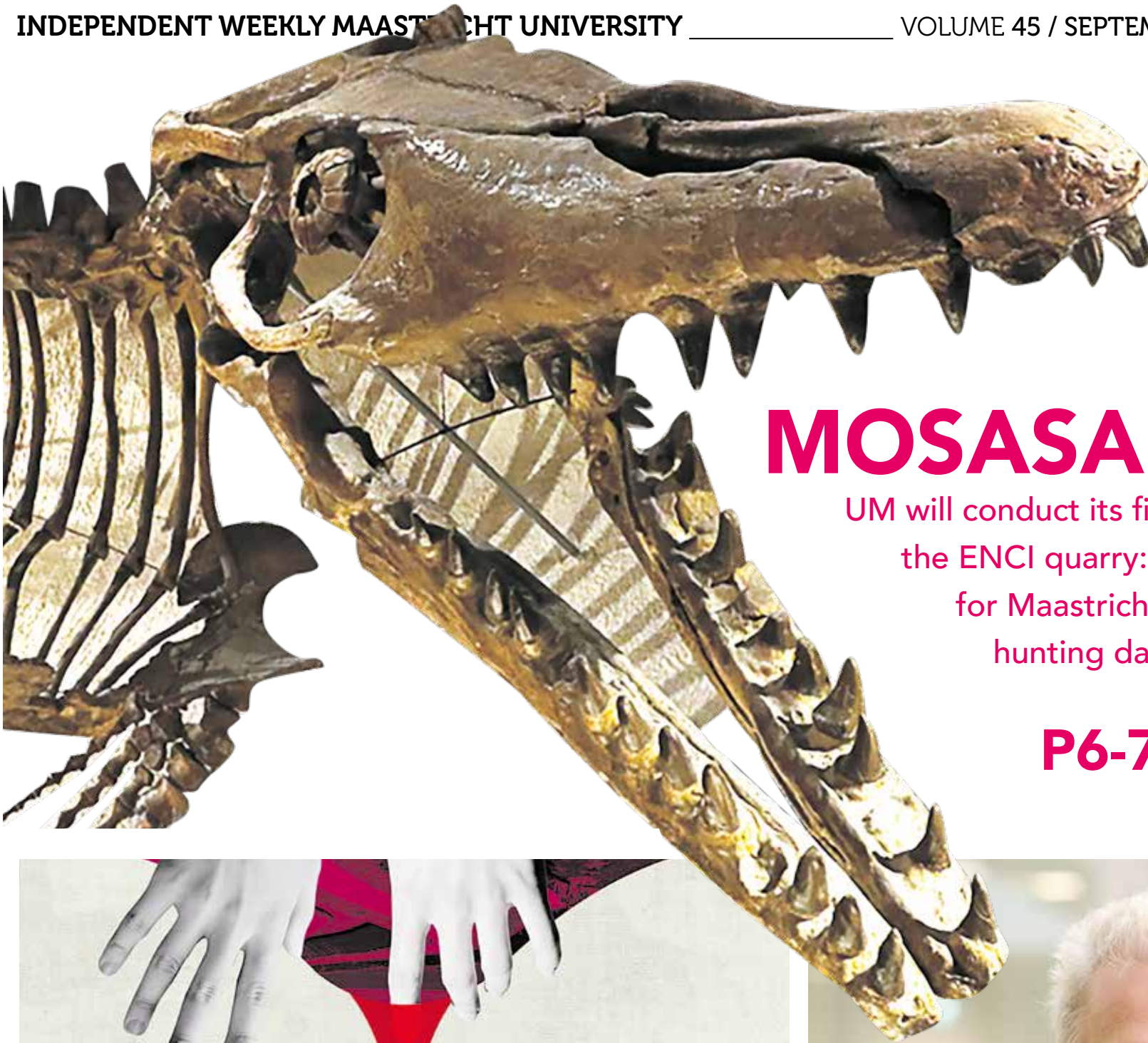


# observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 45 / SEPTEMBER 26, 2024 Nr 4



## MOSASAURUS

UM will conduct its first research in the ENCI quarry: a new era for Maastricht fossil hunting dawns

