go?

Five years after the opening of its first spaces, BeCentral continues its incredible growth.

King Philippe visited the Brussels Central Station campus today, where he met with the BeCentral community to talk about how far we've come and what's next.

We kept our promise

Five years ago, the co-founders of BeCentral promised to reinvent an iconic location in the center of Brussels, the Central Station. *"We promised to make it a place of learning, entrepreneurship and digital inspiration open to all. The commitment was far from being achieved initially. When we opened, we were hosting about 50 entrepreneurs and 50 students. Today we are tenfold. I'm very delighted to be able to show King Philippe that our community has kept its promise,"* enthuses Laurent Hublet, CEO of BeCentral.

Together, the entrepreneurs, trainers and investors based at the Central Station have enabled 425,000 Belgian citizens to become actors or creators of the digital future¹. Among them, 5,200 people have followed a training course that will allow them to (re)orient themselves towards the digital professions. The schools based at BeCentral train more than 1,000 new digital professionals every year².

During his visit, the Sovereign met with a dozen people undergoing a professional transition at BeCentral's co-searching. These people are accompanied by Actiris and a group of NGO partners, in an inspiring space that looks out onto the main hall of the station. The King also met with researchers from FARI, the Institute of Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good of ULB and VUB. This cutting-edge research center, with a tradition of artificial intelligence research in Belgium, is set to grow at BeCentral in the coming years and become a European center of excellence.

During his visit, King Philippe was able to see that BeCentral is a place like no other, which is visited by people from all over the world. A thousand people meet there every day. Private, Belgian and foreign companies, NGOs and public organizations give everyone the chance to benefit from the opportunities of the digital age, regardless of age, gender,

The place for future digital entrepreneurs' development

Alongside apprentices, the campus is home to 300 entrepreneurs; some are just starting out, like participants in the WeAreFounders program, and are creating their businesses thanks to Google for Entrepreneurs. Others are growing scale-ups, like Rosa, a connected health application that has already enabled 1 million patient interactions. Sortlist and RingTwice took their first steps here, and Orange has set up its digital center. Others are mentors and investors, via BeAngels, the largest Belgian network of business angels, also based at BeCentral. BeAngels has supported more than 220 start-ups and scale-ups in 5 years, for a total amount of €24 million.

¹ Cumulative impact over 5 years

² By way of comparison, there are ~880 students enrolled in the final year of "computer science & systems" and "business informatics" in all French-speaking universities (source: Ares 2021), and ~600 students enrolled in MA2 computer science and MA2 computer engineering (source: CREF, 2019-2020 data)



The arrival of Proximus-Ada to grow over the next five years

The highlight of the royal visit at BeCentral was when Proximus' CEO Guillaume Boutin, surrounded by hundreds of students from Ecole 19, announced to King Philippe that the Central Station campus had been chosen to host Ada, the group's center of excellence in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. One hundred and fifty digital specialists will gradually join the BeCentral community starting in summer 2023. The campus will then occupy the entire Central Station building, more than 10,000 square meters.

Guillaume Boutin, CEO of Proximus :

"Proximus Ada is the first Belgian center of expertise that combines artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. Through Ada, we put our expertise in these two key areas at the service of Belgian society. In this way, we want to stimulate the development of innovative applications in many fields, further strengthen the cybersecurity of our companies and our critical infrastructures and ensure that the digital and technological sovereignty of our country remains assured in a rapidly changing world".

Stephanie Cox, Managing Director of Proximus Ada :

"Ada's primary objective is to become a center of expertise for all Proximus Group companies, both in Belgium and internationally. Ada's ambition also extends further; we want to develop a real local ecosystem, based on strong partnerships with universities, research institutes, companies and governments. The move to BeCentral fits perfectly into this context and should help us further develop into a center of expertise with strong Belgian roots and international prestige, capable of attracting, training and retaining local talent. We currently employ around 50 experts, but the aim is to triple this number in the next three years."

"With the arrival of Ada, as well as the development of the FARI Institute, BeCentral is no longer just one of the largest digital learning centers in Europe. We are becoming one of the leading places where the Internet is being built," concludes Laurent Hublet. "People say that in Belgium nothing is ever possible. That we don't dare to be ambitious. At BeCentral, we are proving the contrary."



BeCentral 5 years of activity in 10 key dates:

- **October 2017:** Opening by H.M. King Philippe. The campus occupies ~1500m².
- **April 2018:** Opening of the Google Digital Atelier, in the former refectory of the retired staff of the SNCB, in front of the big hall at the Central Station.
- **Summer 2019:** Opening of the extensions on the 1st and 2nd floors (~1000m²), hosting among others the Youth Campus.
- **January 2020:** Opening of the Digital Public Space operated by Bruxelles-Formation and the "Angels Hub".
- **Summer 2020:** Extension to the 3rd floor of the Central Station, including the Ecole 19.
- **June 2021:** European Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen visits BeCentral and signs the Belgian part of the Recovery and Resilience Plan.
- **September 2021:** Launch of WeAreFounders, a 9-month entrepreneurial school operated by BeCentral in partnership with Bruxelles Formation, Google and BeAngels.
- **February 2022:** Opening of co-searching, the first permanent space dedicated to group job search, operated by Actiris and five NGO partners.
- **March 2022:** Launch of Code United, free coding courses for 8-12 year olds in Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, Liège and Charleroi.
- **June 2022:** Opening of the Orange FabLab, in an area previously occupied by the military guarding Central Station after the 2015/2016 terrorist attacks.

BeCentral and its community in numbers (impact 2017-2022)

- **1,000** people work or study on campus every day
- **5,200** people have received training leading to a qualification that will enable them to (re)orient themselves towards digital professions
- **8,000 m²** of space currently occupied (10,300 by summer 2023)
- **110,000** adults have followed an upskilling course in digital fields
- **310,000** children use a solution developed by a BeCentral resident

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