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S4Hot

“Very harsh for young researchers,” Rianne Letschert, President of Maastricht University’s Executive Board, reacts to the news that the starter’s grants will cease to exist as early as 1 January 2025. This was one of the many budget cuts announced during Prinsjesdag.

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Stay rate

More and more foreign graduates are staying in the Netherlands, according to research by ROA. But is political The Hague interested in these figures? “Convincing politicians themselves is a different matter – they’re often impervious to rational arguments.”

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About sex

Consent – mutual agreement to engage in sexual activity – is a hot topic. Men in particular are often criticised for not picking up on or misinterpreting cues. But what if you’re so worried about getting it wrong that you feel like you might as well give up on dating altogether? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte has the answers.

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editorial

“I haven’t got anything done all day”

It’s half past five on Monday evening. “I haven’t got anything done all day”, I grumble to one of my colleagues. She knows the feeling. Some days just seem to fill up with meetings and other obligations, leaving no time for our core business of writing.

This Monday was one of those days. First, a student complained about the headline of an article. It was an almost verbatim quote from the text, which the interviewee had read and approved before it was published. No, we won’t be changing it – headlines are determined by the editorial team. And no, they’re not included in the text the interviewee reviews for factual errors before publication. Why not? A headline needs to grab the reader’s attention, so it has to be catchy and compelling. We’re the experts in this area. Besides, the final editor often makes last-minute changes to headlines if they’re too long, too short, unclear or not to the point.

Then there was a former student emailing us to request the removal of her photo from the website. She no longer looks like she did four years ago and feels uncomfortable with it being up. I’m sorry to say that we can’t accommodate such requests either. As I’ve explained before, our website serves as an archive. As a rule, we don’t remove any photos or articles from it. If, fifty years from now, a researcher decides to use *Observant* as a source to study university students in the 2020s, they need to be able to trust that the archive has remained intact.

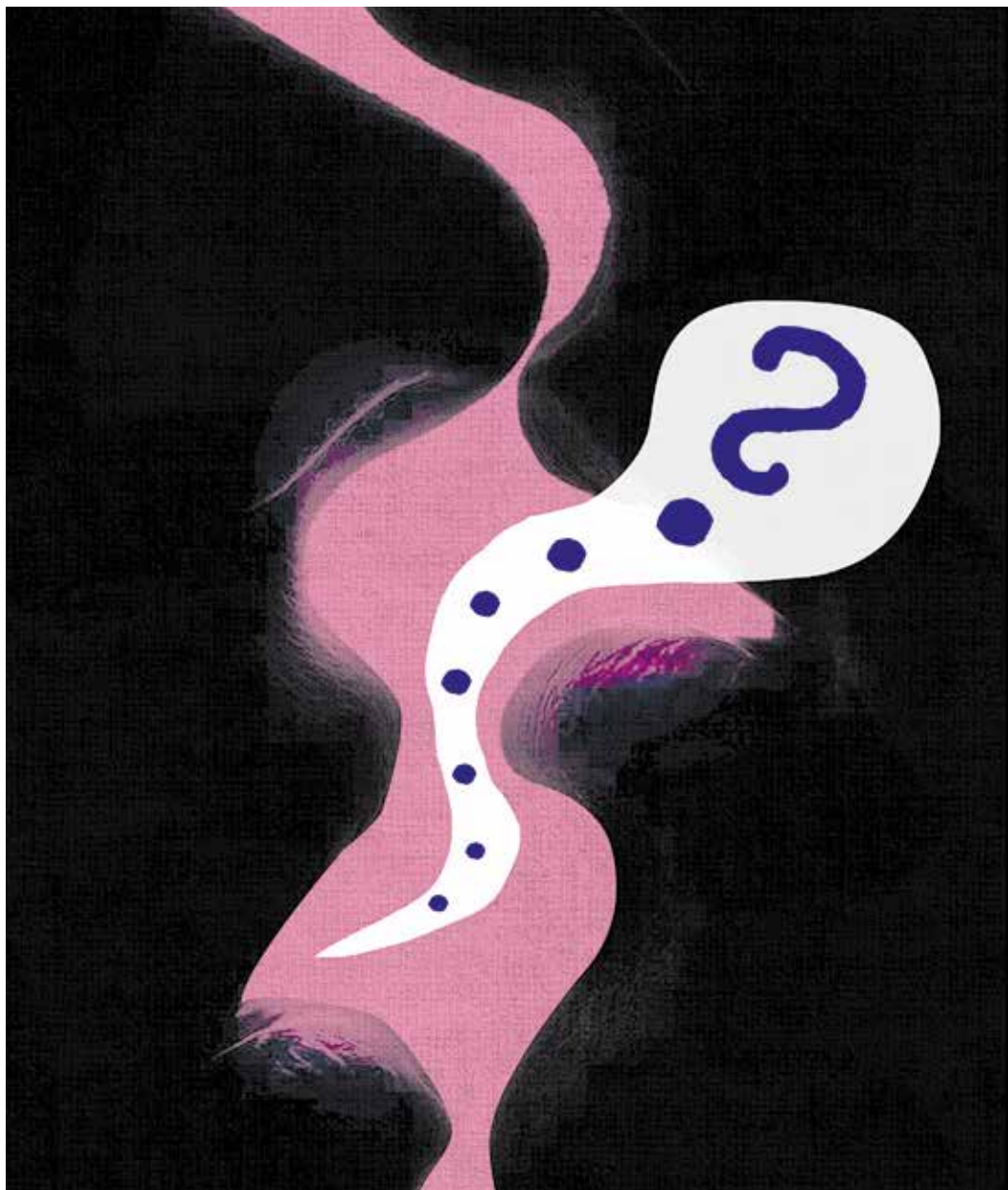
Finally, an interviewee had second thoughts about having their surname published in *Observant* – a condition agreed upon in advance. We responded that quotes must be accompanied by the speakers’ names. We’re extremely sparing in our use of anonymous sources or first names only, and will always explain why someone insisted on not being named. We also never use pseudonyms for interviewees. As the newspaper *NRC* puts it, “Journalism stands or falls with the reliability and verifiability of information. Naming names is part of that.”

Riki Janssen

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



series everything you want to know about sex



Collage: Simone Golob

“Check in with your partner at every new stage”

Consent – mutual agreement to engage in sexual activity – is a hot topic. Men in particular are often criticised for not picking up on or misinterpreting cues. But what if you’re so worried about getting it wrong that you feel like you might as well give up on dating altogether? After all, how can you be sure that both you and your sexual partner are having a good time? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte has the answers.

According to Dewitte, many men mistakenly believe that consent is something to be intuited, something you should instinctively pick up on. “But it’s a skill you can develop. Research shows that men are indeed more likely to interpret non-verbal cues as implicit consent, whether accurately or inaccurately. Nonverbal signals can be misinterpreted. It is better to communicate verbally to avoid misunderstandings. It is important to emphasize that silence is not the same as consent. Consent must be active, explicit, and come from both parties.”

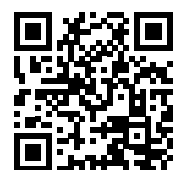
Consent must be continuous, Dewitte stresses. “Even if someone has given you consent before, they can change their mind and they have the right to indicate this at any time.” So, it’s important to remember that having permission to kiss someone, for example, does not imply consent for further sexual activities. “Consent is an ongoing, dynamic process. Check in at every new stage of intimacy, from touching under clothes to oral sex or penetration. Ask your partner if they’re still comfortable with what’s happening.” This is just as important in a relationship, she adds. “As you get to know your partner better, you can rely more on non-verbal cues and implicit consent. But just because you’ve had anal sex once, for example, doesn’t mean your partner wants to have it every time.” Some people might find it awkward to keep checking in with their sexual partner. “But I think it’s actually appreciated. It’s a sign that you want them to feel good, a sign of respect. And

the more people do it, the more normal it will become.” Dewitte understands that this might make some men, particularly men who have sex with women, feel unsure about what to do. “For a long time in history, sex was considered a man’s right and a woman’s duty. The woman went along with what the man wanted; that was the norm. Today, we see that women are increasingly exploring their sexuality and wishes and discovering their own boundaries. At

the same time, men report being less interested in sex and reaching orgasm less often. They’re too focused on whether their partner is still having a good time.” But as long as you check in periodically to make sure everyone is still on the same page, she says, you can let go of the fear. “Try not to obsess over it.” The woman has a role to play here too, Dewitte points out. “If you notice that he’s feeling a bit unsure, explicitly let him know you’re still okay with what’s happening. Don’t be passive, but actively communicate what you want.”

Cleo Freriks

Marieke Dewitte is a clinical psychologist and sexologist at Maastricht University. In this weekly series, she answers questions about sex from students. If you have a question, you can submit it anonymously, scan the code



UM President Rianne Letschert on cabinet's austerity plans

Workload will rise, and a blow to innovation

"Very harsh for young researchers," Rianne Letschert, President of Maastricht University's Executive Board, reacts to the news that the starter's grants will cease to exist as early as 1 January 2025. This was announced during Prinsjesdag.

They were meant to boost the research of young scientists. "The 2024 scholarships are being handed out now, the 2025 scholarships had not yet been awarded."

UM, like the two other young universities Tilburg and Twente, received additional starter's grants to compensate for historically lower funding (fixed base) of research. For Maastricht, this amounts to €16 million. "This was

an agreement between the three universities, UNL, the society of universities, and the minister. As far as UNL is concerned, this compensation will remain, but how will the minister handle it? There is no final outcome yet."

The board is currently working on scenarios that will be discussed with the deans in late September, early October. Letschert stresses that it is all based on hypotheticals, as much is still unclear. Will there be compensation? How will the Internationalisation in Balance Act (fewer international students, less English-language education) work in practice? What effect will the long-study fine (langstudeerdersboete) have? "We make calculations from the most negative scenario to the most positive."

However, two things are certain: the elimination of the starter's grants and a large part of the incentive grants will not do the workload any good, Letschert says. And the cuts to the National Growth Fund and, for example, research funder NWO, will definitely have an effect on innovation. "We will see that in a few years' time."

Good news is the €8.6 million for the Einstein telescope. Most of that will go to the Einstein Academy where skilled workers will be trained. "A very nice development. This shows that the cabinet considers the Einstein project important."

Riki Janssen



Microsoft Outlook thinks we are children

“

The latest email update imposed upon us by Microsoft has some more and less wonderful new features. A little box saying 'not verified' appears across the sender's name if it thinks they are somehow suspect. This includes some, but not all, UM colleagues using their UM accounts. What does Microsoft know about those colleagues? Have they been fired? Are they under investigation for misuse of their email, or something worse?

The most enraging feature is the way it generates colourful confetti or balloons when you receive an email with words like 'thank you' and 'congratulations'. The moving confetti is both startling and infantilising. I'm not five years old, and I'm at work. By chance I discovered how to turn off this annoying feature, but why was it the default setting? Only PC users are inflicted with this, my Mac-using colleagues tell me they don't have this problem.

We can also now respond to email with emojis. Yippee, but I do know how to spell, and responses often require more than a thumbs up or a smiley face. Clearly this marks me as a boomer (tail end – I haven't yet retired). There are 'surprised' and 'sad' emojis, but no thumbs down or middle fingers.

AI-generated suggestions about how to respond are now quite common. Again, these are overly positive and friendly, full of gratitude for yet another email. Where are the options for 'f**k off', 'what is your point?', 'maybe you should have waited 24 hours before sending this to all of your colleagues', and 'too long, didn't read'. I could suggest some useful abbreviations if we want to full GenZ, such as WTF, WTF-JK, TLDR, IDC, (SWM)squared. The latter draws on dating site lingo from when I was younger: 'stop with the mansplaining, single white male'. There are many worse things about the Faustian pact universities have entered with Big Tech. These include technical and financial lock-in and loss of autonomy and self-respect. But these new Outlook features are just silly.

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Sally Wyatt,
Professor of Digital Cultures

Budget Day: feasible or not, cutbacks are going ahead



Budget Day. The royal family arrives in The Hague
Photo: ANP/Emiel Muijderman

Fewer international students, the slow-progress penalty... Even if the plans turn out not to be feasible, the cabinet is going to cut the higher education and research budget by hundreds of millions of euros.

The universities will already be affected by the cutbacks next year, the budget of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for the year 2025 shows. Universities of applied sciences won't be hit quite as hard. Most of the plans were already known, but now they've been concretised with the exact amounts and dates.

The slow-progress penalty is to start paying off in 2026: 95 million euros. In the years after that, this amount will be over 280 million euros. That's what it says in the budget, at least, even though officials warned last spring that this cost saving cannot be made that quickly.

Something similar applies to the reduction of the number of international students. The cabinet is counting on saving 29 million euros in 2026, climbing to 272 million euros three years later.

But higher education institutions have to cooperate on this, and according to the officials they "don't benefit from it directly". So the question is whether there will actually be fewer international students and, if so, how much fewer.

Nonetheless, higher education institutions will have to realise the aforementioned savings one

way or another. "The budget cuts come to a hefty total", Minister of Education Eppo Bruins acknowledges in a press release. "The exact shape those cuts will take is not yet set in stone in all cases."

In any case, the cutbacks will not be withdrawn for the moment. In their outline agreement, the coalition parties agreed that 'setbacks' will be compensated by the ministries themselves. In other words, if one cutback isn't feasible, it will be replaced by another.

At first, the cabinet wanted to scrap the 'sector plans' with effect from 2026, saving 215 million euros per year. These are national plans for collaborations between universities in all kinds of disciplines, for which they were going to get extra money.

Starter grants

The universities threatened to take the government to court over this cutback. The cabinet is now cutting the starter grants, for assistant professors who get a permanent contract. The grants allowed these assistant professors to conduct research at their discretion. This would lighten their workload and the pressure on the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

The incentive grants (which are also intended for curiosity-driven research and which universities can divide up as they see fit) are more

than halved. They will be cut by 82 million euros per year, leaving an annual budget of 78 million euros. This will run until 2031.

In order to uphold the sector plans of universities, research funding body NWO will be cut by 26.6 million euros in 2030, which will rise to 40 million euros per year as of 2031.

Einstein

NWO will also have to forego 30 million euros for new large-scale scientific infrastructure, and 10 million euros for open science will also be disappearing. Another 9.2 million is to come from salary cuts and price adjustments.

There are more savings NWO will have to realise, although it concerns smaller amounts. For example, the cabinet will take a few million euros to improve the business climate for chip manufacturers. NWO will also have to give up money for the benefit of campuses in Groningen (an impulse following the earthquakes).

At the same time, the cabinet wants to free up extra money for some things, including 8.6 million euros for the Einstein Telescope: an underground observatory for gravitational waves. Part of the money is going to the Einstein Academy, "which will strengthen professional education in South Limburg".

HOP/Bas Belleman

series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire



Olga Kosjakova (Prague, Czech Republic, 2004)

/ third-year student of Biomedical Sciences; member of the FHML Faculty Council for Novum

/ relationship status: in a relationship with Michael

/ lives in Maastricht

Photo: Joey Roberts

“
I haven't been handed much in life, so when an opportunity comes up, I want to take it
”

I always wanted to study science. Not at all! I was the artsy girl who spent all her free time drawing and painting. Have you seen the film *Dead Poets Society*? In it, Robin Williams plays a teacher who tells his students that making art is good for the soul, while you go into law or medicine to make money – they don't bring fulfilment. That's how I felt as a teenager, so I thought I was sacrificing art for a degree with better job prospects. I was being quite dramatic about it, but I've come to realise that art and science are not the polar opposites we often make them out to be. There's creativity in hard science. When I run a lab experiment, I don't know what's going to happen. There are so many variables involved, which makes it interesting and leaves room for interpretation. I certainly don't regret my choice.

Being ambitious is a good thing. I get satisfaction from doing things well. I want to become a successful scientist, lead my own research group and work on my own terms. I haven't been handed much in life, so when an

opportunity comes up, I want to take it. When I first started studying here, I was afraid to miss out on anything and said yes to everything. I've since become more selective, both for my mental health and to fully commit to the projects I do take on. Like my work as a student representative: in addition to serving on the FHML Faculty Council, I'm also chair of my party, Novum. It's more work, but when you're busy, time becomes flexible. You have to get things done faster, so you become more efficient. In my first year, all I did was study, and it took forever. Now, studying takes up relatively little of my time. I know exactly what I need to do to show up well prepared for tutorials.

The worst thing that's happened to me in the Netherlands... is getting chicken pox. I'd just moved from the Czech Republic to Maastricht, woke up one morning with red spots all over my face and had to quarantine for two weeks. It's scary when you suddenly can't take care of yourself. It was my first year here, so it was the first time

I didn't have my parents around. Luckily, my boyfriend lives here, too. We both wanted to study in the Netherlands, and Maastricht was the best option for both of us. Our rooms are right next to each other, and he'd already had chicken pox, so he could look after me.

What do your friends dislike about you?

I like to challenge people, ask them why they do certain things, and I enjoy confrontation. I also have a habit of grabbing my phone to look something up if I don't know it. I always need to know the facts immediately, and it's hard for me to understand that others don't have the same urge. It irritates me when people refuse to learn, when they ask things they could've easily looked up themselves (“How do you insert a column in Excel?”) and then wait hours for your reply. We all have access to the internet, don't we? How does it never occur to them to just look it up themselves? How much time do I spend on my phone every day? [Laughs] Hold on, let me check... about four hours, mostly on WhatsApp and FaceTime. I video call my parents a lot.

What I like about the Netherlands... is that

each province has its own culture, but when there's a football match, everybody wears orange and the borders seem to disappear. [Laughs] I love that. And Carnaval! I was amazed to see whole families, from grandparents to grandchildren, all dressed up in the same way. I'd never heard of it before, but now I celebrate every year.

The thing at the top of my bucket list is...

getting a pilot's licence. [Laughs] I don't even have a driving licence, so it'd be a cool way to make up for that. I also want to visit China and South America, and buy a house for my parents near wherever I end up living. I love them so much; they mean everything to me. And I want to learn Dutch! I'd jump at the chance to take affordable courses, but they're so expensive. I would like to stay here long term. I want to do my master's in the Netherlands, but I haven't decided where yet.

Peter Doorackers

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

No financial compensation for student board members with study delays

“Student board membership has become far less attractive”

As of last year, UM students with study delays are no longer entitled to financial compensation for board membership. Student associations say this change has made it even harder for them to recruit board members. Board positions remain popular with students from Zuyd University of Applied Sciences.



Board members of Circumflex during INKOM Photo: Observant

Board members of student organisations at Maastricht University, from sports clubs to social and academic societies, can apply annually for financial compensation in the form of “administrative months” (about 350 euros per month). The money comes from the UM Profileringsfonds, the same fund that supports students experiencing study delays due to extenuating circumstances – such as illness, family issues or pregnancy – or competitive

sport careers.

Last academic year, the rules for student board members were tightened. Only those *without* study delays are now eligible for financial compensation. Previously, student board members were allowed to take up to one additional year beyond the set duration of their study programme (three years for a bachelor’s degree, one to four years for a master’s degree).

But there was no “sound justification” for this

more lenient policy, explains Margriet Schreuders, director of the Student Services Centre (SSC). It didn’t apply to students facing extenuating circumstances or competitive athletes. Abandoning the policy not only ensures that everyone is treated equally, but also frees up “the necessary financial resources” to expand support. Since last academic year, non-EU students facing extenuating circumstances are also eligible for financial compensation through the fund.

Last academic year, 55 out of 354 applications from student board members were rejected based on the new rules, says Schreuder. Most of them eventually did receive financial compensation under a transitional arrangement, following protests from student associations whose candidates had accepted their board positions under the old rules. However, this transitional arrangement is no longer in place. It’s a source of frustration for student associations, says Circumflex president Joost Mol. According to him, recruiting board members is becoming increasingly difficult. “Fewer people are willing to incur a year’s delay in their studies, especially given the looming penalty for students who take too long to complete their degree. Without financial compensation, it’s even less attractive, particularly for students who aren’t well off.”

Only one UM student on this year’s Circumflex board is eligible for financial compensation. Other student associations are also critical of the new rules. Julie Caenen, president of KoKo, notes that only two KoKo board members are entitled to financial support from UM. And Saurus president Joep Eijkens characterises the new rules as “strange. On the one hand, UM encourages students to be actively involved in university life, but this makes it harder.”

Student associations have noticed a decline in the number of UM students on their boards. At the same time, there has been a rise in the number of board members from Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. Three out of seven board members at KoKo and Tragos are from Zuyd, and Circumflex currently has four Zuyd students on its board. “We’ve had Zuyd students on the board before, but never in these numbers”, says Circumflex president Mol. Zuyd students aren’t entitled to financial support through the UM Profileringsfonds, but they do receive compensation from Zuyd University of Applied Sciences.

Dennis Vaendel

New rules around renting cause problems in many student cities

Increase in sale of student houses not visible in Maastricht

New rules around rental properties are causing housing problems around the country for students as more landlords are looking to get rid of their student properties. The situation in Maastricht appears to be calm, but worry is starting to creep in.

On 1 July, the Affordable Rent Act drafted by former Minister of Housing Hugo de Jonge, which aims in part to ensure fairer rents, went into effect. Experts warned that this could have unintended consequences: landlords would lose a significant portion of their income and might therefore want to sell their properties. Questions sent to the housing teams in eight university cities by NRC last week showed that these predictions are coming true. Every city saw a “surprising number of reports of eviction notices from students and other shared tenants”, with Amsterdam, Groningen and Nijmegen seeing “a significant increase”. Most cases do indeed involve landlords looking to sell their properties. Often due to the Affordable Rent Act, but increasing property taxes

and the equally new Permanent Lease Agreement Act, which means students are eligible for a permanent lease sooner, also play a part.

However, questions sent to Huurteam Zuid-Limburg by Observant suggest that this trend is not (yet) really visible in Maastricht. “There has been no increase, let alone a significant one, in the number of reports of landlords looking to sell. However, when we do receive reports, the reason for selling is more often that letting is no longer a viable source of income,” says project leader Robin Janssen. “It’s also worth noting that we are receiving more reports of maintenance and renovation by landlords.” Janssen believes this could suggest that landlords are trying to increase the ‘score’ assigned to housing. Under the new law, the rent is determined according to a point system, where a higher energy label, for example, could increase the rent permitted.

Bermon Pooters, board member for VVWM, the association of private landlords in Maastricht, however expects that the pool of student housing available will shrink. “We have seen

an enormous increase in the sale of flats which were let to a couple of students or PhD students. Unlike ‘traditional’ student housing, the points system can decrease the rental income there drastically, leading to landlords sometimes even having to make up the difference.”

Maurice Evers, head of Maastricht Housing,

also hears that it is an active consideration amongst private landlords in Maastricht. “They might still choose to sell at a later date. Considering housing shortage, it is a concern we continue to discuss with the council.”

Dennis Vaendel

What are the rights of students?

What if a letter suddenly falls on your doormat telling you that you will soon have to leave your home because the landlord wants to sell the property? Can the landlord just demand that? No, in principle not, says Robin Janssen of the Huurteam Zuid-Limburg. “Only if it is a fixed-term contract and the landlord gives timely notice that this lease will not be extended. But otherwise, the main rule is: selling does not break a lease.” In other words, sale is not a valid reason to terminate an open-ended contract.

But, Janssen says, “we do see that landlords can push hard, sometimes even intimidate, in the hope that tenants will agree.” In such cases, tenants can make a report of intimidation to the municipality’s ‘landlords good practices’ (‘goed verhuurderschap’) reporting office. “Also, as Huurteam, we can have a conversation with the landlord. If the latter really wants the tenants out of the property, we can often negotiate about compensation.”

UM research centre ROA studied retention rates of international students

“The message for politicians: a lot of international graduates stay here”



“Some of my political views don’t seem welcome in Limburg anymore”

After earning her bachelor’s degree in Berlin, **Magdalena Martin** (28) from Germany moved to Maastricht to pursue a master’s in European Studies. She enjoyed her time in the Netherlands so much that she enrolled in another master’s programme, Public Policy and Human Development at UNU-Merit. “I felt right at home in Maastricht. I made lots of friends, played sports, volunteered and felt like part of the community.” Even so, she left immediately after graduating. This summer, she moved back in with her parents near Frankfurt. “I needed a break

after two intense, stressful years. My studies took so much out of me that I had no mental space to think about my future. There was hardly time to apply for jobs or visit Career Services. I’m lucky to have a financial safety net – I’ve been working part-time as a flight attendant for years. But it makes me sad that a lot of my fellow students have to make rushed decisions.” Whatever the future holds for her, a return to the Netherlands seems unlikely. “Firstly because of the relatively poor job opportunities in policy and diplomacy. I want to leave

the academic bubble. And my Dutch isn’t good enough to work in local government. If I were fluent, it might have been more appealing. Finally, the housing market here is way too tight and expensive.” The political climate is also a factor, says Martin, pointing to last autumn’s election results. “I feel like my views on migration aren’t welcome in Limburg anymore. There’s a lot of tension; it feels like migrants and students are being blamed for the housing crisis.”

More and more international students are staying in the Netherlands after graduation, according to a study published this summer by the Maastricht University Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). The study adds data to the ongoing political debate on the internationalisation of Dutch higher education.

Text: Dennis Vaendel **Illustration:** Shutterstock

It's a frequently heard argument against the Dutch government's plans to limit the intake of international students: attracting talent from abroad is a golden opportunity to relieve pressure on the Dutch labour market, particularly in border and shrinking regions such as South Limburg. But do international graduates really go on to work in the Netherlands? "There's been some research on the topic, but we didn't know much about it", says Didier Fouarge, director of ROA. That was reason enough for the research centre to dig into data collected by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). "By the way, the study wasn't politically motivated. When we began it two years ago, the political climate was different. We primarily started studying it to support our labour market forecasts." But the conclusion will certainly be of interest to politicians. It turns out that a significant number of international graduates stay, and this number has been steadily increasing in recent years. For a long time, the percentage of international graduates still living in the Netherlands after four to five years hovered around 20 to 25 per cent. For the 2018-19 cohort, this number is inching towards 30 per cent. "These retention rates are only expected to rise. For more recent cohorts, we see that the percentage after one year is significantly higher, reaching 43 per cent in 2022. If this trend continues, we can expect a higher percentage after five years." This is economically advantageous, Fouarge explains. "Some argue that educating international students costs the country money.

But the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) has previously calculated that beyond a certain retention rate, it actually generates a profit. Right now, we're well above that rate."

Feel less welcome

The labour market also benefits. "We see a significant number of international graduates, particularly from outside the EEA, stay in sectors such as engineering and IT, which are facing severe talent shortages", says Fouarge. He suspects this isn't a coincidence. "From an economic perspective, it makes sense that more people stay if job prospects are better. That said, we don't see the same thing happening in the healthcare sector, which is also experiencing a severe shortage, so other factors are clearly at play. We haven't researched those, but we'd like to in the future."

Fouarge offers a possible explanation: "Other studies have shown that factors such as quality of life also play a role. I wouldn't be surprised if the government's right-wing agenda and the heated debate on migration and internationalisation make international students feel less welcome, which could cause retention rates to drop. But it will be a few years before we can know for sure." This could have a negative impact on sectors already facing severe shortages. "After all, even if all international students stayed, it still wouldn't be enough to solve the shortages."

Convincing politicians

ROA researchers also found that after five years, fewer of the "stayers" live in border regions such as South Limburg and Twente, while their number in the Randstad region increases. "These findings may be somewhat distorted, as the CBS data don't include cross-border workers living abroad. But it's a pattern we see in Dutch graduates as well. Urban vibrancy is appealing, and there are more job opportunities in the big cities. For shrinking regions, it's important to remain attractive. The Eindhoven region has Brainport as its draw; in South Limburg, the Brightlands campuses or the Einstein Telescope could play a similar role." However, it is important that international students are introduced to these during their studies. "We've found that almost half leave immediately after graduation, having already made the decision to leave."

It's no coincidence that ROA published the study in late June, shortly after MPs submitted written questions about the internationalisation bill. "We moved up the publication date a bit. I believe that policy decisions should be based on the right data." Fouarge presented the findings in The Hague over the summer. "Mainly to

civil servants who will soon be shaping new policies, or deciding which programmes can continue to be taught in English. Convincing politicians themselves is a different matter – they're often impervious to rational arguments."



"Most job opportunities are in the Randstad region"

"I'd love to stay in the Netherlands if I can find a job here", says **Amir Jazayeri** (32) from Iran, who completed his master's degree in Data Science for Decision Making just a few weeks ago. Returning to his home country, where he had already earned a bachelor's and master's, is "not an option. I tried to found a start-up there, but it was very difficult – there was way too much red tape. Like many Iranian students, I decided to seek opportunities abroad. As a leader in technological innovation, the Netherlands appealed to me." Jazayeri is now looking for work as a data

engineer or scientist. He's currently based in Utrecht, where he moved for an internship last year. "I didn't go back to Maastricht because of the tight housing market. I worked on my thesis remotely." Is he planning to stay in the Randstad region? "I'll go wherever I find a job. I do prefer it here, though. The city is bigger, there are more people. That's what I'm used to; I grew up in Teheran. Besides, most job opportunities are in the Randstad region." While many of his fellow graduates have already found jobs, Jazayeri hasn't had much luck so far. "I'm not sure why exactly. Perhaps

language plays a role. I feel like an increasing number of vacancies are only advertised in Dutch, and speaking the language seems to be a more frequent requirement. I'm working hard to improve my Dutch, but I'm not quite there yet." He won't let the political discussions on migration and internationalisation discourage him. "I know that in politics, things can change quickly. Besides, I've met a lot of Dutch people over the past few years, and I've never felt like any of them were strongly against international students or migrants."

news

Randwyck is buzzing: successful bee hotspot sets trend for more biodiversity at UM

What started as a – seemingly randomly dumped – heap of dirt on a barren patch of land has flourished into a paradise for wild bees in Randwyck. Plenty of room for more, also at Maastricht University.

“It’s roughly 70 square metres, I’d say.” Peter Alblas from the Centre for Natural and Environmental Education (CNME) squints in the bright morning sunshine as he quickly works out how large the piece of land on Oxfordlaan is that is now so popular with insects and other creatures. “We’ve got earworms and caterpillars too, but people don’t like them as much as the wild bees.” The flying insect is having a hard time in the Netherlands, but seems to be doing well in Maastricht. Recent research carried out on behalf of the council shows that 148 wild bee species have been spotted at the twelve CNME hotspots dotted around the city: little mounds of different types of soil sown with a variety of native plants and flowers. Randwyck’s count of 64 species of bee means it has an above-average biodiversity. “I think there are more than fifty different species of flowers here,” says Alblas, explaining that they are all flourishing in soil that he very carefully compiled, and which was also taken from Maastricht and the surrounding area. “Marl and loam, for example, and a mix of gravel, sand and silt, such as that once left behind by the river. These types of soil dry out easily, which prevents grass from growing rampantly. Bees like heat and nest underground, so the sun needs to be able to reach it”

What it looks like below remains a mystery, but at the surface this paradise looks a bit of a mess. “It does look wild,” Alblas admits, as he pulls up some plants with long roots, “but that is entirely deliberate. You can’t just let everything grow either, maintenance is necessary.”



The bee hotspot in Randwyck Photo: Observant

He’s also trying to get the staff and students at the university more involved with that. For example, the nanoscopy team from the M4I institute (Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences) helped sow the first flowers, and the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience (FPN) has plans to start a separate flower meadow behind the hotspot in the autumn. The posts marking it out are already in the ground. “It would be nice if there could be a bench, so students can sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee.”

It’s an image that also appeals to Rabbe Dormans, advisor for environment and sustainable operations management at Maastricht University, for starters. “The bee hotspot is an CNME project that doesn’t cost us anything – we’re just facilitators. But it is an excellent way to change how we look at our environment and to work

towards more change.”

And that change is coming. Since 2020, the university has stimulated more nature on and around campus. “This came from the idea that more biodiversity is also good for people’s well-being. So we asked students and staff how we could make our facilities more attractive.”

This led to a partial removal of the tiled courtyard by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), replaced by a native garden, and more flower beds and hedges planted at Universiteitssingel 40, amongst other things. There are also

new plans and an even greater focus on biodiversity.

“For example, the Faculty of Science and Engineering used the grounds outside for fieldwork last year,” says Dormans. “The flower meadow at Duboisdomein yielded 30 beetle species.” Also, the students of faculty have been working on a proposal to use the grounds outside more often anyway, also by other faculties, as an alternative to the classrooms indoors.

Dormans also points out that students of the Maastricht Sustainability Institute have been asked to research how the university can develop a green vision for the grounds. “There are so many possibilities, but it all depends on money, time and workload. Culture change is a long game.”

The bee hotspot, which boosted the biodiversity in Randwyck in a short time, is a positive result. “And should this spot ever disappear, because of future construction, for example, new places will pop up for the bees to discover,” says Alblas. “They’re smart animals, pioneers, who are also concerned with the next generation.”

Those descendants will continue to be numerous in Maastricht, Alblas thinks. “This is the bee capital of the Netherlands, with 240 species. Why? It’s warmer here, we’re in the Maas valley, there are slopes, and the soil is perfect. That combination makes this a unique place for biodiversity. What we have achieved here wouldn’t be possible anywhere else in the Netherlands.”

Deborah Blekkenhorst

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

19-09, 10.00h	Cheng Gong	03-10, 13.00h	Julia N. DeBenedictis
19-09, 13.00h	Jeroen R.J.H. Gruiskens	03-10, 16.00h	Lisanne Vonk
19-09, 16.00h	Ian Jens Dieterhillebrand Pohl	04-10, 10.00h	Rick H.G. J. van Lanen
20-09, 13.00h	Aurore C.M.-J. Delvenne	04-10, 13.00h	Hester W.H. Smeets
20-09, 16.30h	Dr. Alard F. Roebroek, inauguration	04-10, 16.30h	Dr. Raymond Schlössels inauguration
23-09, 10.00h	Nivinehanach	07-10, 13.00h	Gözde Şahin
23-09, 13.00h	Francesco Schianchi	07-10, 16.00h	Arno J. Gingele
23-09, 16.00h	Khava Im Elievna Ibragimova	08-10, 10.00h	Suzanne J. Dedden
24-09, 10.00h	Sophie Vervullens, Double Doctorate Degree Maastricht University 0 University of Antwerp	08-10, 13.00h	Margaretha K. Tuut
24-09, 13.00h	Gerjanne Vennegoor	08-10, 16.00h	Hubert Nii-Aponsah
24-09, 16.00h	Katherine Marie Wisener	09-10, 10.00h	Konstantinos Gasteratos
25-09, 10.00h	Valérie N.E. Schuermans	09-10, 13.00h	Dārta Vasiljeva
25-09, 13.00h	Hajarhasannejadasl	09-10, 16.00h	Danny Claessens
25-09, 16.30h	Prof. Dr. Gijsbrecht Vonk, inauguration	10-10, 10.00h	Eline Berends
26-09, 13.00h	Yara Quirine Wingelaar-Jagt	10-10, 13.00h	April C.E. van Gennip
26-09, 16.00h	Maud P.M. Tijssen	10-10, 16.00h	Inge T.H. Römgens
27-09, 10.00h	Janna Josephus Anna Oda Schoenmaekers	11-10, 10.00h	Jelle L. Faessen
27-09, 16.00h	Prof. Dr. Clemens G.M. Rommers, afscheidscollege	11-10, 13.00h	Anne C.M. Cuijpers
30-09, 10.00h	Bhathika Perera	11-10, 16.30h	Dr. Gijs H. Goossens inauguration
30-09, 13.00h	Maike-Elisa Ostheller	14-10, 10.00h	Guanguao Zhang Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Dalian University of Technology
30-09, 16.00h	Leanne Lily Gerda Christina Ackermans	14-10, 13.00h	Jeroen B. van der Linden
01-10, 10.00h	Noortje A.C. van den Boom	14-10, 16.00h	Sarah M.R. D’Haese Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Hasselt University/tUL
01-10, 13.00h	Yentl Lodewijks	15-10, 10.00h	Max M. Meertens
01-10, 16.00h	Cécile M. van den Broek	15-10, 13.00h	Khalid M. Alameer
02-10, 10.00h	Sjim W.A. Romme	15-10, 16.00h	Maarten Van Herck Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Hasselt University
02-10, 16.00h	Annet A.M. Duivenvoorden		
03-10, 10.00h	Prafulla Shriyan		

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achtergrond

Randwyck zoemt: succesvolle bijenhotspot opmaat voor meer biodiversiteit binnen UM

Wat begon als een – op het oog achteloos gestorte – hoop grond op een braakliggend stuk terrein, is uitgegroeid tot een walhalla voor wilde bijen in Randwyck. Dat smaakt naar meer, ook voor de Universiteit Maastricht.

“Pak ‘m beet zo’n 70 vierkante meter denk ik?”. Peter Alblas van het Centrum voor Natuur- en Milieueducatie (CNME) knijpt zijn ogen even dicht tegen de felle ochtendzon terwijl hij snel uitrekt hoe groot het stukje land is achter de Oxfordlaan dat zo in trek is bij de insecten en andere diersoorten. “Oorwurmen en rupsen hebben we hier ook, maar dat vinden mensen toch minder leuk dan wilde bijen.”

Het gevleugelde dier heeft het moeilijk in Nederland, maar lijkt in Maastricht goed te gedijen. Bij een recent onderzoek in opdracht van de gemeente werden 148 wilde bijensoorten aangetroffen bij de twaalf hotspots van het CNME die de stad telt: heuveltjes die zijn opgebouwd uit verschillende grondsoorten en ingezaaid met verschillende soorten inheemse bloemen en planten. Met 64 bijensoorten bleek de biodiversiteit in Randwyck bovengemiddeld groot.

“Ik denk dat er hier zo’n vijftig soorten bloeien”, zegt Alblas, die uitlegt dat ze het allemaal goed doen op de grond die hij nauwkeurig heeft samengesteld – en ook in Maastricht en omgeving is gewonnen. “Denk aan mergel, leem en stol, dat is een mengsel van grind, zand en leem zoals de Maas ooit heeft achtergelaten. Die grondsoorten drogen gemakkelijk uit, zodat je geen last hebt van uitbundige grasgroei. Bijen



Bijenhotspot in Randwyck Foto: Observant

houden van warmte en nestelen onder de grond, dus de zon moet erbij kunnen.”

Hoe het er beneden uitziet, blijft gissen, aan de oppervlakte oogt het paradijs voor de bijen nogal rommelig. “Het lijkt een wildernis”, beaamt Alblas, “maar dat is heel bewust. Je kan hier ook niet zomaar alles laten groeien, beheer blijft nodig.”

Daar probeert hij ook studenten en medewerkers van de universiteit wat meer bij te betrek-

ken. Zo hielp het nanoscopie-team van instituut M4I (faculteit Health, Medicine and Life sciences) bij het inzaaien van de eerste bloemen en heeft de faculteit psychologie en neurowetenschap (FPN) plannen om dit najaar een aparte bloemenweide achter de hotspot te maken. De markeringspaaltjes daarvoor staan al in de grond. “Het zou mooi zijn als er ook een bankje komt, waar studenten dan hun kopje koffie komen drinken.”

Het is een beeld dat Rabbe Dormans, adviseur milieu en duurzame bedrijfsvoering van de Universiteit Maastricht ook wel voor zich ziet – om mee te beginnen. “De bijenhotspot is een project van het CNME waaraan voor ons geen kosten zitten. Wij faciliteren alleen. Maar het is wel een mooi haakje om anders te gaan kijken naar de omgeving en nog meer te werken aan verandering.”

Die is al ingezet, sinds 2020 stimuleert de universiteit meer natuur op en rondom de campus. “Dat is gebeurd vanuit de gedachte dat meer biodiversiteit ook goed is voor het welzijn van mensen. Daarom is ook aan studenten en medewerkers gevraagd hoe we onze terreinen aantrekkelijker kunnen maken.”

Bij de Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) verdween al een deel van de betegelde binnenplaats ten gunste van een inheemse tuin en bij Universiteitssingel 40 kwamen bloembedden en hagen. De komende jaren wordt de focus nog meer op biodiversiteit gelegd.

“De Faculty of Science and Engineering heeft bijvoorbeeld vorig jaar de buitenterreinen al gebruikt om veldwerk te doen”, vertelt Dormans. “In de bloemenweide bij Duboisdomein 30 werden kevers gedetermineerd.” Daarnaast zijn studenten van de faculteit bezig geweest met een voorstel om de buitenruimtes sowieso wat vaker te laten gebruiken, ook door andere faculteiten, als alternatief voor de onderwijsruimtes binnen. Ook wijst Dormans erop dat aan studenten van het Maastricht Sustainability Institute is gevraagd om te onderzoeken hoe de universiteit een groenvisie voor de terreinen kan ontwikkelen. “Er kan nog meer, maar veel is ook afhankelijk van geld, tijd en de werkdruk. Cultuurverandering is een zaak van lange adem.”

Deborah Blekkenhorst

colofon

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