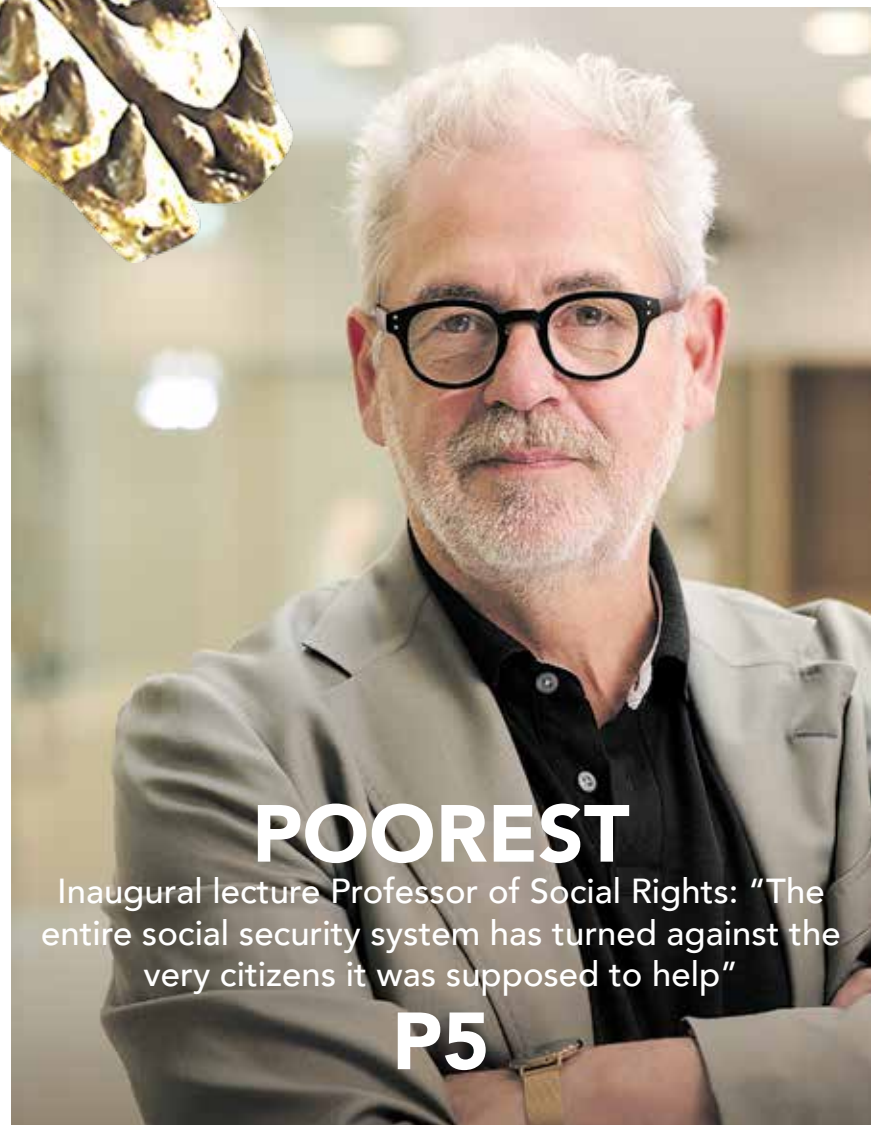
**P6-7**



## MASTURBATION

Yes, masturbation should be taught about in sex education, says sexologist Marieke Dewitte. "What we want is for people to have enjoyable sex"

**P2**



## POOREST

Inaugural lecture Professor of Social Rights: "The entire social security system has turned against the very citizens it was supposed to help"

**P5**



## editorial

## Uncomfortable is not the same as unsafe

There aren't enough toilets in our building. Our floor (the first) has two, and the second floor has just one. When the tutorials on the ground floor break for coffee or lunch, our hallway fills up with people queuing right outside our office doors, which we keep open so we can easily pop in on each other. Naturally, these queues are never quiet; people chat and make calls. But so far, a friendly request for quiet has always worked wonders.

Of course, we're not entirely innocent either. We chat and laugh by the coffee machine and have work conversations in doorways. Sometimes we even shout from one office to another. Combine that with the less-than-ideal acoustics on the first floor of Lenculenstraat 14, and it's no surprise that office etiquette came up in a recent meeting. Could we please keep our voices down in the kitchenette? And if we need to discuss something, could we do it *inside* our offices instead of half-standing in the hallway? We all promised to do better. But not even an hour after that meeting, I caught myself brainstorming out loud in an office doorway. Whoops. Old habits die hard. I promised to do better, again.

Speaking of office etiquette, *Volkskrant Magazine* recently (14 September 2024) devoted several pages to the topic. They covered a whole range of issues, from saying good morning at work (which we do) to not jumping the queue for the coffee machine (this doesn't happen in our office), and also: "Women and juniors aren't waitresses." It's one of the first things we tell any new junior journalist – you don't have to get coffee for anyone but yourself. As for the women in the office, they certainly don't let themselves be treated like coffee fetchers. That said, I have noticed that they tend to be just a bit quicker than the men to empty the dishwasher or cut and serve the *vlaai* when we have an office treat.

Providing constructive criticism on each other's work – some prefer to call it feedback – is part of daily office life for us. No article, whether written by a junior journalist or the editor-in-chief, gets published online or in print without being reviewed by someone else first. There's almost always something to improve. You've got to be able to handle that. We do, however, aim to give feedback calmly and fairly. This is essential; being needlessly blunt doesn't help anyone and only harms workplace relationships. And if you can't explain why a colleague should make a change, it doesn't need changing; it's likely just a matter of taste.

From experience, I know that criticism can make people feel uncomfortable. But I'm glad to say that I've never seen anyone in our office confuse the discomfort of criticism (number 13 on *Volkskrant Magazine's* list) with feeling unsafe. After all, being uncomfortable is not the same as being unsafe.

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

# "There's no need to turn it into a technical manual"

**Masturbation is not a topic everyone feels comfortable discussing openly. Some even believe it's inappropriate to masturbate if you're in a relationship. Should masturbation be taught about in sex education? How would this benefit young people? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte shares her thoughts.**

"Current sex education in schools almost exclusively focuses on preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)", explains Dewitte. It's a rather biological approach, she says. "This is the penis; this is the vagina; this is how reproduction works." Implicitly, this puts the emphasis on heterosexual penetration, reinforcing the idea many young people already have – that sex without penetration isn't 'real' sex. It's as if intimacy, cuddling, foreplay and masturbation don't count."

There's nothing wrong with masturbation, she explains, and this message should be spread far and wide. It wouldn't hurt to be more specific, either. "How do you go about it? If you've been handling your own penis from a young age, it might come more naturally to you. If you have a vulva, general tips can be helpful – there's no need to make it overly technical." Dewitte takes the lead without hesitation: "For example, vary your speed when stimulating your clitoris. Apply a bit more pressure or try gentler strokes. Or use a lubricant, like saliva or lube, to see what it's like. A useful resource is [omgyes.com](http://omgyes.com), a website with instructional videos on self-stimulation. While you can look for sexual stimulation in porn, you can also read or listen to erotic stories. This is a great option if you're not very visually oriented or prefer to use your own imagination." Dewitte would like to see more emphasis placed on sexual pleasure in general. "What we want is for people to have enjoyable sex." This requires a few conditions: "The right sexual stimulation, a safe context with mutual consent, and good

communication. To discover what works best for you, you'll have to embark on a journey of self-exploration. It's best to do this alone, as being with a sexual partner can make you focus too much on them."

Masturbation can make sex with others better too, explains Dewitte. "If you know what you like, you can communicate it to your partner." A lot of people struggle with this, though. How do you approach the conversa-

tion? "Look for an opportunity to bring it up, like a sex scene in a film or an article in a newspaper or magazine. And always frame things positively. Don't say 'You're doing it wrong', but 'I'd really like it if you tried this or that'. You can also let your partner know what you like during sex through non-verbal cues, such as moaning louder."

And even beyond this journey of self-exploration, masturbation is appropriate in a relationship, she points out. "It's just another form of sex. It doesn't mean there's something missing in your relationship. It's not even necessarily about sexual arousal; people also masturbate to relieve stress, relax or just have some me time."

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



Collage: Simone Golob

# FPN decides to discuss Israel ties confidentially after all



Photo: Shutterstock

A memo detailing the collaborations of the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience (FPN) with Israeli universities was discussed confidentially in the Faculty Council last Thursday, although it was initially on the public agenda.

Pro-Palestinian protesters – who in the spring, set up a tent camp in the garden of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, staged hunger protests and eventually occupied a building – have been asking Maastricht University to provide transparency with regards to ties to Israeli institutions for a while.

FPN would have been the first faculty at Maastricht to publicise those ties, after student council members Dominik Eberle Martinez and Alex Lemberg requested this in July during the last Faculty Council meeting of the academic year. They were interested in the “symbolic and financial ties”, Lemberg emphasised at the time. “I think it would be undesirable for information about individual researchers to be made public.” However, at the beginning of Thursday’s meeting, it was decided to discuss the document confidentially. This would allow members to respond “more frankly”, said now former council chair Michael Capalbo. That also meant that Lemberg did not get to witness the discussion of his own question. He has been on the University Council since September, which means he is no longer a Faculty Council member. Non-members are only allowed at the public portion of the meeting.

The memo – which was accessible for *Observant* until Thursday – does not mention any surprising collaborations between FPN and Israeli universities. All the information can also be found on the websites of the respective projects and

universities.

In terms of research, it involves two European research projects – in addition to individual collaborations between researchers. As part of innovation programme Horizon 2020, the faculty is working together with Reichman University, a private university just north of Tel Aviv, and others to develop an AI machine that aims to improve communication on social media, by stopping cyber-bullying, for example. FPN is also working together with Bar-Ilan University (Tel Aviv) and others in a European Research Council project to promote voluntary compliance with rules – for instance, covid regulations. Both projects receive European funding and are set to finish in 2025 and 2027 respectively.

There has also been a student exchange programme with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (HUJI) since 2017, although there are no financial obligations here. Since the beginning of this programme, a total of eight FPN students have studied at HUJI for a semester, two online and six in Jerusalem, and in return, one HUJI student has come to Maastricht.

The exchange programme is currently on hold pending the Human Rights Due Diligence Tool that is still under development, a document that will determine how UM deals with partners in conflict areas.

Spokesman Koen Augustijn said by email that there will be no overview of collaborations at the university level for now. That would “conflict with the care with which we are preparing the Human Rights Due Diligence Tool”. Security considerations also play a role: the university fears that the names of researchers involved in these collaborations might be traceable.

Cleo Freriks

# Significant increase of institutional tuition fees

The institutional tuition fees for Maastricht University will increase significantly next September. Students from outside the European Economic Area will pay some five or six thousand euros more for certain study programmes.

The majority of students pays the legal tuition fee of €2530, an amount set by the government and thus the same across the Netherlands. However, for students outside the European Economic Area, higher institutional tuition fees apply – these students are not funded by the Dutch government and universities can set their own fees.

Institutional tuition fees for Maastricht University will increase significantly at the start of the next academic year. Three examples: a ‘low rate’ Bachelor’s degree (e.g., Digital Society and Psychology) will increase from €9800 to €13,000. Students choosing a ‘high rate’ programme (bèta) will pay €18,300 instead of €13,500. And fees for a ‘high rate’ Master’s degree will increase by six thousand euros (€25,000).

The situation was no longer tenable, a UM policy officer explained last Wednesday in a committee meeting of the University Council, where the topic was on the agenda. There was too much pressure from the faculties. There are more and more students from outside Europe, who all need the same “student-related facilities” such as classrooms, study places and study advice, while the compensation has remained the same for years. In 2016/2017, there were only 800 students at UM who paid the institutional tuition fees. Last academic year, there were 1650.

What does that mean for the students currently enrolled at the university? Do they suddenly have to start paying thousands more? The policy officer explained to the committee members that a transitional arrangement will be put in place. According to University Council member Netty Beckers, this will have an impact either way on the number of non-European students. Vice-president Jan-Tjitte Meindersma added that this was never the intention.

Wendy Degens

Check out for the latest news



www.observantonline.nl



## Everywhere and Nowhere

“

Over the past years, I’d encountered a conundrum of sorts. An unavoidable, seemingly unanswerable conundrum that I was faced with each time I met someone new. Allow me to demonstrate:

“Where are you from?”

*I’m from Munich.*

“Nice. Born and raised?”

*Hmm, not originally. I’ve lived in Munich for ten years, but before that, I spent a significant part of my childhood in Florida.*

“Wow, Florida! So, you were born there, before moving to Munich?”

