

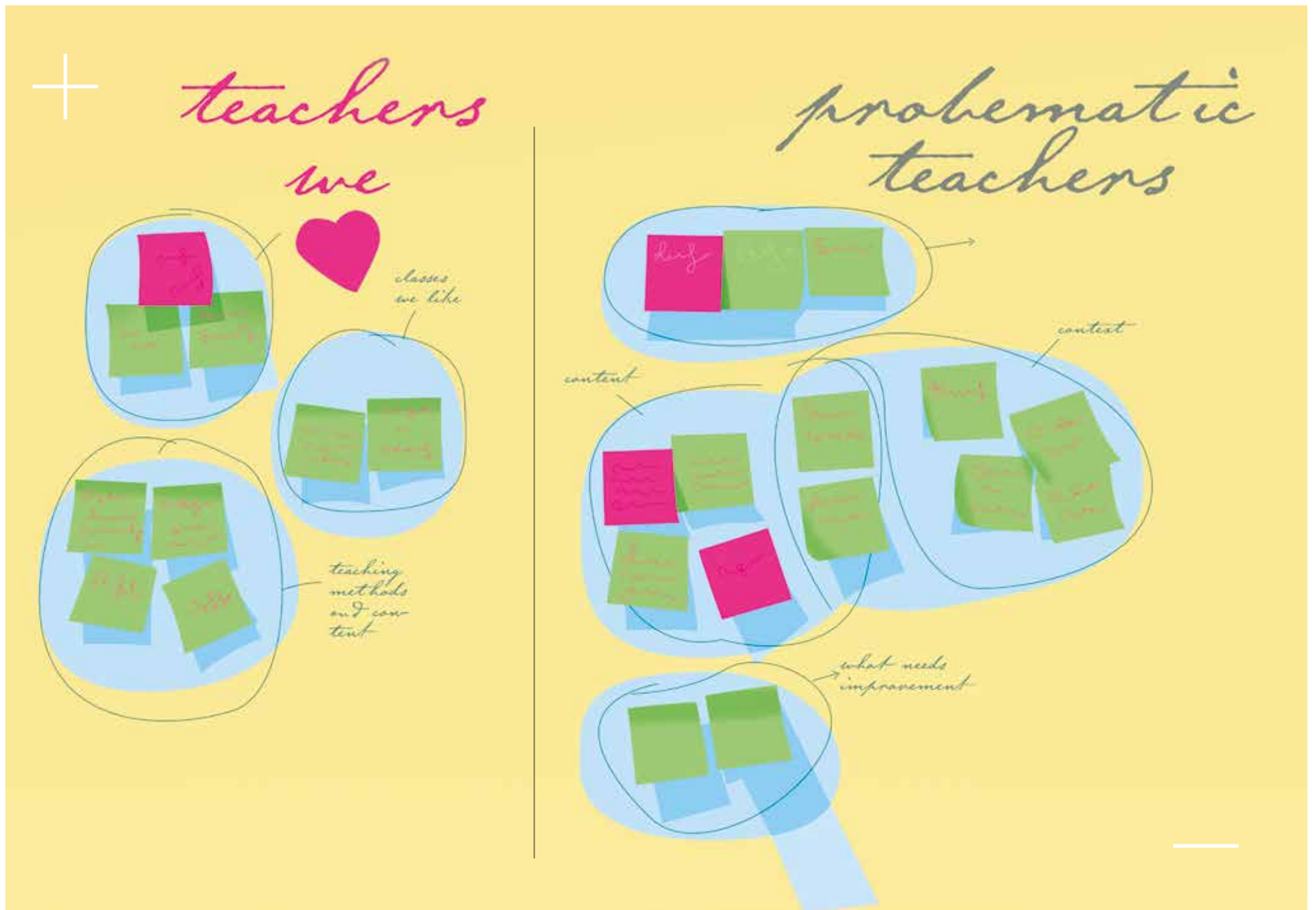
# observant

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INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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## Report on 'more diverse curriculum' at Arts and Culture leads to commotion among staff



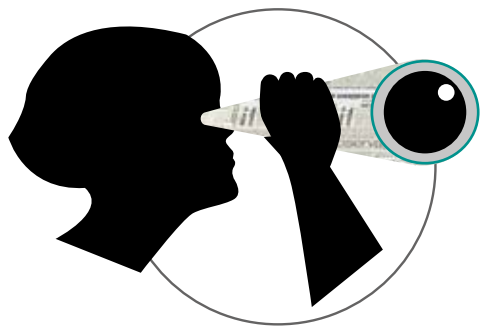
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Riki Janssen

editorial

## Leave it to the professionals

Sometimes we have steam coming out of our ears. This week, for example, one of my colleagues was fuming at the desk. “A low point in my career”, my colleague said indignantly. What had happened? An article that had been sent to the interviewee to be checked for accuracy came back covered in red. For those unfamiliar with Word’s Track Changes feature, there were more (red) changes than there was original (black) text. I’ve written about it before: some employees and students believe they are better journalists/writers and feel free to edit or delete entire sentences or paragraphs as they see fit. This is quite different from correcting any factual errors. In this case, the article contained one inaccuracy (my colleague had misunderstood something) and there was one other minor point.

