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Medical interns are chronically dissatisfied

That says departing professor Koopmans. They complain about poor supervision, the excess overtime and high workload. There are solutions, although they are inconceivable in the medical world at the moment.

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“In my seven years as a UM official, I have never intimidated the press, I haven’t done so now either”

UM board president Rianne Letschert wants to have a talk with ScienceGuide, the national news medium with whom the university has a conflict.

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Teaching at the university of Kyiv

“When my fellow passenger said that I was brave to be travelling to Kyiv, I did think: Oh, my God.”

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Illustration: Simone Golob





editorial

No conflicting roles

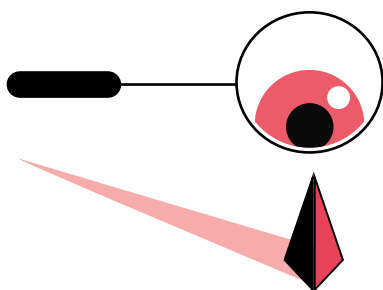
Riki Janssen

There are days when you feel like you don't get around to doing any work – writing articles, in our case. Last Monday was one of those days. One meeting followed another, with informal meetings and discussions in between. Before we knew it, it was 5.30 PM and we had to rush to make it to our annual *Observant* dinner. About thirty people attended, all of whom contribute to our newspaper in one way or another, from photographer and translator to editorial council member and from editor to illustrator. We bid farewell to Teun Dekker as a board member of the Observant Foundation, which manages our finances and oversees our staff. He left before the summer when he became chair of the University Council. We would've liked to keep him on the board a bit longer, but those two roles don't go together. Our editorial statutes are quite clear on the matter: your board membership ends when you become part of the

University Council or the Executive Board, for example. In practice, this also applies to deans and other faculty administrators. They are at the centre of power and therefore frequently feature in our reporting, whether positively or negatively. Apart from that, and more importantly, a member of our foundation board must be free to act, without having potentially conflicting roles. The mere fact that the Executive Board, after approval by the University Council, appoints the board members says enough about potential conflicts of interest. Anyway, that was Monday. Tuesday would bring more meetings, but there were articles to be written as well. That's why colleague WD and I got together before 9 AM for a brief update on an article we're writing together in the run-up to the general election on 22 November. The topic: are UM employees and students concerned about the discussion in

national politics on internationalisation and the increased use of English in higher education? What if Pieter Omtzigt's party – not exactly a fan of English-language teaching – comes to power? We've interviewed about ten people, both employees and students. We probably won't have time to speak to many more. Interestingly, not everyone we approach is willing to be interviewed. International staff and students in particular seem hesitant to discuss this topic. Why? We can't quite put our finger on it. That's why we're considering conducting a short survey in addition to the interviews. So, who knows – maybe one of us will reach out to you this week. If so, please consider participating. It will only take a minute of your time.

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, Simon Wirtz en HOP

Fuss about Splinter

Scrum masters, product owners, agile coaches and everyone who deals with marketing and communication: according to the anonymous columnist Splinter at *SAM*, the newspaper for HAN University of Applied Sciences, they have an absurd position, or a 'bullshit job'. The column caused a lot of controversy last week. Not (or hardly) because of its content, but more because of the reaction that Hans Valkenburg, head of the department of Marketing, Communication and Information at HAN, had placed *above* the column.

In it, he states that he "completely disagrees" with the column: you cannot "anonymously and unfoundedly" thrash the work of colleagues and "moreover, in an anonymous way, this column creates an unsafe working atmosphere for many at HAN." He advises the newspaper to "stop publishing anonymous columns".

The reactions to the action of the public relations official are harsh. "Using your power when something doesn't suit you. (...) Why don't you find a job in the business world," is one of the replies *underneath* the column. In daily newspaper *Trouw* it appears that HAN's Executive Board is not charmed by the interference. A spokesperson calls it a one-man crusade that is not supported by the board. "We do not want to restrain *SAM* in any way." The editor-in-chief hopes that this can be included in an editorial statute, because there is no such thing at the moment. Furthermore, the columnist is allowed to stay.

Expensive bike parking

Quickly parking your bicycle outside the rack? From 1 January 2024, this could have more costly consequences for bike owners. The city of Maastricht is raising the fee for getting your bike back from the depot (which is where incorrectly parked items are taken) from 25 to 50 euro.

A total of almost 2,200 wrongly parked bicycles were removed and taken to the depot this year (up to 23 October). How many of those belong to students? "Of course, you can't tell that just by looking at the bike, but it is especially the hotspots in the city centre where we feel that student bikes represent more than half of those removed," says Stefan Gybels, board and communication advisor for the city.

How much effect the higher 'fine' will actually have, is the question: the city reported that when the lower amount of 25 euro applied, only 54 per cent of the wrongly parked bicycles were reclaimed. So, why the raise then? "At the bicycle depot, we always ask why these people parked incorrectly," says Gybels. "The offenders regularly say that they are aware of the rules, but because of the low fine and the very slight chance of being caught, they just take the risk. Working from the principle that the offender pays and to send a clear message, we are raising the amount."



Heart-warming

Last weeks, visitors to the University Library in the city centre and in Randwyck tripped over large plastic containers with second-hand coats. Why were they there? A campaign has been taking place the past few weeks – 'Give a coat, warm a heart' – in which municipalities and organisations in Limburg collect winter coats for people living in poverty.

The University Library participated for the second time this year. "As was the case the first time that we participated, in 2018, those donating were mainly employees," says University Library employee Alice Maris-van der Hijden, who took the initiative to take part in the campaign. "If you come to live here in a student room, you would not normally have a second winter coat with you."

The campaign organiser, the 'Samen voor Maastricht foundation' reported last Monday evening, that a total of more than 35,000 winter coats had been donated in the whole of Limburg. How many of those were from the University Library, Maris-van der Hijden doesn't know exactly. "There were a few bags full. That is good, but it could certainly be better. If every faculty was to participate next year, we could make many more people happy."

Kaleido: a pause for reflection

Almost nine years after it was announced as the Maastricht international student club, Kaleido takes a pause for reflection. There was a plan for improving the current accommodation, building Z on Tapijn, before the summer, but it was scrapped. Due to the increased construction costs, a renovation became too expensive.

“What we had in mind was not financially feasible,” project leader (UM employee) Alan van de Wall explains. “In that proposal, the focus was more on organizing cultural events that required large investments.” So this was crossed out, with the result that an alternative had to be considered. “We have to revert to the core, actually through necessity yes, and that is actually a good thing. We now know better what we want to stand for: a living room for international students where everyone can walk in and out, where small-scale social activities such as a comedy night or a jam session can take place, where you can drink a cup of coffee, and where other student organisations, such as Alles is Drama and Tuna Femenina, can rehearse, perform or have meetings. Kaleido being the connector and organiser.” From the first press release, from February 2015, when UM signed a declaration of intent with the city of Maastricht, one would have gotten the idea of a student association for internationals where parties, and cultural and social events would be held. “Through the years, there have been all kinds of ideas and plans,” says Van de Wall, “going from big to even bigger, then to small and back to bigger again. But it was never the intention that Kaleido would become a club for parties and concerts. Maastricht already has other locations for such activities.” Kaleido was housed in the Timmerfabriek for a while. They were allowed to use the old hall in the Muziekgieterij. Former UM President Martin Paul, the driving spirit behind the foundation of the student club, applauded the “home base” for international students, as he called it at the time. But little was left of those initial intentions. Very soon after that, Kaleido had to leave the Muziekgieterij. They moved around the city and finally were allocated their

own place at Tapijn. The city then pulled out as financial partner; they were not about to invest in a building belonging to the university. Anyone passing by Tapijn building Z today, will see that renovations are unavoidable. It is a miserable sight. Van de Wall: “We are now working on a new proposal (with an emphasis on the living room idea, a place for con-

nection).” For Kaleido to “have some more options” – in the evening, maybe occasionally staying open into the late hours, a small event, with a drink at the bar – would not only require the correct permits from the city authorities, but also a ‘go’ from the Executive Board.

Wendy Degens



Photo: Observant

Kaleido is run by a four-headed student board (backed by a UM project group). It is an association with about fifty members; the living room is open to all students.

House of Representatives decreases interest on loans for ‘unlucky students’

A majority of the House of Representatives wants students who were under the loan system to start paying less interest on their study debts. How much less, and when this would take effect, is not yet clear. A proposal to bring the interest down to zero didn't make it.