*Not quite. Before Florida, I lived in Frankfurt for about six years.*

“Oh-“

*-And technically, I was born in northern Germany, near Bremen. You wouldn’t know the exact town.*

“So, you’re from that... town?”

*Well...*

Although the wording was different each time, I found myself consistently falling into a pattern like the one above. Someone would ask me where I was from, and I’d be stumped. There simply was no right answer to the dreaded question. No matter what I said, I would end up second guessing myself. I began to wonder whether I had truly come across a question that could not be answered.

In utter dismay, I sought the advice of the two people I look up to the most: my parents. And thankfully so. During our conversation, my father reminded me of two distinct words: ‘Heimat’ and ‘Zuhause’. Directly translated, ‘hometown’ and ‘at home’ – but I feel like the original German words hold more meaning. Crunch time. ‘Heimat’ typically refers to the place where you were born. Notably, this can be an entire region, and not just a single town or city. And whilst you can gain a second ‘Heimat’ later in life, the primary will always remain the most important. On the other hand, ‘Zuhause’ is more closely tied to the place where you currently live, and therefore more flexible.

Following the wisdom my father has bestowed upon me, I can finally resolve the conundrum. I now realise that identity is not a fixed point on a map, but a fluid connection to different places and moments in life. My hometown will always be in northern Germany. I was born and will always find comfort and belonging there. I also spent part of my childhood in Frankfurt and Florida – places I love and often reminisce. On the other hand, my current ‘at home’ is wherever I choose to build it – and right now, that place is Munich.

”

Robin van Wasen,  
student at University College Maastricht

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



Edward Huizenga  
(Rheden, 1970)

/ Professor of Strategy,  
Innovation and  
Change at the School  
of Business and  
Economics and partner  
at consulting firm  
Benthurst & Co

/ Lives in Rosmalen

/ Marital status:  
married, three children

Photo: Joey Roberts

“  
I’m a bit like  
a butterfly, fluttering  
through life  
”

### Describe yourself as a child in five words.

Energetic, positive, very curious, outgoing and always seeking challenges. My mother had no fear, which was just as well, because I was always off on adventures. On beach holidays, I’d disappear for two or three hours, wandering off to chat with another family and ending up invited for lunch. I had no hesitation in approaching people or exploring new things. I’m still like that; curiosity is a major driving force for me. I’m a bit like a butterfly, fluttering through life. But I’m also disciplined – I get that from my father. If I really want something, I’ll make it happen. I won’t move on until I have.”

### Is there anything you’ve done that you wouldn’t let your children do?

My children are allowed to do anything. Taking the occasional risk helps you grow, it’s how you discover who you are. My two eldest children are currently studying here in Maastricht. My daughter is getting a master’s in Neuropsychology and my eldest son is studying Medicine. No, I didn’t push them to choose UM – we visited open days at various universities. I love that I’m learning new things and making new contacts through them. For example, I’m currently working with the Faculty of Psychology to develop a programme to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Mozambique.

### I always wash my hands.

The moment I became a professor, I said I wanted to set up a meaningful project every two years. In 2019 I spoke with a colleague at the consulting firm where I work, who had just returned from Kenya. He told me that every year, 25 per cent of children in Kenya fall ill with infectious diseases and are unable to attend school for extended periods of time. I wondered: how can we encourage them to wash their hands? That’s how Hand Washing Angels was born, for which I recently received the Beta Sigma Gamma Business Achievement Award (for excellent leadership, ed.). Children learn to wash their hands at school with blue soap that leaves a temporary coating – Smurf foam, we call it – so you can easily see if you’ve missed a spot. At the end of the day, they get a stamp on their hand that only comes off after a few washes. This gets them talking about it at home. It soon became uncool to still have your stamp the next day. It’s wonderful to see how these children influence the adults around them. At one point, even the local policeman – who had, so to speak, never washed his hands in his life – was standing in the school playground listening to them.

**I get angry when...** It takes a lot to make me angry, but I do get annoyed with people who are only out for them-

selves or don’t put all their cards on the table, giving you the feeling that there’s more going on. If someone gets in the way of what I’m trying to achieve, I can become rather directive. I’m still learning how to handle this better.

**The best thing about being a teacher?** One of the reasons I agreed to become a professor is because I wanted to give back what I’ve learnt. I want to foster a sense of wonder in students and stimulate their thinking. Seeing them start to think critically, seeing that I’ve inspired them and made them feel like what they’re learning matters, is incredibly rewarding. It’s an addictive feeling.

**The biggest mistake I see organisations make is...** Forgetting that change creates fear. Managers underestimate this aspect, mistaking fear for mere resistance. But when you tell people ‘This or that is about to change’, their thoughts immediately go to what they will lose. Business is human. Act with empathy and ensure people understand why the change is necessary or why a particular decision was made. People are driven by meaning, so make sure they know the significance of the change. I’m currently working on my eighth book, *The Positive Side of Change*, which addresses this issue.

**What do you look for in a friend?** A sense of security, a safe haven. The feeling that you can talk to them about anything. A good friend is someone you can truly be yourself with – someone you can have fun with, but also feel calm around. Every year, I make a list of ten people who are important to me. I call or visit them to catch up and thank them for the role they play in my life and what they mean to me.

**My dream home is...** surrounded by nature. It’s a wooden house by a lake, with a deck to sit and play peaceful saxophone music as the sun sets. Perhaps it’s in Norway, or perhaps in Galicia, Spain. It’s just a fantasy – I’m always on the go – but it’s one I’ve had for a long time. Maybe it also reflects the current zeitgeist, the need to slow down and switch off every now and then. I think finding serenity will be my next adventure.

