

observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 44 / MARCH 7, 2024 Nr 21

Abuse

P. 5

The Your Coach Next Door (YCND) foundation of professor and paediatrician Anita Vreugdenhil has been linked to abuse at a Maastricht basketball team.



She denies the accusations. Maastricht University is not taking action yet: Vreugdenhil's work for the foundation comes under 'ancillary duties'.

New boss

P. 6-7



Jan-Tjitte Meindersma. Soon he will be one of the Executive Board members of this university, to be precise: vice-chairman. 'A boss'. But he thinks that word sounds ridiculous. "I am aware of my position, but I am averse to stature and hierarchy." So that's why we call him 'just' Jan-Tjitte.

Wide world

P. 4

"As much as I love my homeland, I knew as a child already that I wanted to leave it," says Ridho Dirgantara, who grew up in a poor family in rural Indonesia. "I wanted to learn more about the big, wide world. I felt somehow restricted." He is now studying at University College Maastricht.



After graduation from UCM he will be preparing to set up an NGO about educational accessibility and experimental learning with a friend. He imagines a kind of Indonesian UWC, "but for underprivileged children and with Indonesian as the language of instruction."



WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL



observantUM



observant_um



facebook.com/ObservantUM



Riki Janssen

editorial Dilemmas: when is a matter private and therefore not of interest to *Observant*?

“It was reported by *Trouw*, a reputable newspaper, and later by *De Limburger*. It has already become a public matter. It would be odd if we didn’t report on it.”

“But we haven’t been able to fact-check anything, or get a response from the professor involved.”

“True, but the story (see page 5) is this – a national newspaper has linked UM professor and paediatrician Anita Vreugdenhil to illegal activities involving the Rebels, the first team of Maastricht basketball club Kimbria. Allegedly, she illegally housed internationals in a luxury container home in her garden, among other things. The professor denies all allegations. We have asked her for a response.”

“But she was unavailable for comment, and the damage to her reputation has already been done. And *Observant* will be contributing to it. You see it all the time, news outlets just copying each other or blowing things out of proportion, stirring up a tempest in a teacup.”

“Are you suggesting we postpone the article? That would make our readers wonder why we’re keeping quiet about this. It would look like we were sleeping on the job.”

A brief silence ensued in our animated Monday morning meeting.

No, we agreed, postponing the article was not an option. One factor in this decision was the fact that *Trouw* is a serious newspaper not known for publishing nonsense. But, it was reiterated, the professor in question must get a chance to defend herself.

Another point was raised: when is a matter private, and therefore not of interest to *Observant*?

“Vreugdenhil is the founder of Your Coach Next Door (YCND), a foundation allegedly embroiled in the affair. The foundation is related to her work at UM, so if it’s implicated, this concerns UM as well. Which means it’s not a private matter.”

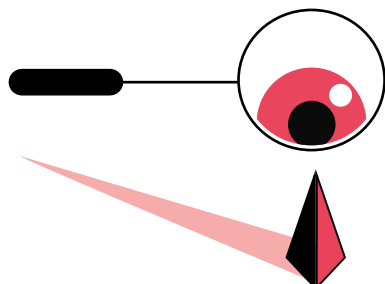
“But it’s *her* foundation, not work she carries out for UM. If it doesn’t affect her work at UM, why report on it?”

“Well, someone in her position has a duty to set a positive example, doesn’t she? There’s such a thing as ethics. Imagine if a university administrator was caught visiting sex workers, or a staff member renting out substandard housing. Regardless of whether they’re good at their jobs, if they’re involved in a scandal, we report on it. Right? That’s *our* job.”

What about the luxury container home in the garden, though? “Well, surely it’s none of our business what a person does in their own backyard?”

“Generally speaking, no, but we have to report on it if it’s relevant to the story. And it seems to be – although we’ll need to fact-check that, too.”

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the Observant office



splinters

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.

Contributions: Peter Doorackers, Dennis Vaendel, Cleo Freriks



Complaints about students

Students do not bother about what is going on in Maastricht, do not speak the language, make noise, and their presence alone puts pressure on the local housing market... the complaints are not new. On the other hand, university managers who emphasise what a blessing UM is for the Limburg capital, are not new either. What is new, is a former president of the Executive Board who, albeit carefully, says that the truth lies most likely somewhere in the middle. “Maybe,” said Karl Dittrich (president from 1994 to 2002) last Friday, “we as a university placed the problems firmly elsewhere.” With the local authorities, who ultimately had to see what could be done about the unease in the city. “Back in the nineteen-nineties, we were in survival mode,” he adds, by way of an excuse, but anyway. Dittrich said this at the presentation of *Licht op Maastricht* (previously *Jaarboek Maastricht*), in which the student life of 2023 has been given its place too. In the run-up to the fiftieth anniversary of UM (in 2026), he would like to see, as would yearbook senior editor Eric Wetzels, an investigation into all the effects of the university on the city. He received applause for his idea from those present at Dominicanen bookstore.

The end of the rubbish bag

It is by now a familiar sight in Maastricht: rubbish bags lying in the streets. Especially since 2022, when the municipality decided to no longer collect the famous red and white residual waste bags on a weekly basis but once every two weeks. Especially residents of student rooms and high-rise buildings, who often do not have a garden or balcony to store full bags, have been complaining about smells and pests in their homes ever since. Meanwhile, to the frustration of many city inhabitants, dumping or ‘accidentally’ putting the bags on the street too early is commonplace, while at the same time there is also a lot of dissatisfaction about the stricter controls with accompanying fines.

In short: a big mess. Neighbourhood meetings and surveys show that many residents want to return to the system of once-a-week collection. But that is not going to happen, it turned out last week. The Liberal Party motion proposing this did not make it through the city council.

That does not mean that nothing will change: a majority did approve a new waste policy starting in 2025. This will see the disappearance of the residual waste bag and the introduction of underground waste containers in as many places in the city as possible, where residents can bring their residual waste themselves at any time. Plastic, tins and drinks cartons (PMD) will be collected outside the city centre. How often? Once every two weeks.

People in Amsterdam don’t want meat

It’s bean burgers galore this week. As it is the Week without Meat and Dairy, vegetarian and vegan diets are being promoted all over the country. ‘Maastricht goes vegan’, for example, organised a dinner in the InnBetween last Saturday and UM caterer Eurest is sharing facts about plant-based food via Instagram. The catering company at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) decided to place the meat sandwiches in a less obvious spot, university newspaper *Folia* reports. Students can also win tickets for amusement parks Walibi or the Efteling if they buy products from the Vegetarische Slager (Vegetarian Butcher). As it is, not many people in Amsterdam still have to be tempted to not eat meat. According to local caterer Cirfood, almost three quarters of the customers in the UvA canteen chose the vegetarian (more than 40 per cent) or even the vegan option (25 per cent). It is not clear whether this concerns the entire selection of products (so including items like coffee and fruit, which are vegetarian by nature) or just the sandwiches and hot meals. At Wageningen University and Research (WUR), the Plant-Based Universities Wageningen organisation are less positive. In a letter to the editor in university newspaper *Resource*, they classified WUR’s participation in the Week without Meat and Dairy as ‘greenwashing’. “The canteens appear to have no qualms about selling meat and dairy this week,” they complain. Also: it should be easier to eat healthy and sustainable food “all year round”.