It came as a nasty surprise to many former and current students that the interest on their loans increased from 0 to 0.46 percent this year, with plans for a further increase to 2.56 percent next year. As they hadn't received the basic student grant, they had already borrowed more money than previous generations of students and would now be facing an interest rise on top of that.

Several political parties were willing to meet the students belonging to the ‘bad luck generation’ in the middle. MP Pieter Omtzigt proposed to decrease their interest and pay for this by cutting back the tax advantage for expats. The amendment he submitted got the majority vote in the House last Friday.

It is not clear yet how exactly this will affect the students. According to Omtzigt, the gradual reduction of the expat scheme will save the treasury 3 million euros in 2025, rising to 194 million euros in 2029 and beyond. These savings will be used “in their entirety” to lower the interest paid by the bad luck generation. But the exact percentage and date of effect are not stated in the legislative amendment.

An ample majority of the House supported the motion by GroenLinks urging the government to take a step back and – in anticipation of a legislative amendment – freeze the interest for loan system students in 2024 to 0.46 percent. The amendment by D66 and SP to adjust the interest for all loan system students down to zero percent didn't make it. Dutch National Students' Association chair Demi Janssen is disappointed the zero percent proposal didn't make it. “Now it's important not to let students hanging and to give them financial security.” The freezing of the interest should in any case go ahead as planned, ISO thinks, also if this requires extra coverage.

HOP



The Stories We've Told

“

Marija rubs the sleep from her eyes and puts the coffee on. She smokes a cigarette in the dark and smiles tiredly when she remembers that Stjepan should be returning today from his journey to the Far East.

“Can you fix it real quick?” Louis asks his friend Pim while clumsily attempting to join two pieces of a toy car racetrack together.

I am reclining on a chaise longue of sorts. When I know I have to come here, I try to make sure that my clothes and shoes won't clash with the electric blue cover.

The decolonisers were suddenly marching up my alley, protesting racist policies and structural inequalities.

These seemingly random quotes have more in common than it might appear at first glance. Each opens a vignette in a new anthology put together by 19 researchers at FASoS. Titled *The Stories We Tell*, the collection grew out of our desire to communicate our research in an accessible way to non-specialists. We used the techniques of creative writing to bring our research settings and subjects to life, and we had great fun along the way.

The diversity that emerged was astounding. Some contributors took us back in time to historical settings such as 1950s Yugoslavia, post-war Britain, and colonial India. Reading each others' short pieces, we were transported into the heads of playing preschoolers, bored bureaucrats, crypto-criminals, Chinese pop fans, and nervous ethnographers wondering whether they'd got themselves in too deep. We endured dangerous bus rides, visited the dentist (and the toilet!) and wrote love letters to museums. We braided hair in Antwerp, watched shoes being made in Addis Ababa, and ate like queens and kings in the Italian Alps. To read the collection for yourself, head over to www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/news/fasos-anthology-stories-we-tell. But this month's column is not only a shameless ‘plug’ for our (open access) publication. By spreading the word, we hope to involve other interested members of the UM community in future endeavors. Our experience so far shows that there's a lot of unrealised creative potential around us; we're excited to see where it might emerge next.

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Elsje Fourie, assistant professor of Globalisation & Development Studies

series: students about their future

“I want to go somewhere far away from here, not dependent on anyone or anything”

Noémie Hautot (22) from France arrived in Maastricht three years ago with no particular expectations. She'll be graduating next year. What's next for her? “I want to go somewhere far away from here. No kids, no obligations. I just want to be independent.”



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Noémie Hautot, a master's student of Globalisation and Development Studies, is sitting on her leather couch in her room near Emmapplein with a mason jar of water in her hands and a smile on her face. The windows are wide open. Behind her, on an old record sleeve leaning against the wall, is a dancing man. It's Herman van Veen, a well-known Dutch singer. “I found it at the thrift store. I've never listened to the record, I don't even know who he is, but I just like the way it looks. I got almost everything in this room from the thrift store.”

Eight times

Just like her room, her life seems quite chaotic. During her child-

hood in France, she changed schools no less than eight times. “We moved around a lot, first in Normandy and later near Geneva.” As a teenager, she already had plans to go abroad. France never truly felt like home to her. “I found the part of Normandy I knew – the industrial area around Le Havre – ugly and the people in the Alps racist and homophobic. I didn't feel like I belonged.” The frequent moves made it difficult for her to form deep and lasting connections with others. She still struggles a bit with this. “On

the last day of school, I just told my friends, ‘Bye, I'll never see you again!’ We weren't close. It hurts, sure, but I was used to it.” After secondary school, she was finally free to leave France. But where to? “I looked at the map. I wanted to go as far away as possible. Vancouver seemed interesting and open-minded, so I moved to Canada on my own.” She worked various jobs there and generally had a good time. “I had to leave because of the pandemic. That's when I thought, maybe I should go to university. I was interested in

In this 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.

studying digitisation, which is a topic I care about. But no one in my family had gone to university. I had no concept of life as a student.” What she did know was that she didn't want to go back to the stifling world of France. And she wanted to enrol in an English-taught programme, to become fluent in two languages. She'd previously visited Amsterdam and liked it there, so that seemed like a good option. But the programme in Amsterdam didn't have a spot for her. The bachelor's programme of Digital Society in Maastricht did. Was it a problem for her to go to Maastricht instead? “I thought, ‘Oh, it must be similar to Amsterdam, everything in the Netherlands is probably the same’, she laughs. “I was 18 and naïve.”

No lifelong relationships

She quickly realised that Maastricht is a lot smaller than Amsterdam, but she didn't mind. By then, the country was in lockdown, and everyone was sheltering in place anyway. Studying turned out to be easier than expected. “From the first week, I found the programme very interesting. The literature, discussing it with my fellow students... But I didn't think about what I could do with my degree.” Now, more than three years later, pursuing her master's degree, she still has no concrete plans. But she's certain of one thing: “I want a meaningful job. I don't want to work in the private sector, but for an NGO or in the public sector, maybe somewhere in Latin America. For me, work is also about the exchange of cultural knowledge. Money isn't the most important thing.”

So what is? “Exploring, travelling. That's why I want to leave the Netherlands again – it's too much like France. I've seen enough of Western Europe.”

She wants to go to another country or continent, with no obligations, not dependent on anyone or anything. That means no relationship, either. “My parents are divorced. I don't really believe in lifelong relationships anyway.” She doesn't want children either. Partly, she says, “because the world is f*cked. Our history is a burden weighing on us. Do you really want to bring a child into this world?”

She's also not convinced she'd be any good at it. “There's always a 50 per cent chance of raising a child well and a 50 per cent chance of things going wrong. It's a gamble.” But, she admits, that's how she feels now. “I'm proud of where I am. And what I want right now is freedom. But later, when I'm 30 or something, who knows? Maybe everything will be different by then. I might meet someone who already has children – I'd be fine with that, too. We'll see.”

President wants a talk with ScienceGuide about financial dispute

“In my seven years as a UM official, I have never intimidated the press, I haven’t done so now either”



The Executive Board with Rianne Letschert in the middle during a U-council meeting Photo: Joey Roberts

During the recent University Council meeting, President Rianne Letschert emphasised that the accusations made by *ScienceGuide* that she was trying to limit the freedom of the press, is utterly untrue. She also said that she wants to discuss the matter with the national news medium regarding the unintended ‘contribution’ payment by UM of 50 thousand euro. “We want a reasonable solution.”

Letschert calls it “worrisome” that she is being accused of intimidating the media. “In my seven years as a UM official, I have never intimidated the press, I haven’t done so now

either.” The reason for the conflict between Maastricht University and *ScienceGuide* (SG) is an article published by the medium about the legal action taken by a professor against UM. He was (and still is) on suspension due to a ‘personal investigation’ into his behaviour and performance. He had, among others, unjustly accused a colleague professor of unacceptable behaviour.

According to the university, SG had not made it sufficiently clear in its article that the accusations were unfounded. “Something had to be put right here quickly. The incorrect position taken in the article was unnecessarily damaging to one of our employees”, said the spokesperson for UM earlier in *Observant*.

Wednesday afternoon 25 October, Letschert said this about it to the council: “When members of staff are being damaged, we

“When members of staff are being damaged, we will immediately take action”

will immediately take action. Other media often pick up on such articles very quickly and the consequences for the person involved are unimaginable. This is not about our image as an institute, it’s about the individual. And so we threatened to apply for a temporary injunction if the text was not adapted.”

As far as the financial dispute is concerned: UM had an agreement with SG as a ‘partner’ (just like a few other universities and universities of applied sciences) until 2021. For this, they paid an annual amount of 25 thousand euro. A partnership entails that agreements are made about articles on topics that are important for Maastricht, such as internationalisation. Letschert to the University Council: “When the contract ended in 2021, we, the Executive Board, decided to quit being a partner. We do not want to provide any financial contribution towards education

media, except *Observant*.” Due to a “mistake”, UM still paid invoices received after 2021, the spokesperson for UM explained earlier to *Observant*.

The university informed SG that they wanted the money (50 thousand euro) returned, upon which the editor-in-chief Frans van Heest said that this could mean the end of the news website. He told *Observant* that the financial dispute is related to the journalistic dispute. UM doesn’t agree with that. The president now wants to have a talk with SG, she said to the University Council. This will not be about renewing the contract; what she does want, is a “reasonable solution”. The University Council appreciates that the Executive Board put this point on the agenda themselves. A number of members wondered, however, if it would not have been better to first negotiate with SG about the text. And only after that, if there was no prospect of a compromise, to threaten with legal steps. When asked whether immediately threatening to take legal steps was necessary, the spokesperson said to *Observant*: “Maybe that could have been done differently”.

interview

Prof. Wim Groot: Teaching in Kyiv for a week

“The salary of Ukrainian teachers is about 120 euros per month, they do not make ends meet at all”



Normally, it is a 2.5-hour flight, but this time the journey from the Netherlands to Kyiv took nineteen hours. The war in Ukraine is (for the moment) no longer front-page news, since fierce fighting broke out between Hamas and Israel. But that did not discourage Wim Groot (professor of health economics and professor of evidence-based education) from recently spending a week at the university of Kyiv to teach.

Text Riki Janssen **Photos** Shutterstock/archive Wim Groot

Not too long ago, Wim Groot spouted his displeasure in an *Observant* column about his alma mater, the University of Amsterdam, to which he occasionally donates money. On 1 September 2023, UvA raised its tuition fees drastically for Ukrainian refugee students, unlike to Maastricht University, for example. First-year students no longer pay the ‘normal’ tuition fee of 2,314 euro, but the institute lecture fees, which can run up to fifteen thousand euro. And that in a time, Groot argued, when Ukrainian scientists are becoming more and more isolated due to the Russian

invasion – foreign researchers are hesitant to travel to them – and it is also difficult for them to do their research. Not just because of the power cuts or air-raid alarms, but also because of the psychological pressure that comes with living with war. He angrily told his readers: “I never again want to donate to this university that has no principles and is purely out to make money.” But also: “I will be travelling to Kyiv to give a few lectures next month.”

“Oh, my God”

No, he wasn’t afraid when he took the train to Ukraine in Poland. “But

when my fellow passenger said that I was brave to be travelling to Kyiv, I did think: Oh, my God.” He did not feel unsafe. “The city is well-defended, the threat is much greater in Kharkiv or Odessa.” The war is not very visible in the capital, he explains. Except for Maidan square, where tanks and other equipment, seized from the Russians, are on display. “And of course, the wall with photographs of those who have fallen.” Other than that, worries about the upcoming winter are heard in every conversation: will there be no electricity available, like last year, what about Internet, will

it continue to exist, and what about heating? “What struck me in these talks was the faith in the army. There is doubt in the West whether the Ukrainians will manage to defeat the Russians. Will there be a breakthrough? Will the offensive be successful? When I broached this, the people I was talking with were steadfast and convinced: we are going to win, losing is not an option, because then the whole country will become one big Bucha.”

Sixteen killed at the front

During the opening of the academic year of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, mid-October, time was taken to remember the sixteen students and staff members who died. Killed at the front. Groot realises that even ‘ordinary’ university life is no longer as before. The number of students who can come to a lecture is limited (just as many as there are places in the air-raid shelter), teaching is partly online because a number of lecturers have fled abroad, and foreign students (a source of income) are entirely absent. Then there is the economy, which has had to endure tremendous blows in 2022 and the government had to make cuts on everything, except on defence, where expenses have risen considerably. “Lecturers’ salaries have dropped significantly. At the moment, it is about 120 euro, before the war it wasn’t a fortune either, but they received between 500 and 600 euro. An average lunch in a pub or restaurant costs about fifteen euro, so you know that they can’t make ends meet. For that reason, people often have a second or even third job, just to stay alive. All of this has consequences for the quality of education. It was already lower than ours, but now you see the level dropping even more.”

Making a contribution

Groot feels that it is therefore even more important for foreign scientists to make their contribution, for example by giving guest lectures and collaborating in the field of research. He himself went to Ukraine for the first time twenty years ago, to set up a master’s of Health Care Management. “I did that together with, among others, my Maastricht colleagues Henk van Berkel and Tom Kuipers. We adapted Maastricht education

material to the local situation. The money came from the George Soros Foundation, which wanted to bring universities in Western and Eastern Europe in contact with each other.” In 2004, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Kyiv and since then a number of Ukrainians have either completed a PhD or are about to do so under his supervision; he also carries out research with colleagues from Ternopil and Kharkiv, and he uses a subsidy from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (Medical Education Development Project: money for the reforming of medical education and research in Ukraine) to update the module of Health Economics of the – by now twenty-year-old – master’s curriculum. “I recorded a number of video lectures, there are online Q&A sessions, but I wanted to give the first lecture at the beginning of the new academic year in person.” He also organised a study trip for medical trainers to Maastricht last summer, within the framework of reforming medical education.

European Union

As far as the joint research into things such as the communication skills of medical students is concerned, progress is slow, says Groot. “They have too many other things on their minds.” But his colleagues appreciate the contact, “it gives them the feeling of being ‘regular’ academics and that life still goes on. They would be helped tremendously if we shared our knowledge about education and research. Not just in my field, but in all disciplines. Now, but especially when the war is over and they want to fulfil their ambition to join the European Union. The level of education will have to rise, and our knowledge of organisational matters will also be useful. Aside from that, equipment is needed, such as all the items that we no longer need: from desk chairs to medical appliances to education material. Everything they have is old and worn.”

Handful

He is not the only person from UM who has connections with Ukraine, but as far as he knows, there are only a handful of people. Anyone who is not put off by this long journey and who accepts the danger (“there is some risk, it is not really big, but you can’t rule it out”), may contact Wim Groot.



Professor Richard Koopmans' farewell speech

Why medical interns are chronically dissatisfied



Demotivated medical interns, and a dire shortage of GPs and specialists outside the Randstad. There is a lot awry with the training to become a medical specialist, says departing professor Richard Koopmans. "But the solutions are unmentionable."

Text Maurice Timmermans

Photo archive Richard Koopmans **Illustratie** Simone Golob

"It is actually inconceivable that we are allowing this to happen," says Richard Koopmans, when he takes stock at the end of the interview. "A gloomy story, isn't it? I sometimes think: did I myself do enough?" Koopmans was professor of General Internal Medicine as well as a trainer in the Southern Netherlands region since 2005, and so he was responsible for the content of the study programme to become a medical specialist and for the supervising of these medical interns.

He recently said farewell to UM with a speech about the flaws in the programme, and the problems that stem from them. Medical interns are chronically dissatisfied, says Koopmans. It is there in every evaluation report, complaints about poor supervision, the excess overtime, high workload and limited freedom to organise their own time. "Burnouts, demotivation, and cynicism have become more prevalent and for about five years now, I have noticed that there are always a few doctors who drop out halfway through the programme. Annual national surveys show that a quarter of all medical interns – two thirds of whom are female – consider stopping."

Plaything

Medical interns – or trainee medical specialists – learn and work at the same time, and after six years, they may call themselves medical specialists, such as neurologists, surgeons, or lung specialists. This training takes place at eighty hospitals in the Netherlands, where medical interns participate in the daily routine and sometimes do training or work placements. University hospitals have more trainees than regional hospitals; MUMC has 350. On a national level, there are a total of ten thousand.

They are being trained, but in actual fact, they keep the place running during the evening, in the weekend

and during the night. They take care of patients, prescribe medication, and deal with complications. These shifts, however, eat into so much of their time that learning has to take a back seat. Koopmans: "The operational management in the hospital always takes precedence. And if two of them drop out somewhere, the others have to make up for it. They feel like they are playthings in operational management and complain about too little autonomy. Rightfully so."

National Ombudsman

Hospitals cannot survive without

the young doctors, also in financial terms: the government pays a hospital 144 thousand euro for every medical intern. "That by no means all goes into training; it is used to plug holes in the budget. So not only are medical interns a cheap source of labour, they also bring along a bag of money. I once tried to move doctors from one hospital to another, for diversity reasons, but the board of governors immediately blocked it."

So, is the quality of these studies not evaluated? Yes, it certainly is, there are audits and official visits, but they are carried out by representa-

tives from the medical profession. It is a case of the fox guarding the chickens. The National Ombudsman put his finger on the pitfalls in 2021, says Koopmans. "One of them is that medical interns are hesitant when it comes to being critical, because they are dependent on the presiding specialists and managers for a job later on."

Alkmaar

Koopmans sees two solutions, although they are inconceivable in the medical world at the moment. The first is to distribute medical interns differently over the hospi-

tals. "At the moment, one hospital receives more medical interns than the other, as a result of historical developments. That has to change. Let a committee of young doctors, hospital personnel and independent third parties assign medical interns based on the quality of the training programme in that hospital, on the amount of autonomy in the work and on overtime. That way, you would create an incentive for hospitals to meet the medical interns some of the way."

The second inconceivable solution has to do with the length of the training, which, including the initial study programme, easily takes fifteen years. "After that, you are in your mid-thirties, you have children, and are no longer mobile. A job in Alkmaar, which is initially often for just a few days a week, is not very attractive if you live in Maastricht."

That is why Koopmans suggests shortening the training to become a specialist to three years and to offer as many medical interns as possible a job at that time in the same hospital. "In that way, you would keep your specialists for the region and prevent the shortage of specialists and GPs rising even further."

Superspecialists

Halving the training has another advantage. "In the first three years, they mainly train in general knowledge and skills within the specialism. In the second half, it becomes even more specialistic. But all reports show that the Netherlands is not looking for even more superspecialists, but primarily for doctors who can treat frequently occurring disorders and carry out common operations."

But with a shortened training, hospitals will receive less money per medical intern. "And that is why this plan is also inconceivable for the time being. At the same time, the problems will continue to be subject of discussion."



reportage



Maastricht Gaels Photo: Joey Roberts

“It is part of my identity”

“Ladies, hurry up, run a lap. Actually, you should run one extra,” trainer Tony Bass grins at a group of latecomers. The rest is already warming up with a group of men.

Gaelic Football

Gaelic Games (or in Irish: *na cluichí Gaelacha*) is a collective name for various sports that originate in Ireland. Hurling (Camogie, for women) and football are the two flavours. Both sports cannot easily be described. Hurling is most similar to hockey due to the use of wooden sticks and a ball. However, this ball doesn't just roll over the ground, but flies through the air and is even allowed to be caught and balanced on the stick. Football, on the other hand, is a mix of handball, basketball and football, a player may catch the ball and hold on to it, bounce it, 'solo it' (see box), pass it, or kick it. Also, where a game of hurling is more suitable for large flat fields, football can easily be played on a football or rugby pitch. Football is therefore popular across Ireland. There are two official pitches in

Europe: in Rennes and in Maastricht. Student sports association Maastricht Gaels therefore offers both sports, but as there is a football competition planned, that is what the training session is for today.

Pounding

It is a large group, about forty people, the female portion being practically as large as the male. The sport is really not for wimps. The language spoken is English, with the occasional Irish accent. As far as nationalities go, there is a little of everything: Australians, Asians, Germans, and even someone who is (half) Dutch: Damian Hopley has an English father and a Dutch mother and he himself was born and raised in The Hague. A year ago, he moved to Maastricht for his studies. He discovered Gaelic Games at the Inkom. After the first training, he was sold: “It is an interesting game and I immediately felt welcome. Everyone can join in, whether you are experienced or not. Also, the experienced players like to help the beginners.”

In the meantime, there is a lot of pounding going on among the men. It appears to be part of the game. Does that never lead to arguments? “No”, Hopley answers. “When the game is over, you shake each other's hand and drink a beer together.”

Identity

When the women are asked who is their most experienced player, they shout simultaneously: “Kira.” Blushing a little, she steps forward. Kira McDonnell was born and raised in Belfast. She learned about Gaelic football from a very young age. “For me, it is part of my identity. My whole family plays it.” But that is not the case for all

Irish people. Even within Belfast, there is a division. “I am from the west of the city, where the sport is very popular, but there are people here from the east who have never played it,” she says. That is because, trainer Tony Bass adds later on, the east side of the city is predominantly protestant and there they want nothing to do with something that is so strongly connected to the Catholic (and Republic) people. McDonnell still plays for her team in Belfast, but the season has just ended there. That was in her favour; it is only starting here and now that she is in Maastricht for her studies, she can play this season. Does the low level of some players not bother her a little? “I used to play competitively, but that spoilt the fun. For me, team spirit is the most important and I love teaching new people. I actually appreciate it enormously that people are interested in Irish culture.”

Maastricht Gaels

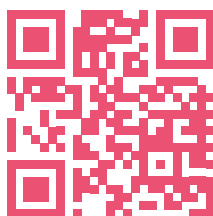
The idea originated, completely in style, in an Irish pub in Maastricht. What once started as a civilian club with a number of people from Ireland, including Tony Bass, has since then grown to be a student sports association. Initially, only Gaelic football was played, but hurling was added later on. While Bass used to be quite competitive, he says, these days he finds the social aspect more important. He has seen friendships come about and love bloom. “There might likely be even two engagements soon,” he says with a wink.

Lotte van de Loo

This is a series in which Observant shines a light on the not so very well-known student sports associations

colofon

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Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

2-11, 10.00h Andrea Roberto Calore
2-11, 13.00h Jessica J.L. Berkvens
2-11, 16.00h Pongtong Puranitee
3-11, 13.00h Marien Rolin Krouwel
3-11, 16.30h Dr. Andrea Broderick inauguratie
6-11, 13.00h Naveen Kumar Balakrishnan
7-11, 10.00h Nikita Alana van de Burgt
8-11, 10.00h Pragati Bhaskar Hebbar
8-11, 13.00h Tian Lu
9-11, 16.00h Anna Eliza Willems
10-11, 10.00h Leonardo Pimpini
10-11, 13.00h Johannes Arnoldus Wegdam
10-11, 16.00h Prof. dr. Anne de Vries afscheidscollege
13-11, 13.00h Amée Maret Buziau
13-11, 16.00h Maikel Verduin

14-11, 10.00h Emma N.M.M. Boersma- von Scheibler
14-11, 13.00h Sofia de la Puente Secades Double Doctoral degree Maastricht University – RWTH Aachen University
14-11, 16.00h Shahzad Hafeez
15-11, 10.00h Marten Laudi
15-11, 13.00h Chandni Khemai
15-11, 16.00h Femke Verhees
16-11, 10.00h Haiyang Yu
16-11, 13.00h Merel Rosemarie Aberle
16-11, 16.00h Dominique V.M. Verhaert Joint degree Universiteit Maastricht – Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen
17-11, 10.00h Dean Paes Double Doctoral

Degree Maastricht University – Hasselt University/tUL
17-11, 13.00h Froukje Vanweert
17-11, 16.30h Dr. Tim Huijts inauguratie
20-11, 10.00h Kimberly Milukia Gréaux
21-11, 10.00h Ghalib Ibrahim Mobaraki
21-11, 16.00h Esther A.B. Beckers
22-11, 10.00h Vu Uyen Chau Nguyen Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University – University della Svizzera Italiana
22-11, 13.00h Lisanne Vranken
22-11, 16.00h Manlio Caldara
23-11, 10.00h Daan van Kruining
23-11, 13.00h Tomasz Dolny
23-11, 16.00h Vincent R.A. Moermans

24-11, 10.00h Bram M.M. Kremers
24-11, 13.00h Alice Giannini Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University – University of Florence
24-11, 16.30h Dr. Rory R. Koenen inauguratie
27-11, 10.00h Xu Liu
27-11, 13.00h Naomi Annie van Westen-Lagerweij
28-11, 16.00h Zeinab Mohamed Mamdouh Abdelkareem Gomaa
28-11, 10.00h Sriganesh Kamath
28-11, 13.00h Wendela M.H. Broers
30-11, 16.00h Madhura Ramchandra Rao
30-11, 10.00h Hidde Pieter van Steenwijk
30-11, 13.00h Hannah Bernhard
30-11, 16.00h Christine Kawa