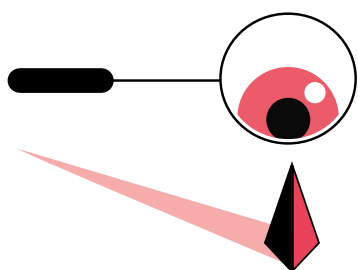
Not too long ago, I read a UM document about interpersonal behaviour – I don’t remember which one – that said we should respect each other’s professional abilities. It’s part of normal interaction among colleagues. Apparently, this can be quite a challenge for some.

Another colleague encountered a rather grumpy person this week. They demanded to know why *Observant* was interested in covering the heated discussion surrounding diversity and inclusive teaching at the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences. Journalists, this person claimed, are only out to pit people against each other, to meddle in things that are already done and dusted and therefore old news. Unfortunately, such reactions are also par for the course in journalism. There’s often an underlying agenda, but it

never gets any easier when your professionalism and, in this case, your integrity are questioned.

Fortunately, not everyone thinks this way. An assistant professor has asked us to develop a workshop for his students on writing opinion pieces. He himself knows a lot about international economics, but when it comes to writing a good opinion piece, “I just wing it”, he chuckles. That’s why he prefers to leave it to the professionals.

*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, Maurice Timmermans, Dennis Vaendel

### Sparkling horizon

*Als het vonkt verspringt de horizon.* For a short time now, this line of poetry – in white neon letters – has adorned the wall of the atrium at the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE) on the Duboisdomein in Randwyck. Last week, UM Vice President Nick Bos and member of the Limburg Provincial Executive Elianne Demollin-Schneiders (responsible for Education and Labour Market) unveiled the work of art during a meeting in honour of the completion of the ‘Versterking Natuurwetenschappen’ (Enhancing Natural Science) project. UM and the Province of Limburg started this in 2010. The objective was to increase research and education in natural sciences. It resulted (partly) in the founding of FSE and the presence of students and researchers at the four Brightlands campuses.



The line of poetry and the work of art are by Maastricht artist Maarten van den Berg. What he means by the sentence? That remains unclear, because “you shouldn’t prattle on about art, you should look at it,” he states, laughing. “Besides, I want to leave it open for interpretation. People pass by it on their way to the laboratories and ETpathfinder. They should feel that its meaning is about what they are currently doing.” During the unveiling, some of those present made a number of suggestions. Does the ‘sparkling’ refer to the scientists’ eyes when they are filled with passion talking about their research? And that horizon, of course that is about the event horizon of a black hole. Or maybe about the undulating landscape of South Limburg?



### 11<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup>

Singing and dancing through the city or sitting in a lecture hall? Maastricht University has caused a dilemma for its future students. Every year, revellers open the Carnival season on 11 November (the 11<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup>). This year, Maastricht University has decided to organise the ‘Master Open Day’ on that date.

Coincidence? “We did think about it, but we chose that day anyway,” says events co-ordinator Michiel Piefer. Every year, he puts a number of dates before the faculties, which subsequently choose one. “I advised them not to opt for 11 November, because it will affect the number of visitors. Some may prefer to take part in the Carnival festivities. I am an ‘avid reveller’ myself, so this was not my preference.” However, the damage appears to be limited so far. “We even have 14 per cent more registrations than last year.”

And what about the people who have no affinity with Carnival or simply don’t know about it? They might get the shock of their lives if they suddenly find themselves on the street or in the train surrounded by the revelry. Piefer can imagine that this could be “shocking”. “But on the other hand, you immediately become acquainted with part of the Maastricht culture.” Visitors to the open day need not fear: the Carnival costumes of UM employees will remain in their wardrobes for the time being.

### Overcoming fear

Last Saturday, third-year law student Emmy Ackermans (24) won the first edition of the Regional Song Contest. In the Utrecht city theater, thirteen regional acts climbed the stage in front of six hundred spectators. She won with the song ‘t Letste Rundje, a song about the last round in the café before closing time.

