

observant

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INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY ————— VOLUME 44 / SEPTEMBER 14, 2023

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Research on psychedelics and cannabis

“More and more people are using it for medicinal purposes, but this also has risks. Certainly for women. It is known that they react badly to the use of weed more often.”

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Illustration: Shutterstock



Riki Janssen

The front door clicked shut and we heard familiar footsteps on the stairs. This week, our team was briefly complete for the first time since summer break. Editor CF joined us for a cup of coffee, or in her case a glass of water. At the beginning of the summer, she developed severe pancreatitis and spent two weeks in hospital. She is now recovering at home while waiting to have (hopefully) minor surgery. She'll be fine, she assured the team on Monday. But it will be a while before she has her energy back and can return to her usual activities.

It was her first time sitting down with our three new colleagues, who joined us in August. But there was no trace of awkwardness; it feels like they've been around for much

longer.

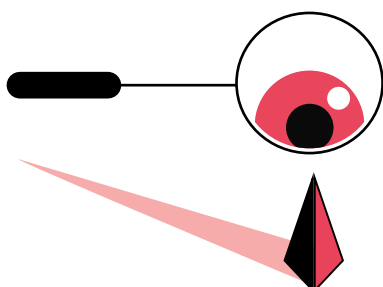
We speak Dutch at the office. This is a first for junior journalist SW, who was born and raised in Germany. Towards the end of 2022, when he was a student columnist writing for *Observant* in English, he heard about the temporary job that would be opening up in our team. He didn't hesitate to apply despite the Dutch language requirement. The job interview in early June was conducted entirely in Dutch. And once hired, he let us know he'd like to write in Dutch as well.

Everyone in journalism knows it's not easy to write in a language other than your own, let alone a language you've been learning for just ten months. But he never gives

up, even when sweat is beading on his forehead. Around five PM, his eyes sometimes look tired from a full day of speaking, thinking, and writing in Dutch. It's a good thing he has fellow junior journalist LvdL. She often invites him along for a short walk or a coffee break. During these short breaks, they speak German, which LvdL speaks fluently as well.

As junior journalists, they still have a lot to learn about the job. But they've already mastered the skill of being a good colleague.

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.

With contributions from: Lotte van de Loo, Dennis Vaendel, Simon Wirtz



Toga-activism

Last Saturday, action group Extinction Rebellion started its daily blockade of the A12 motorway near The Hague. The group of demonstrators also included participants in white lab coats and gowns: more than a hundred members of Scientist Rebellion, a group of activist researchers joined in the protest, clad in their academic robes. Their message: put an end to the Dutch government subsidies for fossil fuel.

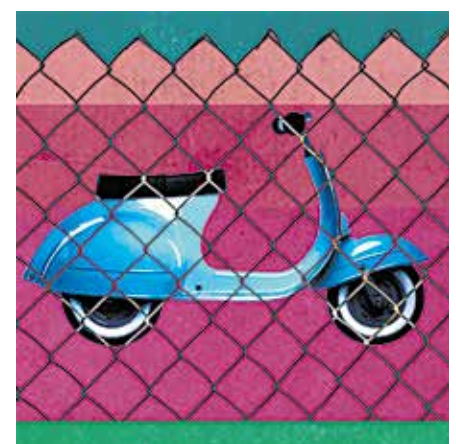
Wim Uijtewaal, professor of hydraulic engineering at TU Delft, agrees. He told sister newspaper *Delta* beforehand that

he would also be protesting in a gown. Despite the fact that this is prohibited for this item of clothing, according to official protocol. Why is he doing it anyway? "I am not standing there as Wim with a gown, but I am there to emphasise the scientific foundation."

Tolkien in Maastricht

This month, visitors to the Sint Janskerk on the Vrijthof are likely to bump into the wizard Gandalf or Smaug the dragon. The figures from the famous books *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are part of an exhibition on the British author J.R.R. Tolkien. This is in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of his death, put together by Dutch, Belgian and German Tolkien societies, which can be seen in the church tower until International Hobbit Day (23 September).

Why there? Maybe Tolkien based Middle Earth, the fictitious world from his books, on Maastricht, reckons Arjan van der Star, steward of the church. He reveals his theory in a book that is available at the exhibition. Texts on centuries-old murals in the church are suspiciously similar to the elves' language that Tolkien made up and there are symbols that remind one of the eagles and flying monsters from the books. The map of Middle Earth also fits the map of the Euregion. Moria's mines could possibly be the underground system of corridors under the Sint-Pietersberg or the Parkstad region; the hobbit land The Shire is then the Belgian Haspengouw area. And Mordor, the land of the dark ruler Sauron? That is located in the Eifel.



"Of course, I can't prove anything," says Van der Star in *de Limburger*. But, he adds, three years before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien spent a number of days in and around Liège. Maybe, he also visited Maastricht?

Motor scooter mystery

A huge mystery in Randwyck: who is the owner of the blue motor scooter that is chained to the railings of the UNS50 building? Due to work being done to - among others - the glass roof, access to the lockable bicycle shed is limited. To make sure that employees and students can still park their bicycles, an area between UNS50 and UNS60 is being rearranged. The chained scooter, however, is throwing a spanner in the works. The vehicle has not moved from its place yet this year. The search for the owner, which included appeals on the intranet at the beginning of September, has yielded no results yet: at the beginning of this week, the scooter was still in its familiar spot.

Will measures be taken? That is unclear. At the moment, there is still hope that the owner will report to the building manager, an employee informed when asked. So, who has lost a nice blue scooter?

Absenteeism figures 2022: Long-term absenteeism more often related to psychiatric problems

In 2022, Maastricht University had more (3.1 per cent) people off sick than in the three previous years. Company doctors also saw more employees who are at home for prolonged periods due to psychiatric problems.

In the years 2019 until 2021, absenteeism was fairly low and stable: 2.7 per cent. This period includes two Covid years with multiple lockdowns, during which many people had to stay at home. This enabled employees to plan their work more freely and those who weren't feeling well, still tried to at least answer some e-mails at the 'home office'.

Occupational health and safety service Human Capital Care presented the annual absenteeism report to one of the University Council committees on Wednesday afternoon (after *Observant* went to press). There are concerns about the increasing number of people ill. Because what does that mean for the colleagues who have to take on that work, or for the person who is sick and has to catch up on that work later?

What catches the eye, is the group that reports sick more than three times a year: their number rose from 182 in 2021 to 410 in 2022.

The service centres and the Maastricht University Office (which includes Legal Affairs, Communication and Marketing and HR) had most absentees due to illness: 4.5 per cent. Facility Services and the University Library take the lead among the service centres. Another striking figure in the graphs and tables is the high illness rate among administrative and support staff at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. In 2021, this was 5 per cent, by 2022 it had increased to 7.2 per cent. Is there an explanation? Director Cerien Streefland could not be reached for comment.

Long-term patients more often suffer from psychiatric problems. It plays a role in 60 per cent of the cases (against 46 per cent in 2021). Company doctors mainly see this among women. In more than half of the cases, work is the cause, triggered by things such as conflicts, pestering or pressure. At the same time, private matters and someone's personality cannot be ruled out, say the writers of the report. After all, it is often a combination of factors that lead to a person's long-term absenteeism. The occupational health and safety service is hoping that UM will pay more attention to "the development of absenteeism" and re-integration after returning to work. Here lies a task for management; the company doctors believe that merely having an approach from 'the medical perspective' is not sufficient. "A significant proportion of cases could have been prevented if early warning signs would have been noticed and addressed by the management." So, noticing on time and then taking action when someone is not motivated or simply can't get anything done. The doctors believe that department heads should be given extra training.

Wendy Degens

Latest
news
via QR



Flooding Flooded basements and leaking roofs



Photo: Joey Roberts

Maastricht University is contending with the after-effects of flooding in various buildings, both in Randwyck and in the city centre.

After the tremendous downpour on Tuesday evening, water found its way into buildings via basements and roofs. "We have to assume that this will not be the last time."

Wednesday morning, the submersible pumps are doing their jobs in the basement of the Student Services Centre (SSC). Employees from Facility Services (FS) are keeping an eye on the water being pumped through a long fire hose from the technical area onto the Ezelmarkt. "It will take at least a day or two before all that water is gone from the basement," Evert van Zoeren from FS sighs. He still has his rubber boots on, beside him there is a crate with a wet vacuum cleaner. He has already spent quite some hours 'mopping up'. "This is the second time that we have had problems caused by rain. We have plenty of vacuums and pumps, but it is not really enough."

According to Catharien Kerkman, head of FS, a lot of hard work was put in on Tuesday evening and night to get the various buildings dry again. "Water entered a number of buildings, sometimes quite a lot, sometimes just a bit, fortunately. We got to work with wet vacuum cleaners, squeegees, and anything else that we could use," she told us by telephone.

Van Zoeren first inspected Tongersestraat 53 Tuesday night, where there was water on the

floor of the student cafeteria and ceilings came down in two offices, "the roofs just couldn't handle it".

In SSC, water found its way to some offices at basement level. "There are now ventilators and dehumidifiers, but some of the carpet will most likely have to be replaced." SSC's technical area is in the worst condition, in the basement, at the back of the building. Van Zoeren estimates that the water has reached a level of one metre. The old wooden door that provides access through the back of the building, was pushed away completely by the pressure of the water. The eight central-heating boilers are drenched. Van Zoeren expects that these can no longer be used. The cooling system has also broken down, just like the ventilation system in the toilets. "There was a power outage. It will be a challenge to get this up and working again." The ground floor of the University Library in the city centre was not lucky either, but "that is open again now".

Sometimes, 'residual damage' only becomes visible after a while, as was the case in the archives of the Faculty of Law on the Bouillonstraat, also in the basement. There was a layer of water there. The damage now seems to be not so bad, says Sandra Daas, head of the university archive service ADP. What she is especially worried about is what the moisture will do? It can cause mould or attract silverfish that eat paper.

Wendy Degens and Lotte van de Loo



We bicker a lot, as such couples tend to do

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Exactly a decade has passed since I first walked through the familiar FASoS arch into the Hof van Tilly courtyard and signed for my glossy new employee card. Hired on a temporary contract before the ink on my PhD diploma was dry, I had no idea how long I'd be welcome here. Nor was I sure how long I myself would want to stay in a town that seemed, to my big-city eyes, rather sleepy and small.

And now it's been ten autumns. The longer I stay, the more the years blur together and the more I must admit that Maastricht- and the UM- is now home for this South African immigrant. Like an old married couple, the university and I have been through a lot together. We've undergone the trials of NVAO re-accreditation panels, the creation and first graduation of the country's only Global Studies degree, and a spring in 2020 that still feels like a bizarre dream. We bicker a lot, as such couples tend to do. To be honest, sometimes you've really pissed me off. But I like to think we've grown fond of each other, and that without our familiar routine, we'd both be a little lost. You've given me a community and a space to grow - something not every spouse is keen to do. So, dear UM, happy anniversary. Apparently, the traditional gift at ten years is something made of tin, and so my gift to you this month is a tin drum. I'll keep banging this drum to draw attention to the causes my colleagues know I care deeply about, in particular the growing need for us to robustly discuss controversial ideas without rancour or polarization. You'll probably find the racket annoying at times. But I'm also giving you this drum so we can keep making music together. The songs we'll play haven't been written yet, so we'd better get started.

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Elsje Fourie,
assistant professor of Globalisation &
Development Studies

New series: students about their future

After Keara Froom moved from South Africa to Maastricht for her master's, her parents followed their daughter to the Netherlands. Now hunting for a job, the recent graduate has a decision to make. **Will she need to leave them behind again?**

"I don't want to be the one that breaks us apart again"



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Keara Froom (24) seems relaxed as we meet in the Stadspark on a sunny Wednesday morning. And she has every reason to be: she has just graduated from her master's in Data Science for Decision Making at the Faculty of Science and Engineering – a programme that, given the enormously increasing demand for digital solutions such as AI, almost guarantees its graduates a bright future. Having lived in Maastricht for nearly two years, Froom has many positive things to say about the town and her study programme. But staying here longer doesn't seem to be an option for her: "Maastricht is lovely, but too small for me in the long term. I've always lived in bigger cities. I love their anonymity." That's why Froom has been applying for positions in software management

at consultancy firms all over the Netherlands. She has also been looking at Germany, but she doesn't want to look farther than that – not yet.

Sacrifice

Why is that? Her family, who left everything they knew behind in South Africa to live closer to their daughter, is the main reason. Froom doesn't want to leave her parents, who recently bought a house in the north of the Netherlands, behind again. "They made a

huge sacrifice when they left their home and friends to move near me. And now we're happy together as a family. I don't want to be the one that breaks us apart again." But she also fears missing out on opportunities and is caught in a dilemma.

Froom's close relationship with her parents has always been important in her life. Especially the strong bond between the FSE graduate and her mum is essential for her. It is rooted in the intense and defining experiences mother and daughter had during Froom's childhood in South Africa.

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

To what extent does their past play a role, and what about the major worldwide problems, think of climate change, war, political instability, growing poverty, and so on.

Apartheid

She was born just after apartheid ended. For nearly five decades (1948 – 1990), the South African government kept white and darker-skinned people separated. They lived, worked, went to school and shopped in different areas, with the black population suffering severe discrimination.

As the daughter of an Indian-South African mother and a Dutch father, Froom and her mum were often picked on, as she is lighter-skinned than her mother. Even though marriage between black and white people was allowed when she was born, and couples like her parents could legally have children, the mindset of many South Africans hadn't changed yet. "It was sometimes difficult. I was especially furious when people made comments about my mom. People sometimes stared at us when we were out grocery shopping. On other occasions, they asked her who she was, implying that we couldn't be related because we have different skin tones", says Froom. "It made us very close."

Moving away

Still, her move to Maastricht wasn't the first time the 24-year-old left her parents behind. After growing up in Johannesburg, Froom went to pursue a bachelor's in Maths and Statistics, two subjects that have always been her passion, in Cape Town – 1400 kilometres away from home. "I got used to the distance eventually, but it was difficult for me. I couldn't just hop on a train for a weekend."

But the distance also helped her. In Cape Town, Froom learned to live on her own, cook for herself, and be more independent. "I had the opportunity to try out artsy stuff, like painting and playing ukulele, during that time, but it wasn't for me. I'm more of a tech and sports kind of girl. But I can say that I truly became an adult there", she explains. After graduation, however, she felt stuck. "I couldn't find a suitable job in South Africa. There were lots of start-ups, but nobody could really offer me a position with opportunities for growth. I was interested in growing."

Europe

Froom moved back home to Johannesburg with a degree in her pocket, but no perspective. It was her mum who encouraged her to go out into the world again, even farther away this time. "One night when I couldn't sleep, she sat on my bed and convinced me to go study in Europe. 'Europe, that's so far away', I thought. It seemed like another world." Although Froom holds Dutch citizenship through her father, she had never been to Europe. "The thought of moving that far away again frightened me somehow. But I realised that I had to. It was a big opportunity. And now I'm grateful that I took the step to come to Maastricht, and for my parents' unconditional support."

Lecture by philosopher Lieven de Cauter on the importance of rigorous actions

“Activists on the A12 motorway have to be careful not to alienate the people”

As a teenager, Lieven De Cauter (64) already climbed the barricades. When he was in secondary school, he protested against the Chilean dictator Pinochet and he handed out red carnations for the independence of the Portuguese colony Angola. Later on, he was co-founder of the Brussels Tribunal against the illegal invasion of Iraq and he was at the cradle of the Flemish petition *Heart Above Hard* (*Hart boven hard*), which advocates an inclusive and sustainable society. The slogan was: “where profit wins from value, loss will be the result”.

Activism and science do not compete with each other, according to De Cauter, they go hand in hand. He is a cultural philosopher at the Catholic University of Leuven and since 1997 has worked at the department of Architecture, Urban Development and Spatial Planning. His last book is entitled *Ending the Anthropocene: essays on activism in the age of collapse* (2021), in which he shines his light on activism.

With an eye towards the climate crisis, you are arguing for radical action to disrupt society. What does that look like in your view?

“We are totally unaware of the seriousness of the situation. According to some experts, global warming is not even the most urgent, it’s the diminishing biodiversity. We are standing before an all-embracing catastrophe, which will be ten thousand times more serious than the

“Instead of occupying the A12 motorway, you would be better off sabotaging the petroleum industry.” That is the opinion of Lieven De Cauter, poet, essayist and cultural philosopher at KU Leuven. De Cauter argues for radical action that disrupts society. Next week, he will be giving a lecture entitled *Activism in the Age of Climate Crisis*, organised by Studium Generale.

Covid-19 pandemic. I am not a biologist, but I have read enough to know that this ecological crisis will be much more radical in terms of size, cost and human lives. I mean, without nature we will be dead tomorrow. We can’t last longer than three minutes without oxygen. At the same time, the Amazon Forest, one of the world’s lungs, is now emitting more CO₂ than it is absorbing. It is code red for the whole planet.”

So that requires rigorous measures.

“Yes, especially from the government. Keep aeroplanes on the ground. Introduce pay-as-you-drive immediately. Limit the consumption of red meat. We saw during the Covid-19 pandemic that we are able to take harsh measures. That all has to happen tomorrow, not the day after tomorrow.”

Still, aeroplanes are not staying on the ground.

“No, society still hasn’t been awakened, the urgency is not being felt yet. This is aggravated by the fact that politicians fear electoral

damage. On top of this, there is the economic pressure in this neoliberal era. We are trapped in the logic of economic growth. Even though Thunberg has previously said to the UN: ‘I don’t want your hope, I want you to panic.’ But another person whom one couldn’t suspect of fanatical activism, UN boss Antonio Guterres, said last week: ‘Climate collapse has started.’”

According to Bas van den Hurk, the new chairman of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), the climate does not benefit from warnings and doom scenarios, but needs solutions.

“I agree, but as long as people deny the seriousness of the problem, there will be no support at all for solutions. As a philosopher, I consider it primarily as my task to provide a warning. For half of the population of the United States, global warming does not exist. It is partly a political matter, because the far right still believes that the climate crisis is fiction, from Baudet, the German AfD to Vlaams belang.”

What do you think about the daily occupation of the A12 motorway by Extinction Rebellion?

“I am in favour of rigorous action. Although I wonder if you would not be better off bringing the petroleum industry to a standstill instead of blocking a motorway. If you live in The Hague, and you are confronted with the blockades every day... Activists have to be careful not to alienate people. In Belgium, activists blocked an energy company, which I think is fine, seeing as these companies are extremely polluting and make huge profits. The cynicism of our captains of industry is shocking. Shell’s new CEO recently said: ‘We are going to pump oil and pump more oil, that is our core business.’ In other words: *fuck the world.*”

Maurice Timmermans

De Cauter’s lecture (in English) will be delivered on 18 September (20:00hrs) in the auditorium of MBB, free entrance.

“Scientists need to speak out more”

No, Pim Martens, UM-professor of Sustainability, did not go to The Hague to occupy the A12 motorway. He did consider it, though, he says. Martens is sympathetic towards the Extinction Rebellion activists, but he himself is not going to climb the barricades. “I am more for the gentle action; I would rather write a piece in the newspaper than block a motorway.”

Does he support XR’s action? “I completely agree with the reason why they are doing this. It is too crazy for words that the fossil sector still receives tens of millions in subsidies. It is just that I am not at all in favour of actions that disrupt the lives of people. I do not denounce them, but I would choose actions that generate sympathy, actions that get people thinking, such as climate marches.” Martens also feels, in line with Scientist Rebellion, that scientists should speak out more. “I have been doing so since the nineteen-eighties. Even back then, the negative impact that humans have on the climate was known. After which it has only become clearer and clearer. It hasn’t made me dispirited. There are dozens of possibilities to turn things around, but we really need to want it.”



Activists occupying the A12 motorway in The Hague this week Photo: Eveline van Egdorn

“I Winner Hustinx prize Natasha Mason studies psychedelic drugs and cannabis
Let’s try
to prevent
a recurrence
of what
happened.
in the sixties”

What happens in your brain when you use cannabis or psychedelic drugs? And how can you incorporate these in the treatment of (mental) disorders? During the opening of the academic year, Natasha Mason, assistant professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Neurosciences (FPN), received the Edmond Hustinx prize of 15 thousand euro for her research on this.

TEXT: Dennis Vaendel PHOTO: Joey Roberts

“Don’t tell anyone this, because it could put an end to your career.” That was the advice that an American professor gave Natasha Mason about ten years ago, when she was a student of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin in the American city of Madison. Her question to the professor? What would be the best way to engage in scientific research into psychedelic drugs? Her interest in this was sparked when she came across a study in the literature in which psychedelic drugs were used in the treatment of depressions and anxiety disorders. “I was already fascinated by the question how medicines make people feel

better. But in practice – while I was a student, I also worked in a pharmacy – I also saw the negative sides of certain drugs, especially antidepressants and opiates. A lot of people complained that they didn’t work, but at the same time, they could no longer do without them. Just how different that picture was in that study about psychedelic drugs: many participants felt better after only one treatment, and the effect also lasted for months.” But further research? There was no question of this being possible in the United States since psychedelic drugs were prohibited at the end of the sixties – a period where the popular-

ity of in particular LSD took flight. What remained, was a tremendous stigma. She would be better off keeping her interest to herself, said the professor. “He was afraid that people would put me down as a hippy or a drug addict. ‘Give it another twenty years, maybe the time will be right then’, he said to me.”

Renaissance

Mason ignored this advice. Fortunately, because those twenty years was a huge miscalculation, she now concludes, sitting in the canteen on Universiteitssingel 40 in Randwyck. For nine years now, she has been doing research into psychedelic

drugs and cannabis in this building. First as a PhD student, by now she is an assistant professor. In the meantime, a true “psychedelic renaissance” has taken place, she says. “More and more studies were appearing worldwide, with promising results, as a result of which attention and resources increased too.” Even in her home country, the mood has changed completely, the American has noticed. “Ten years ago, Maastricht was one of the few places in the world where clinical studies with psychedelic drugs in people occurred. That is why I came here. Now, there are dozens of research groups, many of which – of all places – in the United States, even at prestigious institutes.”

Creativity

In Maastricht, Mason is focussing on how drugs affect the way the brain works – and hence people’s behaviour. “For example, by investigating people’s brains in an MRI scanner while they are under the influence, or by having them fill in a questionnaire.” In her research, she looks into both the direct effects and the long-term effects. “This includes things like the increase in creativity, which is often associated with the use of psychedelic drugs. We discovered that test subjects who had taken psilocybin, the active agent in magic mushrooms, became less creative when they were asked to carry out tasks. But a week later, they appeared



Natasha Mason

to have more new ideas than the people in the placebo group.” It is characteristics like these that are useful in the treatment of psychiatric problems, Mason explains. “Psychedelic drugs increase the plasticity of the brain; they create new connections between brain cells. This process may enable you to think about things in a different way. That can be very effective for people suffering from depression, who are often trapped in certain ways of thinking.” By a better understanding of what happens in the brain, she hopes to be able to improve therapies. “This means, optimising positive effects, but also minimising negative ones.”

Addiction

Plenty of gain can still be made in the case of the latter, says Mason. “Take cannabis, into which we are also doing research – in addition to psychedelic drugs. More and more people are using it for medicinal

purposes, for example to alleviate pain, but this also has risks. Certainly for women. It is known that they react badly to the use of weed more often. In them, it more often triggers feelings of fear, and they are generally more prone to addiction. But why is that? Not much is known about this. In the past, research was often only carried out on men.” Mason wants to study this with the 15 thousand euro from the Hustinx prize. “Sex hormones may play a role here. During certain parts of the menstruation cycle, when the concentrations of certain hormones peak, nerve cells may be more sensitive to cannabis. This could mean that women should use more or less cannabis at certain times during their cycle. We want to test this hypothesis with test subjects.”

Wonder drug

Mason is working on many more projects. That is necessary too,

because the demand for knowledge is great, she says. “In the case of cannabis, we are actually behind the times. Estimations show that 4 per cent of the world population uses weed, and this will only increase now that it is being legalised in more and more places. At the same time, a lot is unclear. Things like, how much you can take and still be able to drive a car safely. For alcohol, the limit has been clearly determined, but for weed hardly at all.”

Science will also have to make an effort to catch up in the field of psychedelic drugs. “I expect that psychedelic medicines will become available for a large section of the population in five to ten years. You see that more and more businesses are smelling the money and want to put it on the market as a ‘ready-made’ wonder drug. With the message: ‘Take this drug and you’ll be rid of your symptoms’. But that is not exactly how it works. Until now,

there has mainly been research into therapy, in which someone takes it under supervision. There is not a lot of knowledge about the effects when people take it on their own.” She has mixed feelings about the current hype around psychedelic drugs, among others, on online forums such as Reddit and in popular documentaries on Netflix. “You see that there is a lot of interest. When we put out a call for test subjects, we sometimes receive hundreds of e-mails within one day, from people over the whole world. On the one hand, this is good, but I am at times scared that it is moving too quickly. You see in more and more countries that laws on drugs are being adapted due to public pressure. Let us try to prevent a recurrence of the sixties – when psychedelic drugs ‘escaped’ from the lab too quickly, with bans and stigma as a result. It is better to have a good understanding of them first.”

“**Psychedelic drugs create new connections between brain cells. This process may enable you to think about things in a different way. That can be very effective for people suffering from depression, who are often trapped in certain ways of thinking**”

news

Oops!

CDA voted wrong on binding study advice

Tuesday, the CDA voted incorrectly in the Lower House on plans for binding study advice. That subject should have been 'controversial', according to the christian democratic party.

Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* confirms that MP René Peters made a mistake. "Yes, that's right, I made that mistake." He wants to correct it as soon as possible.

The House voted yesterday on the list of issues that will no longer be discussed before the November 22 elections. The House of Representatives education committee had also put the plans to lower the bsa on that list.

Proposal

But beforehand, D66 suggested that the bsa not be declared "controversial" after all, so as not to delay the bill. Differences of opinion will come up in debates anyway, was the reasoning.

Unexpectedly, that proposal received a majority, thanks in part to the CDA. But that was a mistake. On Thursday, Peters wants to correct his mistake in the education committee. If that agrees, the House of Representatives must vote on it again.

That is possible, because the list of controversial topics is not set in stone. Topics can be deleted, but also added.

Plans

With the plans for binding study advice, outgoing minister Robbert Dijkgraaf is trying to do two things: reduce the performance pressure on first-year students and make sure they keep up the pace in the second year. They would only have to complete 30 credits at most in the first year. On the other hand, the same standard would apply in the second year.

Student organizations are enthusiastic about it, but universities in particular do not like it. Currently, many programs apply a stricter bsa. They are afraid that unqualified students will stay longer in the programs.

Elections

The question is what the political situation will be like after the elections. In the latest I&O Research poll, the CDA retains only three of the fifteen seats. But VVD and D66 are also at a significant loss. Pieter Omtzigt's New Social Contract could easily exceed thirty seats.

HOP

CBS: Foreign graduates stay here to work more often

After graduation, one in three foreign students finds a job in the Netherlands. This is much more than before, reports statistics agency CBS. An explanation is anyone's guess.

To be precise: 32 percent of international graduates have a job in the Netherlands a year after graduation. Previously, this hovered around 22 percent, but CBS now reports that it went up hard among the 2018 batch of graduates.

Part of that last batch entered the labor market during the corona crisis. Perhaps that made them more likely to stay in the Netherlands, working in whatever job. "We don't distinguish whether someone has work that fits their studies or whether someone works in a supermarket, so to speak," says CBS spokesperson Tanja Traag. Should it indeed be a corona effect, the rate will drop again after this. "An alternative theory is tightness in the labor market," Traag suggests.

"Then we expect this high proportion to remain or perhaps even rise further." Still this year, CBS will release the figures for the 2019 batch, Traag announces.

Direction

Regardless, the labor market does affect the "stay opportunity. According to CBS, the educational fields with the most stayers are almost all technical. Engineering is a so-called "shortage sector," where many people are needed.

There are more and more international students in the Netherlands, especially in university master's programs, so more and more are graduating. In 2019/2020, there were almost twenty thousand.

In politics, there are many voices calling for curbing the influx of foreign students, partly because the government would spend too much money on students who do not stay here anyway. Others point to the eco-

nomie benefits of internationalization. At the bottom line, they make money for the treasury, according to internationalization organization Nuffic. It would be about 1.5 billion euros per year.

University students from outside Europe are particularly lucrative. After all, the government does not pay for their studies, while the stayers pay proportionately high taxes thanks to their high salaries.

Most popular fields of study

By the way, most international students choose a university bachelor's degree in behavior and society, CBS reported last week. In higher education, art studies are especially popular.

In those sectors, about one in four is working in the Netherlands a year after graduation. By comparison, in engineering, computer science and services it is almost one in two.

HOP



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

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

14-9, 10.00h	Min Wu	22-9, 10.00h	Eveline Johanna Maria Vandewal
14-9, 13.00h	Kian Navid	22-9, 13.00h	Lidewij M.F.H. Neeter
14-9, 16.30h	Dr. Lars van Vliet, Inauguratie	22-9, 16.30h	Dr. Pieter Jelle Visser, Inauguratie
15-9, 10.00h	Kyra Theunissen, Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and Hasselt University	25-9, 13.00h	Casty Njoroge
15-9, 13.00h	Matteo Nardin	26-9, 10.00h	Anika Schumacher
15-9, 16.30h	Dr. Renaud B. Jolivet, Inauguratie	26-9, 13.00h	Samuel Yaw Lissah
18-9, 10.00h	Haang Jeung-Maarse	27-9, 13.00h	Yam Fung Hilaire Cheung, Double Doctoral Degree University of Birmingham and Maastricht University
18-9, 13.00h	Yuliya A. Veselova	27-9, 16.00h	Johanna Schmitz-Peiffer
18-9, 16.00h	Mieke C.E. Hooijschuur	28-9, 10.00h	Johan Martijn Nobel
19-9, 10.00h	Williane Fernanda Siqueira, Double doctoral degree Maastricht University and Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais	28-9, 13.00h	Marieke van der Gaag
19-9, 13.00h	Atia Mahmoud Ahmed Attaky	28-9, 16.00h	Cintia Denise Granja, Double Doctoral Degree University of Campinas and Maastricht University
20-9, 13.00h	Annick W.M. van Ool	29-9, 10.00h	Maite Machteld Schroor
20-9, 16.00h	Rocio Arreguin Campos	29-9, 13.00h	Babette J.A. Verkouteren
21-9, 10.00h	Samantha-Lisa Crans	29-9, 16.30h	Mr. drs. Joost Sillen, Inauguratie
21-9, 13.00h	Floris Kees Hendriks		
21-9, 16.00h	Clara Ducimetière		



Maastricht University

Interne vacatures

Voor uitgebreide informatie, raadpleeg de website www.maastrichtuniversity.nl. Klik op de link "Werken bij de UM" en vervolgens op "Vacatures". Schriftelijke sollicitaties o.v.v. vacaturnummer op brief en envelop (of elektronisch solliciteren via de vacaturewebsite) richten aan de afdeling HRM van de betreffende faculteit of beheersheid (Postbus 616, 6200 MD Maastricht).

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