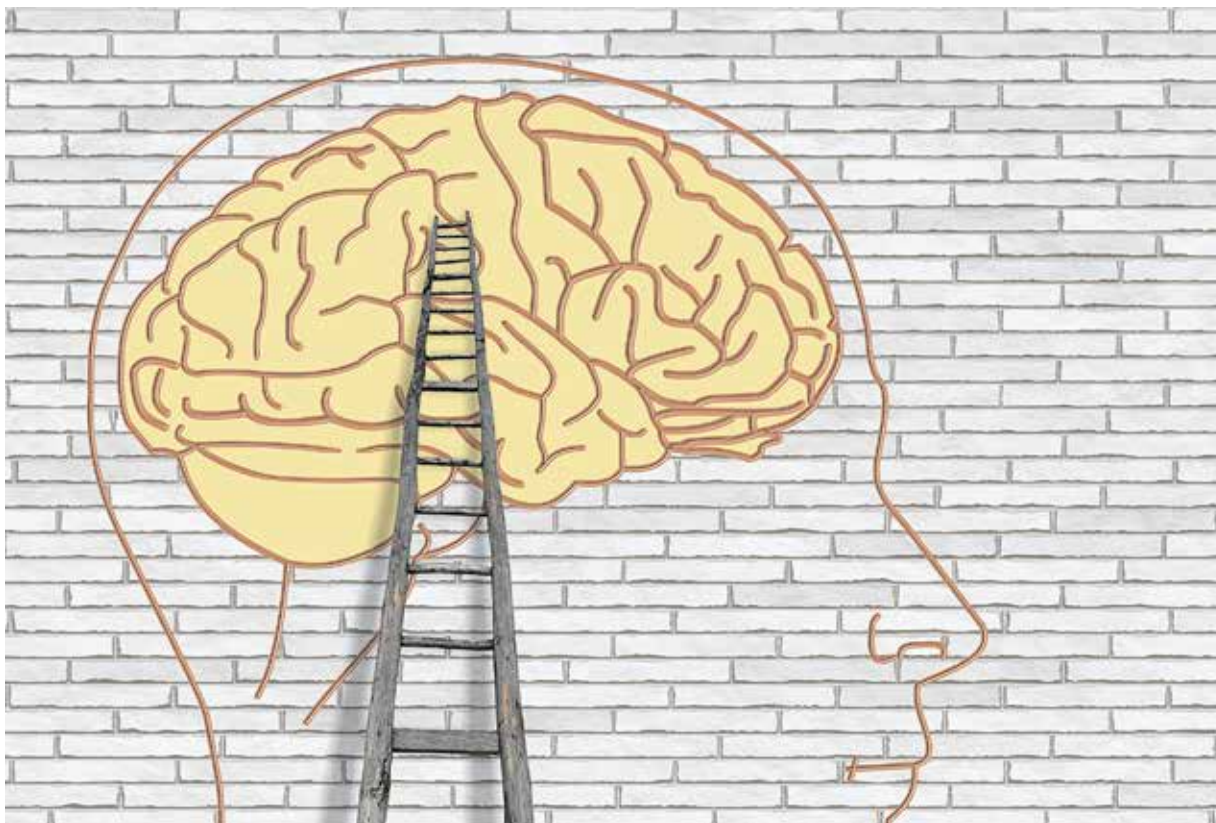


Photo: Pixabay

FPN to limit number of places for the master's of Mental Health

The board of the Faculty of Psychology and Neurosciences wants to limit the capacity for the master's of Mental Health from the 2026-2027 academic year.

That is when the first students who are starting the renewed bachelor's of Psychology in September will graduate. What is new, is that third-year students can choose from three areas of specialisations: 'Brain, Behaviour and Cognition', 'Clinical Psychology' and 'Transdisciplinary Psychology'. Those who take the clinical route, have immediate access to the master's of Mental Health.

It used to be that these students first had to complete the master's of Psychology before being admitted. Because of this accelerated route, FPN expects that the number of registrations for the master's programme will rise. With a limit of 120 students, FPN thinks that the workload for staff members will remain acceptable and there will be sufficient work

placement places available.

Pre-master's programme

The plan also has consequences for the pre-master's programme of Mental Health. The introduction of a numerus fixus means that a selection will have to take place. The law states that students doing the pre-master's can no longer be automatically admitted to the master's programme. The pre-master's will therefore be discontinued, students from universities of applied sciences who want to continue their studies at university level, can from then on sign up for the pre-master's of Psychology. The plan will be put before the Executive Board mid-April.

History

The Maastricht bachelor's programme of Psychology was initially intended for students who were not planning a future as a therapist. The "more clinical content of the programme should

at all cost be avoided," *Observant* recorded in 1992, in the words of Louis Boon, who was one of the initiators of the programme. This was so as not to poach on the territory of other (existing) Psychology programmes.

Is introducing a clinical route in the third year of the bachelor's programme breaking with the past? It isn't. Vice dean of education Petra Hurks points out that this has already been possible for many years to do a national post-master's programme to become a health care psychologist after one of the more clinically orientated Maastricht master's.

The setup of the Maastricht bachelor's programme is still a broad one, the option to choose a field of specialisation is introduced to meet the needs of students who want to be able to choose more of the subjects that they can take.

Cleo Freriks

Making self-created learning material available to everyone

A presentation on aggression against nursing staff, an animation video in which the concept of interdisciplinarity is explained, an image of nerves in the pelvic area. These are all examples of Open Educational Resources: self-created public learning materials that lecturers have shared on platforms intended for that purpose. This week, during Open Education Week, there will be extra attention for this.

At Maastricht University, the Open Science in Education team from the University Library (UL) has been helping lecturers who want to make use of Open Educational Resources (OER) since 2019. "This can be done in two ways," says Michel Saive, Scientific Information Specialist for Open Educational Resources & Open Access. "You can (re)use material that others have published on an OER platform or create something yourself and share that."

Depending on which license the creator has given their work, you can copy the material in

its entirety, reuse parts of it, or add things to it. "As long as you properly cite your source; that is very important," says Saive. The UL-team helps lecturers understand licences, find the right platform, and assess the quality of the material.

Accessibility

For anyone who wants to get started, there are workshops throughout the year, as well as tailor-made advice. "Say, you want to write an open text book, a study book to be made available free of charge: what does that involve? We can lend a helping hand," says Saive. "And also, what degree of openness do you choose," says Rina Vaatstra, department manager of Education, Content & Support at the university library. "You could opt for only sharing it within a community, for example, everyone in the Netherlands who is involved in the subject of anatomy."

But why would you share your hard work for free? Just like with Open Access – where

researchers make their articles available for anyone to read, instead of putting them behind a paywall or a journal – Open Education is all about accessibility and inclusivity.

Inspire

"Teaching material often costs a lot," says Vaatstra. "Both physical books and e-books can be found here in the library, but I can imagine that students do not always have access to this and then it would be nice for them if there was also free study material." Quality improvement also plays a role: the work of others can inspire lecturers.

It is also becoming more customary for research subsidies to require Open Science and Open Education. "You significantly increase the chances that people will actually find, use and distribute the learning materials by sharing them on a specific OER platform," says Saive.

Cleo Freriks



My Roommate

“

My alarm rings. It's 8 am, and I hit snooze. Not even 2 seconds later, it starts ringing again. Unbelievable. I want to press snooze again, but it just won't turn off. Annoyed by such audacity in the early hours, I try to make out where the snooze button is hiding, with my eyes half-closed. Then I realize it's not my phone that's going off. It's my roommate's. I turn to face her, just two meters away in her own bed, fumbling for her phone. Finally, the sound quiets down. I close my eyes again. Just seconds before I can doze off, the alarm goes off again, this time it's my phone.

This scenario has become a regular morning routine for my roommate and me. Sharing a room was something I had to get used to. Back in Maastricht, I live with four roommates, but 'roommate' in the Netherlands means something totally different than in the US. In some cases, it does not mean literally sharing a room together. Sure, I would spend most of my evenings occupying the armchair of my roommate, eating all her snacks, making use of her TV, and babbling on and on about my day. But after she would kick me out, I went to my own room across the floor, usually followed by my night routine, either involving finishing my procrastinated assignments or watching videos until the wee hours.

This routine has been upended by dorm life. Considering my roommate's presence has forced me to rethink many of my habits, for the most part, this has been for the better. I'm getting more sleep and spending less time glued to screens. All-nighters have become a thing of the past, or they've migrated to the common room – which is not as cozy as my bed. Understandably, my roommate would find it hard to sleep with me sitting two meters across from her, illuminated by my laptop screen. And having someone to talk to while getting ready for bed instead of half-listening to the show that is playing in the background is a nicer way to end your day.

It's surprising how quickly we adapt to new living arrangements. Before I left for my semester abroad, I couldn't imagine sharing a room and having essentially no time to myself. Surprisingly, my initial excitement of having the room to myself for one weekend quickly faded into boredom and the feeling that something was missing in the room. What was missing? My roommate.

”

Line-Marie Eichhorst,
student UCM

series students about their future

From Indonesia to Italy and then Holland

"I'm a first-generation student, my family couldn't help me"



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

"I last saw my family three years ago, and that hurts, but you have to make a sacrifice to make an impact", says Ridho Dirgantara. The UCM-student, who grew up in a poor family in rural Indonesia, plans to found an NGO and help Indonesian children.

Unpaved, bumpy roads. Scorching heat in which rice farmers dutifully carry out their work day after day. Poverty, lack of prospects. Dirgantara (third year University College Maastricht (UCM)) was born 23 years ago on the countryside not far from the metropolis of Bandung on Java, Indonesia. "And as much as I love my homeland, I knew as a child already that I wanted to leave it. I wanted to learn more about the big, wide world and broaden my perspective. I felt somehow restricted." Dirgantara had these thoughts already at the age of seven. He didn't find any connection with his classmates at the time because he couldn't relate to their interests – football players and cars. "I loved books. After my mother taught me to read, I could hardly get away from them." His first real "adult book" was – also at the age of seven – 'Broken Wings' by Kahlil Gibran. A poetic novel

from 1912 about a failed love affair, actually a social criticism of the living conditions in the Middle East in those times. And it was his love for literature that ultimately paved the way for him from the rice fields of Indonesia to high level education in Europe. "I took part in national poetry competitions as a teenager. There I met, for the first time, people who were like me. Who were also very lonely as children, read a lot, and who wanted to discover the world."

Connections

He had finally found friends. People who accepted him as he was and, above all, understood him. One of them gave Dirgantara the advice to apply for a scholarship at the UWC (United World College) in Italy. "A broad education, classmates from all over the world, and an open campus. That sounded perfect!", the UCM student still enthuses

today. "But I had a problem: I barely spoke English. And no Italian at all. And yes, would I even be accepted?" It worked. He started at the UWC near Trieste in 2018, took an intensive English course, and got to know – again – people who weren't understood for a long time. "I made friends from conflict zones, like Afghanistan and Mali. And it was sometimes super emotional, even difficult to hear their stories. But I learned to deal with other cultures, and now that I study, I can always ask someone for context when I read something in class about the Middle East for example."

Almost like home

After he graduated from UWC, it wasn't a big step to Maastricht anymore. "UCM was my first choice, because it has an open campus, and I can take courses that

suit my interests. Via the YUFE-program that is offered here (Young Universities for the Future of Europe), I can be even more flexible and study at several European universities at the same time. I also immediately felt comfortable here, because UCM is just like the UWC very international, and the Netherlands are in terms of architecture partly very similar to Indonesia," he laughs. He is alluding to the Dutch colonial period of exploitation of Indonesia for over 350 years. "The roofs around Amsterdam are like this in the town near my village too, but the cultures differ a lot: we would never be so non-hierarchical." Dirgantara is also examining an aspect of Dutch-Indonesian colonial history in his Capstone, the final work of his Liberal Arts bachelor's degree. "In short, the point is that Indonesians struggle enormously with climate change. And this affects me also because my older brother lives in an area of Jakarta that was hit hard by the flood. The city architecture, including the canal system, that's all Dutch heritage." He wants to find out more about how Jakarta was planned, and what exactly needs to be done to improve the situation. So that his compatriots, including his family, are better prepared for future storms. When Dirgantara talks about his family, a smile crosses his face. He misses them very much. "I last saw my family three years ago. We talk on the phone every week, but I still feel like I'm no longer part of their daily life. And that hurts. But you have to make a sacrifice if you want to make an impact."

Indonesian UWC

So what comes after the summer, when Dirgantara graduates from UCM? Which impact does he envisage? "I applied for a Master's in Environmental Management in Wageningen, Twente and some other places. Simultaneously, I am preparing to set up an NGO about educational accessibility and experimental learning with a friend." He imagines a kind of Indonesian UWC, "but for underprivileged children and with Indonesian as the language of instruction." Around 2030, the NGO, he hopes, will start to offer the first Indonesian children a real opportunity for advancement. "With a high quality of education and international training." Particularly, he wants to reach the children in the most remote parts of Indonesia, with the smallest chances. "That we really go to places where no one has ever heard of international scholarships. I think it's important that we give these children a chance to get them." But Dirgantara also knows that it's still a long way before this becomes reality: "We need to find investors and get more people on board." Making a noticeable difference in a country where, even today, not everyone can go to secondary school. Dirgantara wants nothing less than that. But he needs help. "So far I have done everything alone. I am a first-generation student and no one in my family could help me. I need guidance and resources, from a mentor, for example from the 'Boulevard'-program. Someone who has already walked my path and can show me how I can overcome the next hurdles."

Simon Wirtz

In this biweekly series, students are interviewed about their future plans; their expectations, dilemmas and fears.

Professor denies; UM is not taking action yet

Newspaper *Trouw*: UM Professor involved in abuse connected to Maastricht basketball team

The Maastricht professor Anita Vreugdenhil and her Your Coach Next Door (YCND) foundation have been linked by daily newspapers *Trouw* and *De Limburger* to abuse at basketball team Maastricht Rebels. The professor denies the accusations. Maastricht University refers to it as 'ancillary duties', even though the foundation leans heavily on Vreugdenhil's research within UM.



YCND foundation of prof. Anita Vreugdenhil sees basketball as a way to tackle overweight in children
Photo: Shutterstock

According to the newspapers, the YCND foundation, of which Vreugdenhil – a professor at UM as well as a paediatrician in MUMC+ – is the founder, is closely connected to basketball club Kimbria's first team: the Maastricht Rebels. The owner of that team, the British Mike Rawson, is the key figure in the whole affair: he was supposedly underpaying players – 400 per month instead of the legal minimum wage of 2,069 euro – as well as allowing foreign players to play without work permits and insurance. Previously, the Brit was convicted of visa fraud and misleading the authorities when he was the owner of a basketball academy in the United States.

As to the question where does Rawson get the money to pay his pupils, there is a lot of unclarity. There are sponsors and partners listed on the site of the Rebels, but according to *Trouw* most of them don't know anything about a collaboration or they are Rawson's own businesses. The only partnership that can be verified is the one with YCND.

Logo

YCND trains care professionals to become coaches for children and their families during lifestyle changes, especially geared towards children who are overweight or obese. It is strongly linked to UM research: the foundation is a result of Vreugdenhil's research centre COACH (Centre for Overweight Adolescent and Children's Healthcare) and the methodology is based on research results from this centre.

Trouw wonders whether money from YCND goes to the Rebels. After all, the foundation's logo adorns the Rebels' shirts as its main sponsor. Moreover, in their contracts it states that the basketball players receive 1,650 euro from the foundation in exchange for acting as ambassadors, which includes providing

clinics.

According to the journalists, Vreugdenhil is also privately involved: team owner Rawson is her partner and she attends meetings of the Rebels. There is also a container home in her garden – put there in 2021 by Rawson after the flooding of the Maas – where Ukrainian players stayed without the knowledge of the authorities, *Trouw* writes. According to the newspaper, Vreugdenhil was aware of this.

Collaboration

Vreugdenhil denies any financial ties. To *Observant* she also informs by e-mail that “the foundation YCND does not pay players nor is it a sponsor of the Maastricht Rebels.” She did not react to the question whether she could produce an annual account of YCND. She did however say that she sees the potential of basketball in tackling overweight in children in schools and neighbourhoods. “We have a (project-based) collaboration with several parties, including Rebels. One of the many collaborations, by the way, that we have as a foundation concerning this theme.”

For the time being, Vreugdenhil does not want to answer further questions by *Observant*. Where last Friday, she promised *Observant* to tell her side of the story this week, she later changed her mind. This is in anticipation of possible follow-up articles in the media and to prevent herself from “stirring further media attention”. She also states her need for peace and quiet. She wants to share her “complete story at a later moment”.

To what extent the university is not involved with the foundation, is still the question, because the interrelation between the scientific work at UM and the implementation by the professionals of YCND is more than clear

Relation with scientific work

A spokesperson for UM already stated to *Observant* that the university is not taking action yet. “UM is not involved in YCND's activities. As an employer, we can confirm that professor Vreugdenhil reported and received permission for ancillary duties for this foundation. At the moment, we are not aware of any matters that would prove that this permission was granted unjustly.” In the register for ancillary duties by

professors on the UM website, Vreugdenhil is indeed registered as “owner, manager, teacher” of YCND.

To what extent the university is not involved with the foundation, is still the question, because the interrelation between the scientific work at UM and the implementation by the professionals of YCND is more than clear. Besides, UM devoted praising attention on its own website last summer because of the fact that health insurers had included the project in their standard package. NUTRIM, the research school under which Vreugdenhil's research centre COACH comes, highlights the social impact of YCND on the UM-site. The foundation is described there as a “natural experiment” that can provide a “tremendous amount of data” and a “unique possibility to evaluate the effects of interventions”.

The city of Maastricht has already announced that it will carry out an investigation into the affairs of Rebels Maastricht, *De Limburger* reports. Basketball club Kimbria has meanwhile discontinued its collaboration with the team and owner Rawson.



FOR ME,
LISTENING
AND
EMPATHY
ARE KEY



New Executive Board member and vice president Jan-Tjitte Meindersma

He will tag along in May, to really take over in July. Jan-Tjitte Meindersma, born and bred in South Limburg is to become the new vice president of Maastricht University. “Only recently, a professor referred to me as his ‘future boss’, that sounds ridiculous. I am aware of my position, but I am averse to stature and hierarchy.”

Text: Wendy Degens

Photo: Joey Roberts

Oops, our first words on Jan-Tjitte Meindersma (1972) are not quite correct. “I am not a doctor,” he says on the telephone one Thursday in February. Maastricht University had announced the news about a successor for Nick Bos, who is retiring, the day before. Wait, not a doctor? But UM’s press release stated: ‘Graduated in Medicine in 1997.’ “I stopped after four years and only got my *doctoraal* diploma.” There are not many medical students who quit sooner, so it is not so weird to think that he was a doctor. Certainly not if one considers a previous interview in *Observant*, from 1993, when Meindersma was a first-year medical student. At the time, he said that he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his parents and granddad, all of whom were GPs. “I grew up enveloped in that field and I never came across anything that I disliked to such an extent that I would rather do something else.”

His father, from Friesland, came to Limburg in the nineteen-sixties where he met Meindersma’s mother, who was from Limburg. They married and had two sons. The family lived in Camerig, on the outskirts of Vaals. “I was six when my mother became a student of Medicine in Maastricht. She had always wanted to become a doctor. I still see myself as a small boy in the Annadal hospital and the faculty building on the Tongersestraat.”

Quit

Observant’s telephone interview with Meindersma was to be brief, intended to ask him just a couple of questions. However, his answer to the first question (“why did you quit Medicine after four years?”) is so elaborate and honest that we concluded that we needed more time. A week later, the interview continues in his home in the Maastricht neighbourhood of Campagne. “I had doubts in the early stages of my study of Medicine. I didn’t find the content very challenging, it was a matter of learning things off by heart and reproducing them in a different order. I missed, well, how can I say this? I missed a certain arithmetical complexity. The second year followed with patient contact, but that didn’t give me much satisfaction either.”

Coming out

He did receive that satisfaction from another study: Economics. Whenever he had time, he would borrow books from his flatmates who studied at the Faculty of Economics. “I loved it.” But he would complete his study of Medicine, he promised himself that. “What you start, you must finish, is my motto.” For his “intellectual satisfaction”, he started working for Integrand, a foundation that connects students looking for work placements and assignments to companies. At one stage, a recruiter said to me: ‘I think it is high time you talked to someone in the industry.’ He was offered a job in Amsterdam. Parallel to that – and also influencing his choice to leave Maastricht: his coming out as a homo-

sexual. “I had a tragic expectation. If I was to go public with it, I would be denounced, I thought. Nobody would want anything to do with me. There was a good reason for me wanting to go to Amsterdam, far away, I would be safe there. In actual fact, it wasn’t that dramatic at all, but my parents did think that it was a pity that I quit Medicine.”

Giving back

Meindersma was thrown to the lions in an international consultancy company. He didn’t have the required qualifications – “those were the nineteen-nineties, if you had sufficient capacity, you were hired, diploma or not. I was creative, I loved puzzling things out and reasoning logically.” He completed a financial course in Oxford and at the Amsterdam Institute of Finance and subsequently made the transfer to international businesses such as Air France KLM, Alvarez & Marsal (management consulting) and C&A. He also started working independently in the ‘interim business’. “The transfer from Medicine to the industry brought me a lot, but I have always had the feeling: ‘I should give something back to the medical sector or to the region where I came from.’ But what is the right form? I have always wrestled with that.”

Small suitcase

In summer of last year, he handed in his notice for his job as *Chief Transformation Officer* for the clothing firm C&A - where, for example, he was responsible for a cost reduction project and the “opening and closing of new countries” – even before he had heard about the present UM vice president Nick Bos leaving. “I had a deal that I would actually leave C&A in February 2024. I wanted to be at home for a while, doing odd jobs in the house, gardening, being together with Roy, my partner. After that, I would look for a job working from Monday to Thursday, ‘living from a suitcase’, as I had always done.” C&A’s headquarters is in Düsseldorf. He lived in Maastricht and commuted there and back.

It was a friend, who drew his attention to the profile for vice president that the university had distributed. “I telephoned the headhunter to ask whether I had even a chance, I feared that my CV (with ‘only’ a career in business) would scare them off.” It didn’t. “I have gathered a lot of people around me, from UM, but also from other universities. I wanted to know what that world of higher education looked like, ‘what can I expect?’ Most of them said: ‘If you have a desire for complexity, you are in the right place.’” UM’s *2022 Annual Report* is on the table. “I find the number of projects remarkable, there are more than a hundred! At C&A, I felt forty was a lot, and they have 25 thousand employees. When I looked back on the *2021 Annual Report*, I saw the same projects mentioned, so they seem ongoing.” A couple of examples: professionalising leadership, sustainable employability, disability support, Kaleido, Brightlands campuses, collabora-

tion with Radboud University Nijmegen, global citizenship, Recognition and Rewards. “What I wonder in all that: ‘Is that number feasible? Also, is there a deadline for all those projects?’ I don’t look upon it negatively, certainly not, I am just curious.”

Transformation

Does UM have anything to fear, now that there is a manager with a career in ‘transformation issues’ at the helm? The word transformation is consistent with a possible merger between UM and the hospital and whatever else is tied up in that, but does UM’s operational management need to be ‘transformed’ (again)? For years, people have been making strides with the introduction of the *Programma Integrale Bedrijfsvoering*. SAP was once chosen as a replacement for various systems used by HR, Sales and Finance, but the transfer took and is still taking quite a lot of effort. It was too huge a project to deal with in one go, so it was divided into three parts. And it is not completed. “I am not just all about making changes, but also for the improvement of regular processes. In the operational management you always have to deal with advancing technologies and management techniques. For example IT. I compare it with an iPhone. I would have preferred to have kept my iPhone 4, but new models keep appearing, with better features, and the old one is no longer supported. It is the same for finance and the whole day-to-day running of a university.”

People person

What characterises him as a manager? “After I left C&A, colleagues said: ‘We are going to miss you in the organisation as a person.’ I thought that was nice. I am a people person. I like being on the shop floor. I don’t want to lead from an ‘ivory tower’. I don’t believe in leadership, but in followship. People will automatically follow you if you give them space, you don’t need to dictate that. Listening and empathy are the most important skills as far as I am concerned. They allow you to motivate and stimulate people.” He is aware that this ‘interpersonal’ aspect was not always visible in the industry. “For a long time, I myself was convinced that it wasn’t necessary, but it has been eight or nine years since I started to think differently about this.” The turning point? That happened when he worked as an interim manager for a large Dutch childcare organisation. It was in dire straits and Meindersma had to ‘restructure’ the whole thing. They had three thousand employees, “99.5 per cent were on the shop floor on a daily basis, they were very competent in care-giving, had a high EQ (emotional intelligence). I didn’t get very far with logical reasoning. This job required different skills. That sensitive side, yes, it came natural to me, I was able to show my own feelings and vulnerability and that was good. After that, I only looked for jobs that had a good balance between IQ and EQ.”

science

FHML Master's Thesis Prize winner

Bright balloons for better treatment



Photo: archive Caphri

“Care for people with multiple diseases can be quite a challenge. Doctors mostly have just a few minutes for every patient”, says Esmée Vaes, recent graduate of the master's Physician – Clinical Investigator and junior researcher at the department of Family Medicine. Finding ways to improve diagnostics in general practice is in the centre of her daily research. That's also the reason why she swaps her office for a GP's practice once a week, where she treats patients in consultation with the GP. “There I see with my own eyes which obstacles patients stumble across, and for which groups adequate care is especially difficult to have. Patients with multiple chronic diseases are an example of such a group, in this country often suffering from a combination of heart failure and COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), a lung disease. “It leads to severe



A diagram in which the balloons stand for a health domain Illustration: Simone Golob

breath difficulties, cough and tiredness. And often patients have difficulties with activities of daily living, like to get dressed in the morning or do groceries”, Vaes explains. “These patients need much of the GP's time, as they get treated by different specialists, all with different expertise's and tasks. Because beside the diagnosis, it's important to hear from patients what impact the diseases have on them, and explain what they can do themselves to deal better with it.”

For the next generation

This question kept Vaes busy towards the end of her master's, she even devoted her thesis to it. “After researching for a while, I came across a project with the Assessment of Burden of Chronic Conditions Tool (ABCC) (Ziektelastmeter, more info in the box). A very handy tool that however was never used for patients with more than one chronic disease. And I thought: then I will join the project and try to do that.” All she needed

for her part of the work were 70 participants. She asked patient organisations and hospitals, but finding enough participants in just a few months was extremely difficult. “The clock was ticking, but I wasn't making any progress. I was worried about whether I would be able to hand in the thesis on time.” Vaes also doubted herself. Would she be able to do it? “I wanted to speak to each participant personally and explain everything.” Many unfortunately weren't suitable, others were too weak to participate. But one woman dearly wanted to participate. “She said: ‘I'm not doing this for myself, but for the next generation.’ That was touching.”

Developing further

In the end, Vaes handed in a thesis that was “okay” in her opinion, “a pass, but nothing special.” After all, she couldn't find enough participants for her study, so that a PhD student had to take over from her after her deadline had passed. “Of course I was disappointed that I couldn't finish the study, first and foremost in myself”. Still, and to her surprise, her thesis not only was awarded a *cum laude*, but also the Dies Natalis Thesis Award, a prize for the best theses of the year. “I thought I'd pass, but an award?”, she grins.

Simon Wirtz

Every year during the Foundation Day celebrations, prizes are awarded to students who wrote the best bachelor's and master's theses. They receive a certificate and a cash prize of 500 euros. Esmée Vaes is one of the eight interviewees. In the coming weeks all interviews will be published on our website.

The Ziektelastmeter

Based on a list of questions that patients fill in, the Ziektelastmeter, a colourful diagram with balloons on a green meadow is automatically generated. Each of the balloons stands for a health domain, like ‘movement’ or ‘smoking’. The lower the balloon hangs, the more heavy is

the burden on that domain for the patient. This indication is supported by a colour scheme (green, yellow and red). The graph gives patients an overview of their burden of disease, and helps them to better understand what they could change in their daily behaviour to help them deal with their diseases.

Agenda academic ceremonies
Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

07-3, 10.00 h	Jennifer Margaretha Klasen	19-3, 13.00 h	Pia Brinkmann
07-3, 13.00 h	Johannes Paul Van Schayck	19-3, 16.00 h	Jinmi Zou
08-3, 10.00 h	Marlijne Cornelia Grietje de Graaf	20-3, 16.00 h	Jacqueline Rose Mary Salguero Huaman
08-3, 13.00 h	Lieke Clasina Johanna van Delft	21-3, 10.00 h	Daniëlle Johanna Henrica Kerkhofs
08-3, 16.30 h	Dr. Piet Leroy inauguratie	21-3, 13.00 h	Stephanie May Ashton
11-3, 10.00 h	Chukiat Tantiwong	21-3, 16.30 h	Prof. dr. Saskia Brand inauguratie
	Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and The University of Reading	22-3, 10.00 h	Anouk Tanja Rudy Weemaes
12-3, 16.00 h	Renier Hendricus Jacobus (Rik) Hendrix	22-3, 16.30 h	Dr. Inge Dijkgraaf inauguratie
13-3, 13.00 h	Rebekka Maria Koeck	25-3, 10.00 h	Hansje Puck Smeele
14-3, 13.00 h	Pascale Heins	25-3, 13.00 h	Poramapa Poonpakdee
14-3, 16.00 h	Astrid Nicole Louise Hermans	25-3, 16.00 h	Sharon D'Souza
15-3, 10.00 h	Martine Uittenbogaart	26-3, 10.00 h	Qian Li
15-3, 13.00 h	Melissa Sophia Anna Maria Bevers	26-3, 16.00 h	Mathias Dirk Gilberte Van den Eynde
15-3, 16.30 h	Dr. Jur ten Berg inauguratie	27-3, 10.00 h	Imke Demers
18-3, 13.00 h	Antonio Soares Martins Neto	27-3, 13.00 h	Lies van de Kuilen
18-3, 16.00 h	Mayra Pacheco Pachado	27-3, 16.00 h	Mirjam van der Ende- van Loon
19-3, 10.00 h	Wilhelmina Leentje (Lieke) van der Meer	28-3, 10.00 h	Sorina Ruth Simon
		28-3, 16.00 h	Robert Josephus Johannes van Gassel



Maastricht University

Vacatures

Werken voor de meest internationale universiteit van Nederland? Scan de QR-code voor ons actuele vacature overzicht*.

Voor meer informatie over werken bij de Universiteit Maastricht, ga naar <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/werken-bij-de-um>

*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via UMPLOYEE.


www.maastrichtuniversity.nl


THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY,
FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT
ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON
WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL