

observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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Meanwhile, pro-Palestinian protests continue, with demonstrations but also, like this week, with daubing graffiti on buildings in the city centre



Maastricht University freezes administrative ties with institutions in Israel and Gaza

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Dismissal for an FHML professor



The professor falsely accused a colleague of unacceptable sexual behaviour

Judge: he still does not understand what "reprehensible role he played"

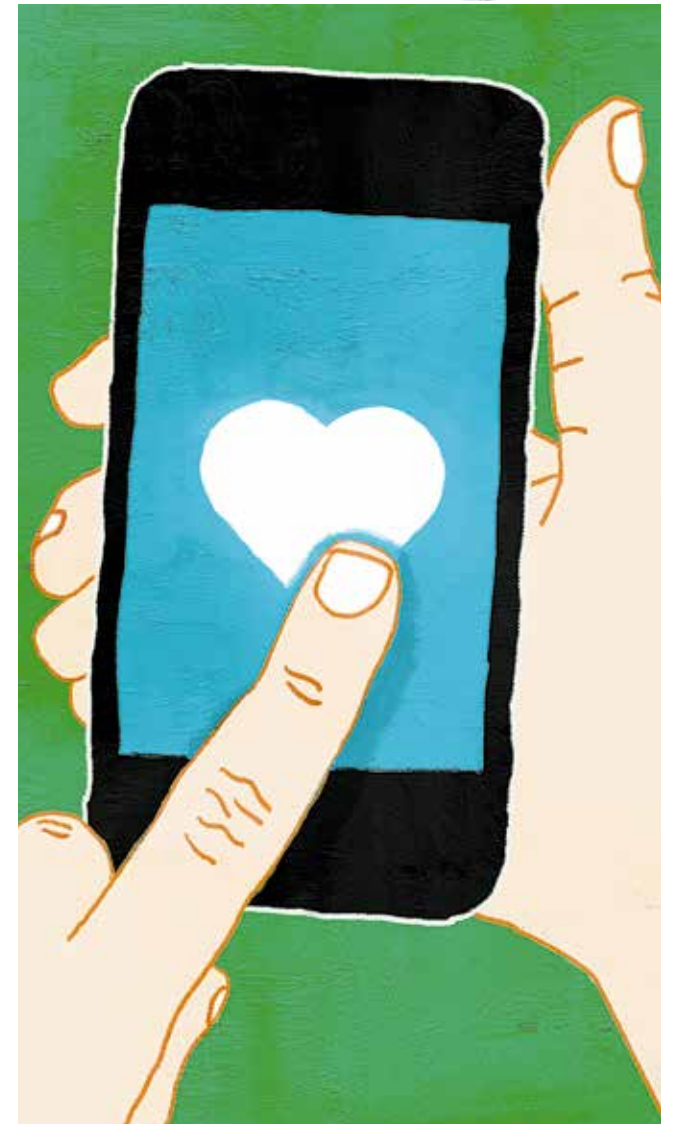
Illustration: Freepik

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Maastricht student influencers talk about their 'work'

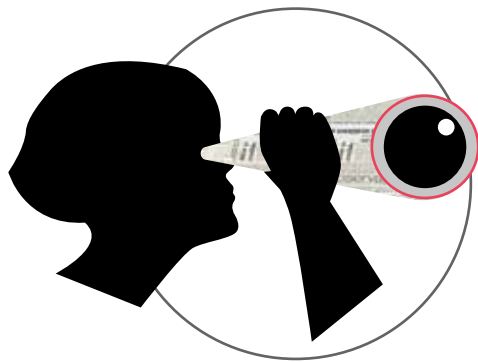
"I want to inspire others to follow their dreams"

And no, they don't get filthy rich from it



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Riki Janssen

The print version of *Observant* was already outdated by the time it hit the university newspaper racks last Thursday 23 May around 9 AM.

We knew we were taking a gamble. On Wednesday 22 May, behind-the-scenes discussions were taking place between university administrators and representatives of the students who had occupied the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences on Grote Gracht that morning. The outcome was uncertain. Would the encampment in the FASoS garden be allowed to remain, or had the protestors well and truly crossed the line by interrupting education and research in the building? By 5 PM on Wednesday, we still didn't know the answer. We sent the newspaper to the printer right on the deadline, with the latest news – university building occupied, negotiations ongoing.

So you can imagine our frustration when, later in the evening, we found out that the encampment had been cleared out and all protestors had left campus. “Voluntarily”, or so the Executive Board claimed that same Wednesday evening. This seemed highly unlikely to us; the students had been

editorial

Waiting, waiting and more waiting

determined and unyielding for days. From other sources that evening, we heard the students had left under the threat of police intervention. They later confirmed this on their Instagram page. On Thursday, however, UM President Rianne Letschert called their account of the matter “not factual”. What did she mean by “voluntarily”, then? “I meant that they left at our request, but without any force being used.”