Cleo Freriks

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

## Interview with Gijsbert Vonk, professor of Social Rights at the UM Faculty of Law

# “Always ask yourself, How will this affect the poorest in society?”

In his inaugural lecture, ominously titled *Welfare state dystopia*, Gijsbert Vonk highlighted the alienation and oppression of benefit recipients. Referencing the Dutch childcare benefits scandal, the professor of Social Rights at the Maastricht University Faculty of Law stated, “The entire social security system has turned against the very citizens it was supposed to help.”



“There’s a significant gap below the middle class. At the bottom are the unemployed, the unhoused, people with little socio-economic security” Photo: Shutterstock

What struck Gijsbert Vonk most about the childcare benefits scandal were the harrowing testimonies of its victims, he tells *Observant* in an interview. Their feelings of anguish, shame, injustice, exclusion, power-

lessness, worthlessness. Vonk was a member of the advisory group assisting the parliamentary committee of inquiry into Fraud Policy and Public Service. Between 2004 and 2019, thousands of families in the Nether-

lands – often single mothers from migrant backgrounds – were wrongly accused of fraud, forced to repay large sums and driven even deeper into debt as their healthcare and housing benefits were cut off as well. How could this happen? Vonk: “The government concentrated all power in its own hands. It used every means at its disposal to combat fraud, when these people hadn’t committed fraud at all. If you made a tiny mistake, you were treated like the worst of criminals.”

### All-powerful machine

Vonk, who has long been a professor of social security law at the University of Groningen, delivered his inaugural lecture at Maastricht University on Wednesday 25 September. He will be working at the UM Faculty of Law one day per week. As he pointed out in his lecture, the Netherlands isn’t the only country to have recently faced a social security scandal. Take Australia’s Robodebt scheme, in which nearly half a million welfare recipients were wrongly issued debt notices due to a flawed algorithm. Or the Norwegian Social Security scandal, where European migrants who were entitled to benefits were unlawfully hit with severe penalties or even prison sentences for failing to meet certain social security requirements that turned out to be in conflict with the European Economic Area regulations.

Vonk: “I wondered if ‘welfare state dystopia’ was too strong a term, but looking at this string of disasters, it’s undeniable. These aren’t isolated incidents; they point to structural deficiencies. By the way, I’m not the first to use the term ‘dystopia’ in this context.” Several years ago, a UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights warned of the emerging digital welfare state, where the poorest citizens are “crushed” by data and technology. “People are at the mercy of an all-powerful machine. Look at the British Post Office scandal, dramatised in *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, in which Post Office branch managers were falsely accused of fraud and theft due to a faulty accounting system.” But, Vonk argues, faulty computer systems aren’t always to blame. “The roots of this dystopia run much deeper. In the Norwegian scandal, unlawful legislation was at the heart of the problem.”

### The poorest in society

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), Vonk continues, “does fantastic research analysing the country’s social classes every few years. While most groups are quite close together in terms of economic, cultural and social capital, there’s a significant gap below the middle class. At the bottom is what we call the ‘precariat’ – the unemployed, the unhoused, people with little socio-economic security. Just above that are the working poor, often in temporary jobs in logistics or abattoirs.” The phrase “the human dimension” comes up in the interview. The government expects citizens to be self-reliant and have their documents in order, but this can be challenging for people who may lack the intellectual capacity to understand complex issues, have low literacy levels or are overwhelmed by stress, poverty or illness. “The Scientific Council for Government Policy reached the same conclusion in its report ‘Why Knowing What to Do Is Not Enough’. The government must recognise that the most disadvantaged need additional support. Don’t ignore them. When making policy and drafting and implementing legislation, always keep in mind, How will this affect the poorest in society?” That’s not an optional step. My argument is that the government has an obligation to ask itself this question, based on the constitutional right to social security.”

### The key

We must also move away from a quid pro quo mentality, he says. “Make the system less repressive. To qualify for unemployment or disability benefits you have to meet certain requirements, such as compulsory participation in a reintegration programme. But if you have a falling-out with your case manager, or are late for an appointment for any reason, you’re immediately hit with severe penalties. Does this actually help people? No.” Finally, he addresses “the toughest and most complex of all problems”: citizen participation. “We get to vote in general elections once every four years. But in our all-powerful welfare state, voting alone isn’t enough. The most vulnerable must be involved in policy development and implementation.” But how do you engage them? “Whoever knows the answer to that question holds the key.”