For Ackermans, the first prize means more than just winning a contest. It is also a self-conquest. She started singing six years ago to fight her fear of failure. That had previously reared its head during swimming competitions, where she could become paralyzed at the *moment suprême*.

“Singing was something I really enjoyed, but even that I didn’t

dare do in front of a large audience. I only sang in family circles and small pubs. Now, there were six hundred people in the hall, and many more in front of the TV. Very exciting, but it went really well. I could even enjoy it.”

She hopes to combine music with studies. “I don’t know yet what I will do next year, probably a master’s degree in criminal law.”



# More external members for UM Sports

*More than a year after UM Sports decided that people who do not have a direct connection with Maastricht University could become members, the number of 'external' members stands at 180. That is an increase of sixty compared to 2022.*

UM Sports now has 5,900 members, three hundred more than in 2022. "This means that we are back to the level of before the Covid pandemic," says Jorg de Vette, head of UM Sports. The increase in the number of external members "has to do with the advertising that we

did," he thinks. In January, for example, there was an open day for citizens from the surrounding neighbourhoods, which attracted about two hundred people. De Vette feels that a lot can still be won: UM Sports hopes to raise the total number of members to seven thousand, of whom a maximum of one seventh (i.e. a thousand members) do not need to have a connection with the university.

According to De Vette, this will prevent the external members from getting in the way of students and employees, UM Sports' actual target group. "If an evaluation proves that this is the case, we will reconsider our policy. But at the moment, this is not an issue at all, with only 3 per cent of our members being from outside the university."

De Vette gives three reasons for admitting the non-UM-related members. One of them is that UM Sports "does not want to be a university bubble in Randwyck. We also want to welcome people from the neighbourhood and others who may work in this area".

In addition, there is a financial reason. Students and employees exercise at a reduction, while external members pay a commercial rate: 51.50 euro per month for an all-in annual membership, 38 euro per month for an annual subscription for the gym, and 23 euro per month for sports lessons and the use of the climbing wall and squash courts.

That helps to reduce the structural deficit of

UM Sports' budget. Next year's budget states that "in the long run" the goal is to achieve "result neutral operations". De Vette is under no illusion, however, that this can be met entirely from UM Sports' own revenues. "Not one university sports centre in the Netherlands is completely self-supporting," he explains. "We feel it is important that students exercise, so we let them do sports at a lower, subsidised rate. So, something will always have to be added." This year, the university is contributing just over 1.3 million euros, out of a total UM Sports budget of about 2.6 million euros.

UM Sports decided to allow external members to join in the hope that they would exercise during the day, when the facilities are often only partly in use. To promote this, off-peak hours were introduced. At least 65 people make use of this at the moment, "about 1 per cent of our total membership".

To increase daytime use, the available options will also be expanded. "We will offer team outings inside and outside the university, we also want to work more with the businesses around us, and promote lessons for secondary schools." Advertising material that will bring the new programme to people's attention should be ready no later than the end of this year.

Peter Doorakkers



## Spreek je Nederlands?

“

During my early months in the Netherlands, I confidently strolled into supermarkets, greeting people with a cheerful "oi, oi!", channeling my inner British hooligan. I interpreted the mildly amused looks from my cashier as a sort of impressed recognition of my Dutch skills. It took about three months until my Dutch friend kindly corrected me, explaining that the correct phrase is "hoi hoi", meant for saying goodbye, and that it is unique to the Limburg region. In the past few months, the debate on whether international students should be required to learn Dutch has resurfaced, sparked by discussions in Dutch politics about reducing the number of international students and English-taught programs. One recurring concern expressed is that a significant number of international students are not learning Dutch during their studies. Which is supposedly hindering their full participation in Dutch society and is one of the reasons why many international students choose to leave immediately after completing their studies.

Thinking about my own less-than-successful attempts at learning Dutch, I can certainly relate to these difficulties. Two years after living in Maastricht and I still respond to the question "spreek je Nederlands?" with "niet zo goed". However, I don't think it's just a matter of laziness on the part of learners. I've put a considerable amount of time and effort into my language studies, consistently using Duolingo, attending a Dutch course, and faithfully tuning in to *De Avondshow met Arjen Lubach*. While my Dutch comprehension has improved a lot, my ability to speak the language is still limited to the very specific yet useless Duolingo phrases like "de schildpad eet een appel" (the turtle eats an apple).

The problem is the lack of speaking practice, most people quickly switch to English upon hearing my struggling attempts. Honestly, enrolling in another Dutch class alongside my regular university schedule, which costs money and demands more time in a classroom, isn't something I would seek out. However, initiatives like Dutch language cafes, buddy programs, and community service projects, where you volunteer alongside local Dutch speakers, are more exciting opportunities to practice Dutch in real-life situations. Unfortunately, these options are rarely promoted or rewarded by the university. Why not? To encourage more international students to learn Dutch, I believe that engaging in real-life situations with native speakers, would be much more interesting and effective than memorizing vocabulary in a classroom.

”

Line-Marie Eichhorst, student University College Maastricht



Photo: Loraine Bodewes

# City of Maastricht to help foreign students with their energy costs

The city of Maastricht is going to offer foreign students who do not receive compensation for their energy costs through DUO financial help. The bench of the Mayor and Aldermen intends to put together a "safety net regulation" for them in December. From January 2024, foreign students can then apply for compensation. The Maastricht regulation "will be based on the DUO regulation," the city writes in a press release.

Under the DUO regulation, students who (as per 1 October) had a living-away-from-home

grant and an additional grant, receive a 400-euro allowance for energy bills over 2023. Students who used to have an additional grant and had a loan with DUO in October, are also eligible. They do not need to apply for this: anyone who is eligible, will automatically receive the amount in the beginning of 2024. How many foreign will be eligible for the city's regulation and what its costs will be, is still unclear: it depends on the criteria that will be applied, says a spokesperson. She expects there to be "little difference" between

the Maastricht arrangement and DUO's. National Student Union LSVb maintains its earlier criticism that it is unfair that students receive less support than other people with low incomes. It is "of course good that the city of Maastricht is undertaking action for foreign students," says a spokesperson, who adds that Maastricht is the only Dutch municipality to have announced such an arrangement.

Peter Doorakkers



## societal impact

# “I quite like activist science”

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 citizens' initiative draft law of the Faculty of Law in partnership with the Restorative Justice Netherlands Foundation on electronic detention as an alternative to short prison sentences.



Jacques Claessen Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

“I quite like activist science”, says Jacques Claessen, endowed professor of Restorative Justice and associate professor of Criminal Law. “You might think ‘Oh dear, activist’, but what I mean is science in service to society – using research to improve practice.” Claessen's chair was endowed by Restorative Justice Netherlands, a foundation he works closely with. Just last month, they submitted what is known as a citizens' initiative draft law together. But first a few words about restorative justice. This is an approach to justice that focuses on addressing the harm caused by a crime in terms of not just pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage,

but also specifically moral and social harm. Ideally, restoration is accomplished by letting the victim, the offender and the community engage in dialogue and collaboratively determine the way the crime is dealt with.

## Ankle tag

What UM and the Restorative Justice Netherlands Foundation aim to achieve is that judges don't have to impose short prison sentences (up to six months) for ‘less severe’ crimes, but can instead opt for electronic detention, commonly with an ankle tag, “as an independent sentencing option”, explains Claessen. This is already common practice in many other European countries, making the Netherlands the odd one out. Why is that? “There's a bit of history there. Ten years ago, when Fred Teeven (VVD) was the under-

secretary of Justice and Security, the media painted electronic detention as ‘lounging in front of the TV with a beer’. The proposal was quickly shot down. But we're not advocating for a bare-bones approach, but a more comprehensive version of electronic detention. People with ankle tags go to work or school, and if they don't have a proper way to spend the day, arrangements are made for them. In certain cases, it's possible to combine electronic detention with community service. So to those who say it's not a form of punishment, I say: actually, your freedom is significantly restricted and you are monitored 24/7. You can't just go to the shops, or to a football game with your friends, or to the pub. If you break the rules, you end up in prison anyway. But what is much more important to us is that electronic detention

is a more effective way to prevent offenders from reoffending.”

## Retribution

“All crime is serious”, notes Claessen, but this concerns less severe offences, which make up 85 per cent of all crimes. “Should you always say, ‘We want retribution, let's lock up the offender’ – a sentiment that tends to do well in politics and the media – or should you be more rational about it? You must understand that retribution comes at a price. Reoffending rates after prison sentences are very high. Incarcerated people lose their jobs, their homes or their partners. They may end up in debt and come into contact with hardened criminals.” These are all factors that may push people further into crime, Claessen points out. “And then there's the literal cost – €324 per day per regular prison cell.” It's not true that victims of these types of crimes just want retribution, says Claessen. “Most of all, they want to make sure it doesn't happen again.”

## A red light

So what types of crimes are we talking about exactly? What offences carry a maximum sentence of six months? “Think of property crimes such as certain kinds of theft, violent crimes like escalated bar fights or neighbour disputes, and specific road traffic offences such as causing an accident resulting in death or serious injury. And I don't mean cocaine-fuelled drivers without licences speeding through town centres, but people who inadvertently run a red light and cause a fatal accident. That's what we're trying to tell politicians: Distinguish between the tip of the iceberg – the part you mean when you're talking about being tough on crime – and the larger part that consists of less severe crimes.”

The citizens' initiative is a means to get the issue of electronic detention on the agenda of the Dutch House of Representatives and the cabinet. This is the second time UM and the foundation have submitted such an initiative together. “The first one dates back to 2018, when we advocated for a legal framework for restorative justice practices, like mediation in criminal cases.” He knows all too well that the lobbying process is a long haul. “Our 2018 initiative has only just resulted in concrete action.”

## Pick up the phone

And there's another thing the researcher has accomplished: he is now in the contact list of the current demissionary Minister for Legal Protection, Franc Weerwind. “We met with him for our citizens' initiative, and he realised that the gap between politics and the scientific world is too large. Research is conducted and commissioned by the WODC, the knowledge centre of the Ministry of Justice and Security, but it's a lot easier for politicians to just be able to pick up the phone and call us when they have a question.”



# 'Genocide posters' and an occupation: Maastricht feelings also run high over Gaza war

A group of students and people from outside UM occupied University College Maastricht last week. They called for attention to the fate of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and want Maastricht University to condemn the Israeli actions there. UM is not going to do that, President Rianne Letschert had already said earlier.

Oriental music sounds in the hall of University College Maastricht, where some thirty youngsters – students as well as others – have gathered around midday on November 1. A press release issued earlier that morning referred to it as a sit-in, a banner on the facade calls it an occupation. In the student common room, there are a Palestinian flag and pro-Palestine posters, while lectures are held and a film is shown in the lecture room of the building on Zwingelput.

The organisers of the occupation – a group that calls itself UM Students for Palestine – want to draw attention to the war in the Gaza Strip and what it considers as “a passive attitude and censorship” on the side of UM about “the genocide in Gaza”.

In an e-mail to the faculty deans and the university board a week before, they had already explained their demands: UM should show solidarity with the Palestinians, use its European connections to lobby in favour of a ceasefire, condemn the Israeli actions, and sever all ties with Israeli organisations.

In short, the university should speak out, say two members of the group. They are not students of UM – one of them is a member of the action group *Autonomen Maastricht*. Participating students were said to fear disciplinary measures from the university. This fear is confirmed by a student who agrees to talk with *Observant*, but only anonymously. She thinks that it is “scandalous that we have to organise this. The university should have done that”. In her opinion, UM makes itself “complicit in genocide” by not issuing a statement about the war.

However, there will not be such a statement: in an earlier University Council meeting, the Executive Board was asked about it. President Rianne Letschert answered that a statement cannot do justice to all nuances and that the dialogue about the conflict should be held in the faculties.

Meanwhile, UCM dean Wolfgang Giernalczyk finds it “too bad” that the demonstrating students fear speaking out. “Looking at

what is happening here today, such fear is unnecessary. It seems that this stays within the limits of what one would call civil disobedience.” He did not know about the action beforehand, but decided to let it go ahead after a talk with the students: education – “my primary responsibility” – is not seriously disrupted “and they are behaving calmly. I want to give the students the opportunity to talk about this and discuss the matter, as long as it is done in a way that doesn't make others feel unsafe. I think I can see that they're trying their best to achieve that.” Executive Board secretary Jeroen van Velzen cannot see any objection to the ‘occupation’ either. “We want people to feel free to express their opinions. They are not calling for violence or other criminal behaviour, and the education system is not affected, so this should be possible.” Students for Palestine, on the other hand, reproaches UM for obstructing an open discussion. After all, posters from student organisation Free Palestine Maastricht



The ‘occupants’ of the UCM building put up pro-Palestine posters  
Photo: Observant

*“Scandalous that we have to organise this. The university should have done that”*

(FPM) were removed from university buildings during the Autumn break. “That was done because they were anonymous”, says Van Velzen, who is responsible for the university’s poster policy. “When posters contain a term like ‘genocide’, which elicits emotions and debate, anonymity is undesirable. We have since then talked about this with FPM.” On the day of the occupation, new FPM posters appeared, including the aforementioned term. This time, they were not anonymous and were allowed to remain. “It is not

up to us to determine whether ‘genocide’ is the right term,” says Van Velzen. “Our view is: can that term be proposed as a hypothesis in an academic debate? The answer is yes.” At the same time, such a word can cause discomfort. “We spoke with an informal delegation of Jewish students and this is the case among them; they feel that there is no genocide. But a majority of these students also felt that a debate on the topic should be possible.”

What exactly are the rules about posters in university buildings? Van Velzen: “The university should provide a safe and open environment in which people can express their opinions and discuss these with others. We do draw the line in two cases: they should not be hung up where they block other expressions, and they must not contain slander or call for violence, discrimination et cetera.”

## background

## Report on ‘more diverse curriculum’ at Arts and Culture leads to commotion among staff

# “Painful”, “inappropriate” and “harmful”, say lecturers

The curriculum of the bachelor’s programme of Arts & Culture is not inclusive and diverse enough. That is what a group of students concluded in a workshop on diversity, of which the report was sent to all lecturers without any comments. The result: from critical to downright furious e-mails from staff members. Others, in turn, criticised the harsh tone of the e-mails.

Text **Dennis Vaendel**

Photo **Joey Roberts**

Unfortunately, quite a few lecturers did not want to talk with *Observant*, partly because they don’t want to get into trouble by doing so, they said. Luckily, there are written sources: an extensive exchange of e-mails by staff members, the minutes of a staff meeting, and certainly also the report with which it all started: the workshop about diversity and inclusion. The conclusions of the report are harsh: the programme of Arts & Culture (AC) is “very Eurocentric,” “mostly male-focused” and “aimed at white Dutch people”, and does absolutely “no justice to the diversity of society”. Subjects such as racism and colonialism are treated “superficially, as if you are reading a children’s book”; many lecturers “simply don’t know enough about it, have insufficient knowledge”. During the lessons, people of colour are talked about in a “dehumanising and superficial” manner, while many people at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) “act as if racism doesn’t exist”. A report from that workshop dropped into the inboxes of all the AC lecturers last month. Nine students had participated in the workshop last spring. The initiative was taken by the *Diversifying the BA Arts and Culture Curriculum* working group, which was set up by a number of lecturers. It should be seen as “a first step toward including our students’ voices in the pressing conversation around how to make the bachelor AC curriculum (...) more inclusive, more diverse, and more up to date,” said the working group in the report. According to the participating students, this must be done by “decolonising” the curriculum, dealing with literature from people of colour, and by appointing lecturers who “actually know something about subjects such as colonialism and LGBTQ-issues”. Students and staff should also be trained in aspects such as “gender-neutral pronouns and gender identity” and it is necessary “particularly for white students” to contextualise certain literature better.

## Parody

The report caused quite some indignation and questions among staff members. When programme director Darryl Cressman distributed it, he did so with the brief message that the report would be discussed during a staff meeting a week later. But who exactly gave the working group the task to organise this workshop? And will the report be used as a point of departure to revise the bachelor’s programme? There was a lot of vagueness about this at that time, as appeared from the e-mail exchange among staff members that followed the original message from the programme director, which *Observant* now processes. Harry Oosterhuis, historian and lecturer at the faculty for more than thirty years, is highly critical: “Is this report a parody?” he starts his e-mail to colleagues. “The report offers nothing but a caricature of what AC is and has been.” The students in the workshop don’t appear to be “impeded by considerable knowledge about our Arts and Culture program and its background and neither by the ability to differentiate between analysing, understanding and knowing on the one hand and appraisal and judgement on the other hand.” Also, as far as ‘the safety’ of students is concerned when they feel insulted: “In historical sources and more recent texts we find ‘offensive’ idioms again and again. Does this imply that such writings should not be read any more by students because their feelings might be hurt?” He also doubts whether the workshop is an adequate starting point for a discussion about a revision of the curriculum. This is something that other staff members also wonder about in their e-mails. Is the small group of only nine students representative? A few staff members write that they don’t acknowledge the accusations in the report, based on their own talks with students and regular student evaluations. Furthermore, some took offence at the fact

that individuals were mentioned in the report. For example, the students spoke about “teachers we love” and “problematic teachers”. In both categories, a number of names were mentioned, only the negative cases having been anonymised in the report – of whom it is clear among staff who were meant, some say. That this was distributed among colleagues in this way, staff members say in the e-mails was “painful”, “inappropriate” and “harmful”.

## Careless

Assistant professor Simone Schleper, who teaches in the bachelor’s programme and is a member of the working group, says that she is shocked by the tone of the reactions. “I did not expect the report to be so explosive. Unfortunately, it also lacked some context. Nobody said that the group of students was representative. But it is important to hear everyone’s voice, so also these students’ voices.” “It was indeed a bit sloppy to send it around without sufficient context,” programme director Cressman admits. “But I don’t understand the negative reactions. It is very inappropriate to voice such criticism in a ‘reply-all’ to all staff members. That is harmful for the cohesiveness within the faculty. A number of staff members have put a lot of effort into this report, because they want to improve the programme. I very much applaud that. Just like I would if someone came up with another idea, for example, whether you could offer the bachelor’s programme completely in Dutch.” But could distributing a report in which students make accusations about individual lecturers not be harmful too? “No, I don’t think so,” says Cressman. “In evaluations of the education programme, lecturers are also confronted with many fierce remarks from students, you learn to deal with them.” Schleper also feels that the report is not inappropriate. “You must be able to maintain a professional distance from students and their statements.”

## Revised curriculum

Cressman emphasises that the report is intended primarily as a starting point for a discussion. “Sometimes, I get the feeling that people think I have a certain agenda, but that is certainly not the case. I personally wouldn’t dare say whether the curriculum should be more diverse or not, I don’t know the content as well as the course coordinators. But it is important to have this discussion. If the question is raised in the faculty, the Executive Board, or by students, what the situation is regarding diversity within our programme, we must be able to show that we have thought about it. But there are no plans at the moment to revise the curriculum.”

Janosch Prinz, chairman of the body that must approve changes in the curriculum, the Educational Programme Committee (of the bachelor’s programme of AC), confirms the latter. “Traditionally, the programme focuses on Western culture. That will continue to be the case, we will not suddenly start to focus on Eastern cultures too. First of all, we don’t have the necessary expertise, but also because this is already offered elsewhere at this university, such as in the Global Studies programme.” Despite this, the students in the report criticise the Western focus and say that they were misled when choosing their study programme by “false promises and lies”. Prinz: “That was indeed remarkable. In the coming time, we will check whether our marketing is in line with the content of the programme.”

## Colonialism

So, will absolutely nothing change within the programme? I wouldn’t say that, says Prinz. “You always need to check whether, for example, the literature is still up to date. In addition, the student population is becoming more diverse.” The programme should reflect that, according to Prinz. What does that mean exactly? “That you place topics more often in a broader context, for example that of imperialist and colonialist history. After all, Western cultures were partly shaped by contact with other cultures. Studying them is more important today than it was a few decades ago. Often it is a matter of minor adjustments, such as revising the literature. This has already been done in parts of the bachelor’s programme over the past ten years. That is in the hands of the lecturers, where they can listen to the students as well.”

Is that possible if students take on a fierce tone in an evaluation or during a lecture? For example, when it comes to ‘sensitive’ subjects such as ‘*zwarte piet*’ or the controversial French author Michel Houellebecq? Or when the “N-word” is dropped, an example from the report with which students have a problem? “That is a matter of experience,” says Prinz. “You have to make that context clear as a teacher. But it is important not to avoid such topics, because critical analysis of divisions and extreme positions in Western culture is an important part of our education.”

## Underlying sentiments

A week after the report was distributed, mid-October, the staff meeting was held. According to Cressman, excuses were made to those who felt hurt by the report or the tone of the e-mails. “After that, we were able to have a good discussion.” Prinz also called the meeting a “constructive one. When you engage in discussion, it appears that the differences among colleagues are not as great as appeared in the e-mails.” According to Schleper, the situation also shows that there are underlying sentiments. “For example, about the workload, or maybe not everyone feels appreciated for their efforts for the study programme in the past. That can easily lead to polarisation, also in other discussions, such as those about internationalisation. We are only a small group of





The FASoS building at Grote Gracht

lecturers. It is important that we continue to discuss and work together.” Programme director Cressman, who wants to bury the affair as quickly as possible, tries to sketch a more positive image. He suggests that this is no longer a discussion. “It lies in the past, the problem has been solved. Since the meeting, I have hardly heard anyone talk about it. The fact that *Observant* is now writing about it, is a pity, as far as I am concerned, because it can stir up the discussion again.”

Does the discussion about diversity also exist in other programmes within FASoS? “In some places more than others, but the discussion is taking place everywhere,” says board member Patrick Bijsmans (education portfolio). “It is, after all, also a theme that exists in society. You cannot avoid that, just like Artificial Intelligence.” Does that mean that the board would

### No handbook

interfere in a programme, if it is not sufficiently diverse? “No, I don’t see that happening any time soon. We leave that to those who run the programmes. But we do feel it is important that they have the discussion about diversity.” But Bijsmans acknowledges that this is not always easy. “There is always a certain amount of unease with change. There are

plenty of examples from other universities where such discussions quickly led to polarisation. That appeared to nearly happen here too, with this report. Fortunately, I hear from staff that the continuation of the discussion is currently on a more pleasant note. But it continues to be tough. If a handbook were to exist, everyone would like to have it.”



## news

## Decreasing interest in Dutch Law

## “The problem is that here in Limburg we have fewer and fewer 18-year-olds”

*The lopsided ratio of student numbers between the bachelor Dutch Law and the English European Law School (ELS) is a cause for concern for the Faculty Board. To illustrate: last September, about two hundred first-year students registered for Dutch Law and six hundred for ELS. The fact that the English bachelor's is growing faster, has been a process of more than ten years.*

The decreasing interest in Dutch Law is “a national trend,” says Sjoerd Claessens, vice dean of education. “As the smallest Faculty of Law in the country, we are bobbing along with the rest. Exceptions are the Covid years, when all Dutch Law study programmes received more students. Now we are all dropping back in numbers.”

The number of newcomers for the Maastricht bachelor's of Dutch Law, according to the latest figures, fluctuates around the 200 mark. “But we would very much like to have more,” adds dean Jan Smits. It has been his wish for years. When he took up the position of dean in December 2017, he already said that intervention in the bachelor's of Dutch Law was “urgent” in order to correct the imbalance with ELS. At the time, he characterised the situation as being “undesirable. You create the impression that ELS is the most important.” But under the leadership of his predecessors, the faculty was apparently unsuccessful in attracting more students for the Dutch bachelor's.

**Ideals**

Under Smits' deanship, the study programme was overhauled rigorously (not just because of the dropping student numbers, but also because the curriculum simply needed ‘maintenance’). Maastricht wanted to do things ‘differently’ to the other nine Dutch Law programmes in the Netherlands, which were all actually doing kind of the same thing. In September 2020, the new bachelor's started with discipline-transcending education, more projects, more formative testing (giving feedback, not grades or pass/fail)



Photo: Loraine Bodewes

as well as a greater responsibility from the student for a personal learning process. Smits, now looking back: “With our marketing campaign, we addressed prospective students about their ideals. We know from surveys that Generation Z [born between 1997 and 2012, ed.] is much more idealistic. We wanted to respond to that.” Social themes such as sustainability and migration are discussed from various (legal) angles in the revised programme.

**18-year-olds**

Nevertheless, the intervention did not bring about changes. Claessens: “The problem is that here in Limburg we have fewer and fewer 18-year-olds. Over the past two years, we have seen more newcomers from elsewhere in the Netherlands, but we know that school-leavers who want to study Dutch Law, see it as a huge

threshold to leave their own region, let alone come all the way down south. You see that with practically all programmes in the Netherlands: the largest portion is from the surrounding area. The Faculties of Law in Rotterdam and Leiden are lucky in that respect, because they are fishing in a larger pond of 18-year-olds.”

**Internationalisation**

The faculty board would be happy with a fifty-fifty ratio between ELS and Dutch Law. In light of the national internationalisation debate about the Englishisation at universities (Maastricht University refers to itself as the most international university of the Netherlands) and the large influx of foreign students: is it possible that Dutch students are ‘not interested’ in an ‘international’ atmosphere, such as the one at the Maastricht Faculty of Law? Smits doesn't know. “Compared to Utrecht or Leiden, for example, we have a small group of Dutch Law students; most of them know each other, that could also be an advantage.”

**Neighbouring regions**

What now? “Marketing remains important,” says Smits. “It is all about how to attract prospective students from neighbouring regions.” In policy documents for the 2024 budget, which were recently discussed in the faculty council, there is a remark about the “possible introduction of more new Dutch-language programmes or tracks”. The dean says he wants to think about a new Dutch bachelor. But it will primarily be about Dutch master's programmes and tracks.

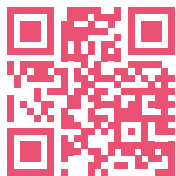
**Numerus fixus**

What about ELS? The board is considering introducing a numerus fixus, so that there is a limited number of places. “Some things come together that bring us to these considerations,” Claessens responds. Lack of space, too much work for the staff, “but there also seems to be a maximum for such a cohort in terms of community - something we always attach great importance to. In any case, the imbalance of the bachelor programmes will not become more imbalanced. “The ideal size of the ELS is still a topic of discussion.

Wendy Degens

## colofon

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Maastricht University

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## Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

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. Nanne 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