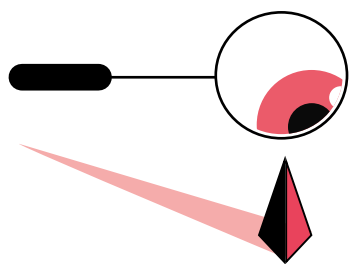
Our patience has been sorely tested lately. The past few weeks were characterised by waiting, waiting and more waiting. From the moment the first tent was pitched, the question each day was whether the student protestors would be allowed to stay in the FASoS garden another night. The answer usually didn't come until evening. On Friday 17 May, we were about to head to the University Council meeting that would discuss the protestors' demands when the meeting suddenly turned out to be held online and closed to the press and public. It was frustrating. Instead of reporting on the meeting, we again found ourselves waiting for news. It finally came around 8.30 PM: the students would be allowed

to stay over Pentecost weekend. We posted an update on our live blog.

Tuesday 28 May, we were able to spring into action when we learnt that nearly all of the university buildings in the city centre had been defaced with pro-Palestinian slogans overnight. Journalists don't like waiting. Who does? We prefer to dig into things ourselves. To ask questions, make phone calls, interview sources, go to the scene, ask some more questions and then write up an article.

There's something else I need to get off my chest. *Observant* is free to read, but non-university newspapers aren't. They're in for a rough time with the plans of the new Dutch government to raise VAT on books and newspapers from 9 to 21 per cent. A terrible idea, in my opinion. If you agree, you can sign this petition to stop the government from increasing VAT on books on [Petities.nl](https://www.petities.nl).

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: Lotte van de Loo, Dennis Vaendel

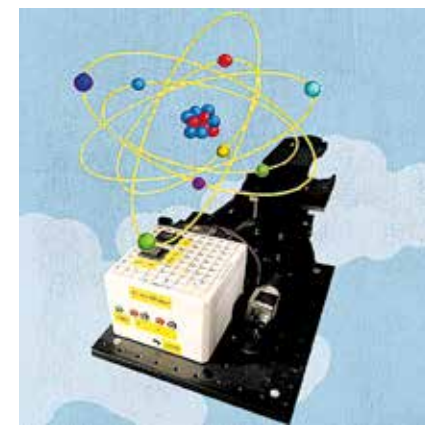
Pole goes viral

A pole that automatically sinks into the ground and then comes back up again: it sounds rather boring, but the past weeks, it has been an absolute hit on TikTok. The account with the name *butterflyeffect722*, which only posts short films of the sinking pole in the Boschstraat in Maastricht, received more than half a million likes in one month's time. Some videos were watched more than a million times, with a peak of 8.8 million views.

Reason for its popularity? Schadenfreude. Road users who have just collided with a pole are the focus point. Since the installation of the system in 2006, such accidents are the order of the day. The poles only allow vehicles with permits, includ-

ing public transport buses, access to the restricted traffic area of the Markt. A few seconds after these have passed the poles, they shoot upwards again. Motorists who quickly follow a car or bus, or who have missed the warning signs, get stuck on the pole. This happens dozens of times a year, after which the city authorities claim the damages – amounting to thousands of euros – from the drivers.

The frustration about the situation has existed for a long time, but it hasn't led to a solution yet. The popularity on *TikTok* seems to have given new life to the discussion: the local fractions of D66, Volt and Partij Veilig Maastricht recently submitted a motion to have the poles replaced by a more “collision-friendly model” or camera surveillance with automatic fining.



Mysterious microscope

A mystery on the fifth floor of Universiteitssingel 50: who owns that ‘futuristic gadget’ that was found in the corridor? “A cross between a sci-fi prop and a DIY project gone wild,” is the description sent by the finder, associate professor Harry Gosker, to colleagues in recent weeks via e-mail and intranet. Okay, those words were written with a wink (“and some help from ChatGPT”), Gosker admits on the phone. There is a suspicion as to what it is: a self-made fluorescence microscope – a microscope that can be used to study tissue, making parts of it visible by causing it to emit light. “But we don't know exactly, and we have no idea how old it is either. It contains fairly expensive parts, including lenses. It is strange that someone would just leave it there.”

Even more strange: that up until now nobody has contacted Gosker. “The thing has been in my office for weeks, I have now had it transferred to professor of microscopy Marc van Zandvoort. He felt that it certainly should not be discarded. But I think that it is also just gathering dust in his lab; they might be able to use it for spare sparts eventually.” If the owner wants to prevent this potential dismantling, they can still contact Harry Gosker (h.gosker@maastrichtuniversity.nl).



Fair darts

Seeing your research results back in a competition with the best dart players in the world? This happened to research-

ers from Eindhoven University of Technology. The popular Premier League Darts, which ended after sixteen weeks last Thursday, adapted its playing schedule to fit calculations created in Eindhoven this year.

The organisation actually introduced a new format in 2022, in which the dart players play a weekly knock-out competition. This did not always work out fairly. It appeared that some players came up against strong competitors more often than others. This could be fairer, PhD candidate Roel Lambers discovered during his research into fairness in sports schedules. As easy as the conclusion sounds, the calculations were very difficult. “That is really serious mathematics,” supervisor and professor Frits Spieksma emphasised to sister newspaper *Cursor*. He took the plunge and approached the organisation via a contact form on the website. “I thought: I will never hear from them again,” said Spieksma. But when he saw the schedules for 2024, it turned out that these had been adapted in accordance with their results. It didn't, by the way, help fellow countryman Michael van Gerwen: he couldn't help but see British Luke Littler win the competition.

Guidelines being drawn up: how to deal with ChatGPT?

Rector: “We do not forbid it, we accept it”

What is permissible and what is not when it comes to the use of ChatGPT and similar AI technology in education and research? A ‘policy framework’ with guidelines will be presented before the summer, said rector Pamela Habibović recently in a University Council committee meeting. She wants to make students and members of staff aware of the possibilities and risks.

Many people eagerly make use of ChatGPT, also within higher education. But a lot is unclear about what is allowed and what not, when is it fraud or plagiarism? Also, is it safe if students and employees make use of it? After all, ChatGPT saves all the information that is entered, even if this includes personal information or data; that is how the model is trained.

Rector Pamela Habibović recently talked to members of the University Council about plans for UM’s own policy in this field. But don’t expect cut-and-dried answers for every possible situation that could end up on the Examination Committee’s desk, for example. “Attempts have been made to include real examples, but that turned out to be very difficult”, the rector said. That is why it is being left to the study programmes themselves. The policy framework is meant to provide insight in “what we as UM stand for when it comes to the use of these ‘disruptive technologies’, what is allowed and what is not within applicable legislation, but also in terms of integrity”.

Habibović: “We are the early majority of adopters. We do not forbid it, we accept it.” And as far as she is concerned, accepting it means training students and staff to make them aware of the possibilities and risks. The UM is therefore thinking about training for all first-year students. There will be an analysis of all available so-called ‘disruptive technologies’, as well as the associated costs, Habibović explains. So, imagine you want students to use ChatGPT in certain subjects. That means that everyone has to have access to the same version. And are we going to use a free or paid version? What are the snags of both variants?

The rector realises all too well that developments are occurring so rapidly that “we have to think about how UM can stay up-to-date”. The plan is therefore that a group of UM experts will monitor events in the field of AI.

Wendy Degens



Check out for the latest news

www.observantonline.nl

Pro-Palestinian student protest continues

UM freezes ties: no new collaborations with Israeli institutions for now



The gate of the School of Business and Economics was defaced this week Photo: Observant

Maastricht University (UM) has decided to freeze its administrative ties with institutions in conflict areas, starting with Israel and Gaza. Meanwhile, the student protest continues, even after the occupation of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences ended last week.

The students want UM to immediately sever all ties with Israeli institutions. However, the university is waiting to make a final decision until the so-called Human Rights Due Diligence Assessment tool is further developed. This tool is designed to help make well-founded assessments on whether partners in conflict areas anywhere in the world are not involved in any problematic issues.

Individual scientists

If that cannot yet be determined - as is currently the case with the Israeli institutes, according to UM - then ties are frozen and dialogue continues with the board of the institution in question. It is important to note that this concerns administrative ties, not collaborations between individual scientists. In fact, UM states in a policy update on the guidelines that it encourages collaboration with individual academics from the Middle East with the aim to support the start of a peace process. The Executive Board will further develop these guidelines in the coming months. It is already clear that a partner will only be considered “problematic” if they have directly or indirectly contributed to “serious” and “systematic” human rights violations. Examples cited include systematically discriminating against certain groups of people because of their political beliefs or not allowing people of a certain ethnicity into a PhD program.

Graffiti

The protesters continued to protest after leaving the tent camp and ending the hunger

strike last Wednesday. Last Thursday and Tuesday, there were protest marches through the city, and on Tuesday morning, graffiti reappeared on university buildings. Slogans such as “Rafah tent-massacre 24 hours ago! Freezing ties???” and “Shame” were seen on the FASoS building, University College Maastricht, and the Inner City University Library. They also disputed on Instagram UM’s claim that they left the tent camp “voluntarily.” According to the students, this occurred “under pressure from the university and police,” giving them only eighteen minutes before the police would intervene. In addition, they describe the university’s communication as “ugly and manipulative.”

Not Factual

University President Rianne Letschert considers this portrayal “not factual,” she said in an interview with *Observant*. “By voluntarily, I meant that they left at our request but without any force being applied.” She said the student delegation she negotiated with Wednesday afternoon had been aware for some time that they would have to leave because the university could no longer ensure the safety of the protesters, neighborhood and other students and staff. “It had to stop, and we told the delegation that.” She added that the demonstrators themselves asked for more time, “which they were given until 7 p.m.”

The FASoS building remained closed all weekend for cleanup. Security guards are still stationed at the entrances of the faculty buildings and the administration building on the Minderbroedersberg. Only people with a UM card are allowed to enter. That measure, introduced last week “as a precaution”, has been extended indefinitely.

Cleo Freriks



Endings



That idea that came to me in 2017—the idea that more should be known about language at the end of life, and that language at the beginning of life might shed light on it—became several pieces of journalism and academic articles, then a book, which I submitted to my editor last October. Now, after six years, two trans-Atlantic moves, two job changes, and a pandemic, I’m done.

Maybe you can relate to the way I felt in October. Ever done a project for a long time, one that organises your whole life, until it stops? It’s as if the North Pole vanishes, leaving you there with your compass wavering uselessly.

You feel like a crustacean that’s molted its shell and must walk around soft and pink. Experience says that you’ll grow a new shell eventually. At the time, though, it feels impossible. Everything is irritating and dangerous, nothing is what it was, and suddenly you have to pay attention to the world again.

No wonder people work on the same book for fifteen or twenty years. No wonder people stay in school forever.

Of course, I’m not done with the book, not completely. There’s copy editing, and proofreading, and gathering blurbers, and publicity. But those activities don’t provide navigational aids for living. Not like trying to wrestle a mass of inchoate ideas into some form that others will find sensible, maybe even appealing, with one eye on the clock and the other on posterity.

The only sensible solution? Get another project. And I’m working on it. Who knows where this one will take me? In the meantime, I’m leaving this column behind—this is my last column for the *Observant*. I’ve enjoyed writing for the university community and working with my editors. I’m thankful to them for letting me write on topics that I might not have otherwise (a lost wedding ring, bilingualism at this university) and for the opportunity to cultivate brevity.



Michael Erard,
Funding Advisor at the Faculty of Law

series the societal impact of UM research

Speaking Limburgish in preschool



Prof. Leonie Cornips Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

In today's world, the societal impact of research findings seems more important than getting published in an academic journal like *Nature* or *The Lancet*. What impact has research conducted at UM had in recent years? This week: a study that persuaded childcare centres in South Limburg to speak Limburgish with children.

Speaking Limburgish is cool and trendy. In a 2022 survey conducted among over a thousand people by the regional dialect association Veldeke, half of all young people under the age of 35 said they text each other in the local dialect. There's even a Limburgish keyboard you can download on your mobile phone, and a free digital dictionary containing 135,000 dialect words from places like Maastricht, Sittard and Venlo.

But at the same time, the number of Limburgish speakers is declining, notes Leonie Cornips, professor of Language Culture in Limburg at Maastricht

University. For years, she has been advocating for the use of Limburgish in preschool and primary education. According to Cornips, it's high time to dispense with the long-standing belief that speaking a local dialect interferes with learning the standard language.

Debunked

Cornips debunked this belief in one of her earliest studies, in which she investigated whether children raised with Limburgish as their first language have smaller vocabularies in standard Dutch. She showed pictures of animals and

everyday objects to 128 children aged between six and eight. Their vocabularies turned out to be just as extensive as those of their Dutch-speaking peers. In fact, they were slightly larger than the national average, although not in a statistically significant way. In 2022, researchers definitively did away with the idea that speaking Limburgish interferes with learning standard Dutch. A study by Cornips, Trudie Schils and others showed that Limburgish-speaking children in their fourth year of primary school outperformed their Dutch-speaking peers on reading comprehension and spelling

tests. This was the first time that hard data was collected from a large sample of nine hundred children. It's not about the specific dialect, but multilingualism in general, explains Cornips. "Speaking one language makes it easier to learn another, especially if they're similar. That's why Limburgish-speaking children have an easier time learning to read and write in Dutch. Growing up speaking more than one language enhances children's cognitive development and linguistic intuition." In addition to primary education, Cornips also looked at preschools. Why is it that so many children enter preschool speaking Limburgish but leave speaking only Dutch? What happens during these years? Zuyd University of Applied Sciences co-conducted a survey among almost five hundred childcare workers. Two-thirds of them said they often speak to the children in Limburgish. "But only in informal moments – at mealtimes, during unstructured play or while consoling an upset child. They use Dutch during circle time and read-alouds. This subconsciously teaches children that Limburgish is inferior to Dutch. We must change that."

Friesland

Rather than gathering dust in a drawer, Cornips's studies attracted the attention of MIK & PIW Groep, a group of six childcare and social work foundations in South Limburg. Three preschools embraced the message and are currently experimenting with using Limburgish as their primary language. "They speak it all day long – not just while consoling children, but in all situations, including circle time. The experiment will be evaluated based on childcare workers' experiences, as unfortunately there's no funding available for academic research. But I believe we should take their experiences and expertise seriously. If the results are positive and children continue to speak Limburgish, other MIK & PIW Groep preschools will follow suit."

The experiment was based on results achieved in Friesland, where they've used the local language in childcare centres since the 1980s. "Each group always has two childcare workers, one speaking Frisian and the other Dutch. This teaches children that both languages are equal. Crucially, parents and the regional government are closely involved. Certificates are awarded to preschools providing their staff with additional training on multilingualism in children. We should do the same in Limburg."

Ukrainian

As mentioned earlier, the UM professor is passionate about dispelling the myth that children raised speaking a local dialect have a harder time learning Dutch. "Doing away with that idea will pave the way for other innovations, increasing the presence of other languages in the classroom. Children might sing Arabic birthday songs for classmates with a Moroccan background, or learn to count in Ukrainian. It doesn't confuse them – it benefits them."

FHML professor dismissed for false allegations

A professor from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences will be dismissed because he falsely accused a fellow professor of unacceptable sexual behaviour. The court that recently handled the case, also resented that the man did not show that "he actually understands what a reprehensible role he played".

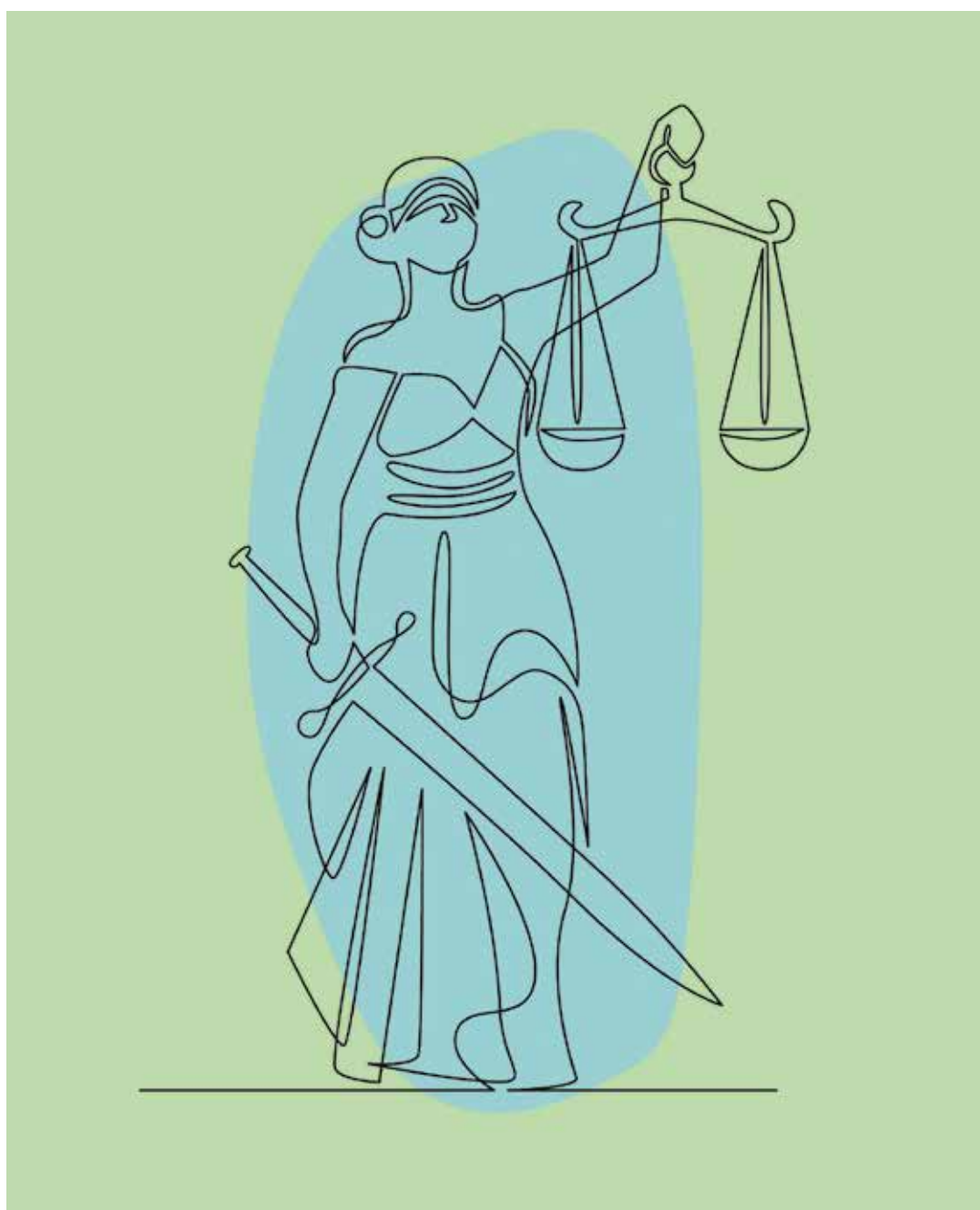


Illustration: Freepik

The case has a long history and cannot be seen separate from the years of animosity that has existed between two groups with overlapping fields within the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML): Nutrition and Movement Sciences and Human Biology. The dismissed professor (we will refer to him as X) is from the former. The colleague who was falsely accused of unacceptable sexual behaviour works for the latter. The two departments merged in 2014, but split up again in the same year, partly due to interference from an external agency. The advice was to appoint a coach to 'appease the parties'. But that never happened, the court reports.

How does it come so far that a person, apparently without good reason, accuses another of unacceptable sexual behaviour? There were difficult relations between the two groups and certainly also between the two people, the court's report states, but the fact that the situation escalated, has everything to do with plans for a new chair of *Metabolic Imaging* within Human Biology. X protested against this because a similar chair already existed within his own group. A chair that is held by his wife.

Social insecurity

But it goes further than indignation about that vacancy –

something that, by the way, is shared by a number of colleagues from his department, as appeared from the e-mail that was made public by the court and was addressed to the administrators. In various messages, X refers to a feeling of 'social insecurity' (not defined in any detail), the years of not being heard, and an FHML dean who would have made decisions which disadvantaged his department on multiple occasions.

Then the case takes an unexpected turn; in autumn of 2022, X makes a serious accusation. In an e-mail to President Rianne Letschert, he lets slip that his 'rival' at Human Biology was guilty of unacceptable sexual behaviour. Because of this complaint, but also the grumblings of colleagues about the vacancy, Letschert commissions an independent investigation into the situation at both departments. When it subsequently appears that X is continuing to throw accusations at his colleague, Letschert gives him a choice: report sick and then leave or a 'person-oriented investigation'. The choice falls on the latter. X is suspended during the investigation (he starts summary proceedings against UM because he does not agree with this, but this is in vain). Ultimately, the situation is no longer tenable. The university wants to dismiss X.

How does it come so far that a person, apparently without good reason, accuses another of unacceptable sexual behaviour?

Sorry

What did the court decide? At any rate that there is no evidence whatsoever for the accusations of unacceptable sexual behaviour by the colleague. As far as 'social insecurity' is concerned: the court states that X and other members of his department *feel*

they are being frustrated by, among others, the department of Human Biology and the dean, but there is no evidence to show that this was really the case.

Can any comments be made about how the new chair came about? Should that have been done differently? No, the regulations that apply were followed, the court states.

The fact that the professor is sorry and will not easily be able to continue his academic career elsewhere, does not lead to a different decision. X will be dismissed per 1 July 2024 and will receive a transitional employment allowance of almost 136 thousand euro.

Wendy Degens

Observant did not name the professors; doing so would not serve any public interest

President Rianne Letschert reflects on outline agreement

“Binding Study Advice? The government should not interfere in this”



Studying at UM-Sports

“Worrisome.” That is President Rianne Letschert’s reaction to the plans for higher education as drawn up in the outline agreement by the four upcoming coalition parties. “Our universities do well worldwide. The coalition has now dealt a blow, not just to the institutes but also to the students. That is unwise and unjustified.”

Text: Riki Janssen

Photo: Yuri Meesen

Return of the Binding Study Advice, fewer programmes in English, limitation of the influx of foreign students, a fine for those studying beyond the study duration period (anyone who takes more

than a year extra in the bachelor’s or master’s phase will have to pay 3,000 euro tuition fees), cutbacks in the sector plans (200 million less for academic research annually), as well as the Fund for Research and

Science getting 200 million less annually), which pays for the starter and stimulation grants. This is a brief summary of the plans that need to be detailed by the

“Less money is going to science, to basic research and innovation”

new – still to be appointed – Minister of Education. Add to that an “alteration” (i.e. cutback) of a total of 2.1 billion in the Growth Fund, which is used, among other things,

to pay for the Einstein telescope. The latter will not be jeopardised. Subsidies that have already been promised, are ‘safe’. What all this will mean exactly for Maastricht University, is still unclear. First, the plans have to be made more definite. One thing is clear, said Letschert: “Less money is going to science, to basic research and innovation.” As for the plans to reduce the use of English in education and to lower the influx of foreign students, two measures that will be unfavourable for the very international UM: “Obviously, we are concerned about this. But at the same time, the Internationalisation in Balance Act (WIB) by current minister Dijkgraaf has not been declared controversial and that is good news. That will be dealt with in Parliament and provides for the unique position of border regions. For tailor-made solutions.” The bill also gives the university the possibility to halt further expansion in Maastricht. “We really want to curb further growth, which is good for the balance, for the inhabitants in the city. We can use the bill as an instrument to curb the influx and pay more attention to the Dutch language.” Whether the bill will be accepted or not, there will certainly be a UM policy to promote the knowledge of Dutch. “We will do that irrespective of the rules from The Hague. We are not deaf to society’s sentiments.” Letschert did not expect the new plans for the students. She feels that they have already had to deal with a “fickle” government for years: “First, there was the basic grant, which was subsequently abolished, but interest was zero; then interest had to be paid on their student loans after all. And now they have reintroduced the basic grant.” The Binding Study Advice (BSA) is back on the agenda too. A measure which she feels is typically something for the institutes themselves. “It is a pedagogical assessment, which can vary per study programme. The government should not interfere in this. The autonomy of higher education is slowly but surely being limited by things like this. That is also a point of concern.” In the time to come, UM will keep an eye on The Hague, it states with vigour. “We will keep a close check on the developments and make sure the Maastricht voice is heard.”

Student influencers

“There are real friends and online friends”

Text: Simon Wirtz

Illustration: Simone Golob

Photos: archive LR and WV

Being an influencer and earning (a lot of) money by sharing your life with others online – that is currently the dream of many young people. But it’s not that easy, say the two UM students and successful influencers Lucie Rauschnabel and Wout Voorderhaak.



Wout Voorderhaak (22), second year student of medicine, is also an influencer alongside his studies. But in contrast to Rauschnabel, his accounts are exclusively about learning tips. In his videos, he is almost always sitting at a tidy desk, with plants and a humidifier in the background. Sometimes learning techniques are in the focus, other times it’s the ideal weekend planning for studying. It never becomes truly private, and feelings don’t play a big role here either. Voorderhaak is another type of influencer than the UCM-student, produces for another ‘niche’, as the specific interests of followers are called. But with all the differences, there is an important parallel to her: the story behind the story, in this case: follow your own path. “I always wanted to be a doctor, but had to fight my way into university. I kept standing in front of closed doors. But I fought, and now I am in my second year of studying medicine”.

Editing

Isn’t it difficult to keep coming up with new content, if your account is just about studying techniques? Not for Voorderhaak. He has been running various accounts on other topics (also motivational accounts, but without showing his face, and with no small success) for the past five years, and has a lot of fun with this one. “It also gives me energy to get reactions from people who I can help to get better grades. And I learn from it myself, it helps me to study more and better as well.” Here, Voorderhaak refers to his study sessions, where he invites his followers to – virtually – study together, every few days. When he is not studying, the medicine student often films and edits. “Mostly 10-15 hours a week, often together with my girlfriend.”

Advertisements

“The work is not completely unpaid, but it’s not a lot that I earn”, he says. The little he does earn comes from advertisements for products – in his case, these are also, among other things, apps, for example an AI-driven app that summarises academic articles. Voorderhaak however also emphasises that he runs his account “for the fun and to help people”, the small side income is just nice to have. “I’m happy if I gain more followers, so that I can help even more people”, says Voorderhaak, who currently counts around 150.000. Will his account stop after he graduated? “I don’t know yet what I’ll do in the future, I’m also not 100 percent sure if I want to be a doctor. Maybe I’ll do both.”



Lucie Rauschnabel (20) sits on her bed, with tears in her eyes. She looks directly into the camera and whispers: “I’m so fucking scared to go to college and actually be alone. I just want to be happy.” Cut. The wind rushes through her hair as she rides her bike through the streets of Maastricht with a big smile on her face. Cut. She toasts with a glass of Aperol Spritz, which glitters orange-red in the sun. Cut. This short video is one example of the many videos that the 20-year-old University College Maastricht (UCM)-student shares every day on Instagram and Tiktok. Most of them are about feelings, about the sad and the beautiful, about living the moment. Within a few months, since setting up her account in January 2023, Rauschnabel has gained over 180,000 followers with her daily posts – a remarkable number. “I love this

job”, she says. “The creativity, the filming and editing. It’s great. And sure, I also earn money with it. How much? Well, I could pay my rent with it.”

Loneliness

She grew up in the suburbs of New York, did seven years of competitive rowing in her youth, and was on the path of getting recruited for a training programme for professional rowers. But Rauschnabel had enough of the sports. “Then I thought, why not study in Europe, with all the English-speaking universities here. But finding the right one wasn’t that easy.” Rauschnabel eventually came to UCM through the agency Beyond the states, one of many that helps Americans with finding English-taught study programmes in Europe. But once in Maastricht, the initial anticipation was gone: “It all went so fast. I found myself far away from home, with no friends, lonely. I missed them really much, also my boyfriend, who stayed in the US. I nearly wanted to go back.” But she stayed, and started to share videos

of her everyday live in Maastricht – when doing groceries, at the gym, at university. And about being scared of the drastic change, as she moved from the US to Europe. “I wanted to inspire others to move to a different country and follow their dreams as well. Even if it is scary. I wanted to show them the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Business

Her social media-accounts became a business eventually when she realized that the Instagram-page of Beyond the states had a massive increase of followers after she tagged them. “I told them: it seems to come through me. We should work together, you could reach so many more people.” From then on, having a side income through her cooperation, she refined her content: what was well received, what were people less interested in? “For example, I don’t post much about my studies because my followers don’t follow me for that.

I’m a decent student, it’s however not my focus.” But healthy eating and exercise the more: “I want to inspire others to take care of themselves,

mentally and physically.” Within months and with increasing numbers of followers, more companies came forward: from cosmetics to all sorts of apps.

Sugar babe

But are there also less bright sides to this job? “Well, I can’t take a day off. Never. And the direct messages I get are sometimes unbelievable.” Dozens of strangers message her daily on Instagram and Tiktok. “There was a lot of hate when I moved here, Dutch people saying that I take away their housing and should go back to the US. And some people are also looking for a ‘sugar babe’ or make sexual comments. They’re blocked straight away.” On the other hand, Rauschnabel feels sorry for people who message her on Instagram and want to go for a coffee or even be friends, but don’t know her in real life. “I would love to, but I can’t be friends with everyone online. And I’m feeling bad about it. I prioritise making friends in real life.” For the next years, Rauschnabel will be busy with ‘building her brand’, as she calls it. “I want to grow, create a valuable and respected brand, something long lasting.” What exactly will that look like? Rauschnabel has some ideas, but doesn’t want to read them in *Observant*. “I want to keep them private, for now.”

“The creativity, the filming and editing. It’s great. And sure, I also earn money with it. How much? Well, I could pay my rent with it”

news

The move will most likely be at the end of 2025 KoKo finds new accommodation, at a stone's throw from present location

After a search that lasted years, student association KoKo has found new accommodation. The association is expected to move at the end of 2025 to a former shack on the Botermijn, no more than a hundred metres from its current clubhouse. In the meantime, the new building will be radically renovated.

The association, with about five hundred members, has been looking for a new building since the end of 2021, after it became clear that their current tenancy lease was coming to an end. In the plans for the redevelopment of the Botermijn, the area close to the station where Koko has been housed in a former office building since 2000, there was no longer space for the students at their present location. A business consortium – MOOI ontwikkelt, Maes Vastgoed and Monitor Capital Investments – want to build about 240 student and starter homes, with catering and work spaces on the premises.

Finding a new building proved to be quite dif-



ficult. Two locations offered by the owner – including the former customs office on the Botermijn – the association found to be unsuitable, while their own search across the city,

together with the university and the city authorities, remained unsuccessful. On 1 November 2022, the date upon which KoKo was to leave the present building, there was still no solution. After consultation with the owner, the association was allowed to stay longer, temporarily, while talks were ongoing about an alternative location on the Botermijn: to the rear of the former goods shack.

This idea was well-liked. “We are not taking a step back: with regard to surface area, it is comparable and we are still in the same place in town, so members don't need to cycle home over a dark, unsafe road in the evening,” says chairwoman Valérie Cramer. The new rental agreement was signed last month, after one-and-a-half years of negotiations. “Plenty of champagne was had in celebration, because it is a tremendous relief. It was a very long and tedious process, which kept several boards – with good supervision from UM – very busy.”

Now the focus is on the renovations, says Robin

Nijsten, housing officer for the association. In the current shack, there will have to be a pub and a hall for parties, as well as rooms for the board and other meetings. “It is mainly the first part that is expensive. The pub and party hall will have sound-proofed floors, ceilings and walls, using a so-called box-in-box construction. Should everything go our way with regard to applications for permits, the renovations can hopefully start after this summer.” After completion, which is expected to be end 2025, the association will be given another two to three months to move in.

The cost is to a large extent for KoKo; the owner is only responsible for the outside of the building. Chairwoman Cramer would “prefer not” to give an exact amount, but it is “a lot” of money. How will the association come up with this? “Beer brewer Bavaria, who has been our supplier since this year, will pay some of it. We also want to organise a benefit event at the end of this year, in which we will focus on former and present members as well as on others. In addition, we will receive a loan from UM, which we will obviously have to pay back in instalments.” Moreover, the association has saved money over the past few years. “Amongst others by not investing in the current building, because we knew we would have to leave anyway.”

Dennis Vaendel

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

30-5, 10.00 h Angelina Pavlic
30-5, 13.00 h Priscila Preciado Rojas
30-5, 16.00 h Prof. dr. Jos Lemmink
afscheidsrede
Franz Palm Lecture Hall
31-5, 10.00 h Elizaveta Lavrova Double
Doctoral Degree Maastricht
University - Liège University
31-5, 13.00 h Gido Metz
31-5, 16.30 h Dr. Ir. Gerco Onderwater
inauguratie
03-6, 10.00 h Jan Caspar Peeken
03-6, 16.00 h Lindsay Groenvynck
Double Doctoral Degree
Maastricht University and KU
Leuven
04-6, 10.00 h Ngoc Hung Nguyen
04-6, 13.00 h Margo Karemaker
04-6, 16.00 h Valentyna Anufriyeva
05-6, 10.00 h Bauke Beate Stinesen
05-6, 16.00 h Yikang Zhang
06-6, 13.00 h Pengyu Zhang Double Doctoral
Degree Maastricht University
and Johannes Gutenberg
Universität Mainz
0-06, 16.00 h online Jeferson Sohn
07-6, 13.00 h Magdalena Beran
07-6, 16.00 h Prof. dr. E.A. Joosten
afscheidscollege
10-6, 13.00 h Alina Ofenheimer
10-6, 16.00 h Karen van der Sluis
11-6, 10.00 h Gaukhar Baidildinova Double
Doctoral Degree Maastricht

University and Johannes Gutenberg
Universität Mainz
11-6, 13.00 h Rob Wilhelmus Petrus Simons
11-6, 16.00 h Allert de Vries
14-6, 13.00 h Cloé Geboers
14-6, 16.30 h Dr. E. Nillesen inauguratie
17-6, 10.00 h Daniëlle Josefina Maria
Adriaans
17-6, 16.00 h Bas Petrus Maria Van Hooren
18-6, 13.00 h Bulat Khaertdinov
18-6, 16.00 h Stephanie Van Asbroeck
19-6, 10.00 h Herwansay
19-6, 13.00 h Daphne Anne Laura
Schoenmakers
19-6, 16.00 h Christine Anne Gutekunst
20-6, 13.00 h Anneloes Geertje Munneke
20-6, 16.00 h Kim Gosewina Gerarda van Kol
21-6, 10.00 h Babs Marlène Francisca
Hendriks
21-6, 13.00 h Tom Schiefer
21-6, 16.00 h Prof. dr. Jos Schols
afscheidscollege
24-6, 10.00 h Ferdi Widiputera
24-6, 13.00 h Yingyi Wu
25-6, 13.00 h Natalia Y. Makhotkina
25-6, 16.00 h Anaís Sánchez Castillo
26-6, 10.00 h Mathilde Catharina Tubbergen
26-6, 13.00 h Jeremy Weerts
26-6, 16.00 h Markus A. M. van der Pas
27-6, 10.00 h Tsai-Ying Lu
28-6, 13.00 h Veerle van Gils
28-6, 16.30 h Dr. Hylke Dijkstra inauguratie

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