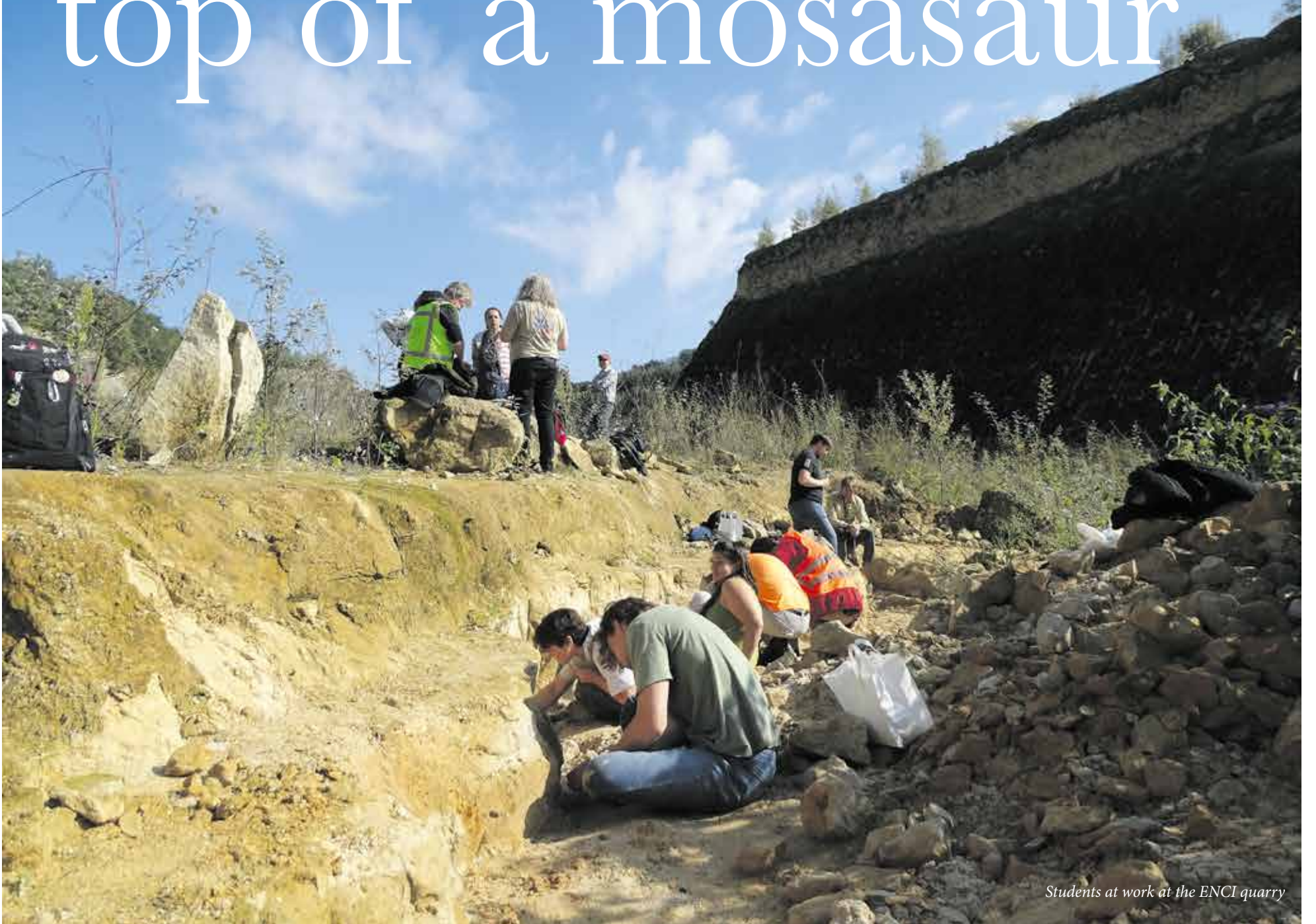
“These aren’t isolated incidents; they point to structural deficiencies”

### Omtzigt

Do the new government’s plans offer hope? After all, the Nieuw Sociaal Contract (NSC) party is part of the coalition, and it was NSC leader Pieter Omtzigt who played a key role in exposing the childcare benefits scandal. He also advocates for better governance and greater socio-economic security. “Well, yes and no. No, because the right-wing populist PVV party brings us closer to this dystopia. They want social security only for the ‘chosen ones’, not for ‘foreigners’ or those who think differently. Yes, because this has jolted other parties into action, pushing to strengthen the rule of law. That’s good.” One final question about the childcare benefits scandal: could it happen again? Vonk isn’t optimistic. “It could easily happen again – that’s what the parliamentary committee of inquiry concluded. We as citizens must remain vigilant, to borrow a term from former Minister of Justice Ernst Hirsch Ballin.”

First-ever UM research in ENCI quarry

# A new era for fossil hunting in Maastricht: “You could be standing right on top of a mosasaur”



*Students at work at the ENCI quarry*

The fossil discoveries at the Sint-Pietersberg, particularly those of mosasaurs, are renowned throughout the world. For many years, Maastricht University wasn't involved in palaeontological fieldwork at the site. But this is now changing as a new era of research dawns. "We no longer have diggers breathing down our necks."

**Text:** Dennis Vaendel **Photos:** Observant

Say the word "Maastricht" to a geologist or palaeontologist, and their eyes will likely light up. This is certainly true for Leon Claessens, professor of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Evolution at UM since 2019. After enjoying his time in the United States, conducting research at prestigious universities like Harvard, he couldn't resist the opportunity to return to the region where he grew up. "Maastricht is world-famous in my field."

Open any textbook and you'll see that the period from roughly 72 to 66 million years ago – the last age of the Cretaceous period – is called the Maastrichtian. And this isn't a mere footnote in Earth's history, Claessens explains. "It ended with the meteor that wiped out the dinosaurs – an iconic event everyone knows about, from scientists to young children."

Maastricht owes this distinction to the typical limestone (locally referred to as *mergel*, marl) deposited in this age in the substrata of Sint-Pietersberg (Mount Saint Peter hill). At the time, what is now South Limburg was a shallow subtropical sea, "similar to the Bahamas", with a rich marine ecosystem. As a result, the ground is replete with fossils.

### Revolutionary idea

One of the most significant finds is the mosasaur, a giant marine predator that ruled the seas during the Maastrichtian. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first fossils of this species were discovered in the underground tunnel system in the hill. Especially the discovery of a nearly intact skull in 1778 (see box) drew a lot of attention. Scientists puzzled over the identity of "*Le Grand Animal de Maestricht*". Was it a whale? An oversized crocodile?

Eventually, in 1808, naturalist Georges Cuvier concluded that the creature was a previously unknown extinct species. This was a revolutionary idea: the concept of extinction was virtually unknown at the time. "It was largely through the mosasaur that extinction was 'discovered'", says Claessens. As a nod to the find near the Meuse River, the sea creature was later named "mosasaur", "Meuse lizard". It put Maastricht on the scientific map – a



The terraced steps, carved out by ENCI specially for research

position that was cemented in 1849, when the Belgian geologist André Dumont introduced the name "the Maastrichtian" for the period when mosasaurs thrived.

### Time pressure

Two centuries later, the fascination endures stronger than ever. Earlier this month, a conference marking the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maastrichtian drew dozens of scientists from all over the world to the city. "And after that, Maastricht hosted the triennial Mosasaur Meeting for the first time since 2004, with about fifty participants", says Claessens. "It's more than just dusty old facts. There's still a lot of research being done on the period." This research includes fieldwork at the ENCI quarry. Over the past century, limestone mining for cement production uncovered several rare fossils of mosasaurs and other exotic creatures. The ENCI company's industrial activity at the site was a blessing in a way, says Claessens. "Without it, these fossils would probably never have been found. But it was frustrating at the same time. Researchers were always working under immense time pressure. The ENCI diggers were always breathing down their necks. After all, time is money. And yes, there's a good chance that a number of mosasaurs were ground into cement."

### Sea turtles

Since ENCI stopped limestone mining in 2018, a "new era" of research has begun, says Claessens. "We can finally conduct research without pressure, with the full cooperation of the new quarry owner, [nature conservation organisation] Natuurmonumenten." This has opened up new avenues of research. "Instead of rushing to find the best fossils, we can take the time to understand the whole context. What was the ecosystem like at the time of the mosasaurs? How did it evolve over millennia? Which animal and plant species appeared and disappeared due to migration or extinction, for example?"

A new multi-year study aims to answer these questions. This summer, researchers and students of the Maastricht Science Programme (MSP), along with volunteers, conducted the first fieldwork at the ENCI quarry. "This is UM's first proper palaeontological research at the site", says Claessens. "It's very exciting because of the rich diversity of fossils – squids, sharks, sea turtles, oysters, sea urchins, and even plankton and microfossils."

### Surprising discoveries

The work takes place on an imposing wall of terraced steps, "almost like a Mayan

temple", carved out by ENCI specially for research. "With each few centimetres you dig, you go back thousands of years in time. This allows us to study ecosystem changes layer by layer." The researchers use traditional palaeontological tools – chisels and brushes – but also a 3D scanner. "The scanner maps the top layer with millimetre precision. We do this for every layer we uncover. The end goal is a digital 'book' that lets you flip through time. It's an unprecedented wealth of data."

In the coming months, students will work on the fossil finds and 3D data. Fieldwork will resume next summer, as soon as the weather permits. "In a few years, we hope to have a clear picture of how the Maastrichtian ecosystems evolved."

Despite the focus on the broader context, surprising discoveries are still possible. Claessens points to a bird fossil found in the quarry by amateur palaeontologists a few years ago. "It had an advanced jaw with teeth, which was previously thought to have evolved much later. The discovery overturned a century of consensus on bird evolution. And the great thing is, the next unknown species or mosasaur skull could be just a few centimetres beneath your feet. You're never done exploring here."

## Back to Maastricht?

The mosasaur skull discovered in 1778 thrust Maastricht into the scientific limelight, but it didn't remain in the city for long. In 1795,

French troops took the fossil to Paris as a *trophée de guerre*, a war trophy. Since then, it's been one of the highlights of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle. But that could soon change if the Maastricht city council has its way. Last year, the council approved a motion requesting that the municipality, possibly in collaboration with the national government, initiate talks with France about its return.

Is this mission feasible? "Getting it back permanently will be very difficult", says Donna Yates, associate professor in the department of

Criminal Law and Criminology who studies fossil trade. "There are no legal instruments to enforce it. Taking spoils of war wasn't illegal at the time. Moreover, French law makes it very difficult to give up 'state property'."

According to Yates, dialogue is the only option. "But France isn't known for returning looted treasures. There would need to be a good reason. Colonial guilt isn't relevant here. Additionally, the scientific and cultural context of the fossil is largely French – most of the research has been done there." But nothing ventured, nothing gained. "Talks could pave

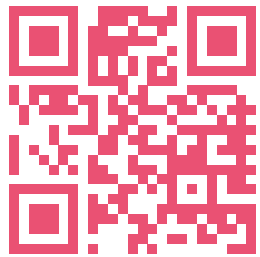
the way for a mutually beneficial collaboration between research institutions. The mosasaur could come here for temporary exhibitions [as occurred before in 2009], and there could be exchanges of students and researchers, as well as other museum objects."

In the meantime, there's still a way to admire mosasaur fossils in Maastricht. The Natural History Museum of Maastricht has several more recently discovered specimens on display, along with an eleven-metre-long reconstructed skeleton of the sea creature unveiled just last month.

# colofon

**Redactie** Riki Janssen (hoofdredacteur), Deborah Blekkenhorst, Wendy Degens, Peter Doorakkers, Cleo Freriks, Marion Janssens (redactie-assistent), Lena Reichel, Dennis Vaendel **Telefoon** 043 3885390 **E-mail** observant@maastrichtuniversity.nl **Website** www.observantonline.nl **Aan dit nummer werkten mee** Wammes Bos, Gideon Koekoek, Robin van Wasen **Ontwerp en illustraties** Simone Golob **Vertalingen** Maud Boveland, Susanna MacDaniel **Druk** Janssen/Pers Gennep **Abonnementen** Observant wordt gratis verspreid op de universiteit en diverse locaties in Maastricht, belangstellenden kunnen de krant thuisgestuurd krijgen voor € 45 per

academisch jaar **Paartjes** /advertenties Zie alle info onder het kopje 'service' op onze site.



# paartjes

Voor hetzelfde geld staan de paartjes iedere week ook op internet: [www.observantonline.nl](http://www.observantonline.nl)

Verbreed je kennis en netwerk en ontwikkel je tot bedrijfskundige - volg de deeltijdopleiding Bedrijfskunde van Maastricht University: [UMIO.NL/OBK](http://UMIO.NL/OBK)

PARKWEGKLINIEK SOMMER. DER MATOLOGIST,UROLOGIST,GYNECOLOGIST. IT'S COVERED BY YOUR EUROPEAN HEALTHINSURANCE CALL 0031433210310 OR WWW.PARKWEGKLINIEK.NL

STUDENT-REMOVAL-SERVICES MAASTRICHT. Voor ongeveer €50,- Je Hele TOKO Verhuisd. Phone : +31 (0)654688956 [www.Stichting-HEYOKA.ORG](http://www.Stichting-HEYOKA.ORG)

NEED A CHECKUP WITH AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING GYNECOLOGIST? IT'S COVERED BY YOUR EUROPEAN HEALTHINSURANCE. CALL 0031433210310 OR VISIT [WWW.PARKWEGKLINIEK.NL](http://WWW.PARKWEGKLINIEK.NL)

## Paartjes

Lever uw paartjes-advertentie digitaal in, zie [www.observantonline.nl](http://www.observantonline.nl) Vóór dinsdag 16.00 uur ingeleverde Paartjes verschijnen de donderdag daarop in de krant. De redactie is niet verantwoordelijk voor de inhoud van de Paartjes en behoudt zich het recht voor om zonder opgaaf van reden Paartjes te weigeren.

DE MEDEDELINGEN VAN DE UNIVERSITEIT, FACULTEITEN, SERVICECENTRA EN STUDENTEN- ORGANISATIES ZIJN TE VINDEN OP [WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL](http://WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL)

Zeeland's delightful mus sels naturally from Van Leendert Vis  
Markt, Maastricht open: [vanleendertvis.nl](http://vanleendertvis.nl) Tues - Sat

**Boekhandel**  
**DE TRIBUNE**  
Kapoenstraat 8-10  
6211 KW Maastricht  
Telefoon (043) 325 19 78

## Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

26-09, 13.00h Yara Quirine Wingelaar-Jagt  
26-09, 16.00h Maud P.M. Tijssen  
27-09, 10.00h Janna Josephus Anna Oda Schoenmaekers  
27-09, 16.00h Prof. Dr. Clemens G.M. Rommers, afscheidscollege  
30-09, 10.00h Bhathika Perera  
30-09, 13.00h Maike-Elisa Ostheller  
30-09, 16.00h Leanne Lily Gerda Christina Ackermans  
01-10, 10.00h Noortje A.C.van den Boom  
01-10, 13.00h Yentl Lodewijks  
01-10, 16.00h Cécile M. van den Broek  
02-10, 10.00h Sjim W.A. Romme  
02-10, 16.00h Annet A.M. Duivenvoorden  
03-10, 10.00h Prafulla Shriyan  
03-10, 13.00h Julia N. DeBenedictis  
03-10, 16.00h Lisanne Vonk  
04-10, 10.00h Rick H.G. J. van Lanen  
04-10, 13.00h Hester W.H. Smeets  
04-10, 16.30h Dr. Raymond Schlössels inauguratie  
07-10, 13.00h Gözde Şahin  
07-10, 16.00h Arno J. Gingele  
08-10, 10.00h Suzanne J. Dedden  
08-10, 13.00h Margaretha K. Tuut  
08-10, 16.00h Hubert Nii-Aponsah  
09-10, 10.00h Konstantinos Gasteratos  
09-10, 13.00h Dārta Vasiljeva  
09-10, 16.00h Danny Claessens  
10-10, 10.00h Eline Berends  
10-10, 13.00h April C.E. van Gennip  
10-10, 16.00h Inge T.H. Römgens  
11-10, 10.00h Jelle L. Faessen

11-10, 13.00h Anne C.M. Cuijpers  
11-10, 16.30h Dr. Gijs H. Goossens inauguratie  
14-10, 10.00h Guanguao Zhang Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Dalian University of Technology  
14-10, 13.00h Jeroen B. van der Linden  
14-10, 16.00h Sarah M.R. D'Haese Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Hasselt University/tUL  
15-10, 10.00h Max M. Meertens  
15-10, 13.00h Khalid M. Alameer  
15-10, 16.00h Maarten Van Herck Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Hasselt University  
18-10, 10.00h Anne G.R. Visser  
18-10, 13.00h Tom J.H. van Mulken  
18-10, 16.30h Dr. Jessica Mesman inauguratie  
21-10, 13.00h Sneha Mithun  
22-10, 10.00h Ine Nieste Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and Hasselt University  
22-10, 16.00h Julie E. Oomens  
23-10, 10.00h Laura A. Kirsch  
23-10, 13.00h Lieve van Veggel Double Doctorate degree Maastricht University - Hasselt University/tUL  
23-10, 16.00h Alina Shirshikova  
24-10, 13.00h Li Yang  
25-10, 13.00h Maarten H.P. Butink

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON [WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL](http://WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL)

**Maastricht University**

**Vacatures**  
Werken voor de meest internationale universiteit van Nederland? Scan de QR-code voor ons actuele vacature overzicht\*.  
Voor meer informatie over werken bij de Universiteit Maastricht, ga naar <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/werken-bij-de-um>  
\*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via UMPLOYEE.  
[www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl)