

Resource

FEBRUARY 2023 VOLUME 17

The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

**Engineering
doctorate
starts up**

**WUR people in
A12 blockade**

**Share of
women profs
not a quarter**

**Flea collars
contaminate water**

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FOREWORD

Bullshit

My name is at the bottom, but I hardly contributed anything to this text. The foreword was basically written by ChatGPT. I asked the program whether OpenAI means an end to critical students who can think for themselves. ‘Absolutely not!’ said ChatGPT. ‘Students are still important thinkers and problem solvers. OpenAI only offers them even more opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge. Because one of the applications of OpenAI is ChatGPT, a model for natural language processing. This model is able to answer questions in a way that resembles human communication. In this issue of *Resource* we discuss how students and lecturers can deal with this and whether students themselves will still be able to write in the future. We hope that this story will be a useful contribution to the discussion about the future of academia and the role of students and artificial intelligence.’

Wow, that was quick work. But I still prefer to write the next foreword myself and I for one will be keeping clear of the ‘bullshit generator’ (see page 20).

Willem André
Editor-in-chief





PICO BELLO

It is more than half a century since the old steam tram Bello (shown on its last journey in 1968) stopped running between Ede and Wageningen. But the name lives on in the fast-track bike path now being constructed: the Pico Bello path. The bike path largely follows the old tram route. An exit in Bennekom will take cyclists safely to the campus. The construction work on this section (Kierkamperweg, N782) is due to start next week. RK

Photo Historische vereniging
Oud Wageningen

Quarter of professors female?

'A quarter of WUR professors are women' was the headline on the WUR website in January. That surprised *Resource*, because just over a month ago our editors calculated that 21.9 per cent were women. And there certainly hasn't been a recent influx of women.

The difference is due to different bases and definitions. The stat that gives women professors a share of over 25 per cent as at 1 January is the calculation in FTEs taken from the HR dashboard (which *Resource* can't check). It is based on everyone in the HAY job category of professor (Professor 1 and Professor 2). According to the dashboard, 156 people are in that category: 39 women and 117 men.

The *Resource* calculation involved counting the people (not FTEs) listed in another source, namely the public overview of WUR professors. According to the most recent version of that (January 2023), WUR has 92 chair holders and 76 per-

sonal professors. That makes a total of 168, or 12 more than the HR dashboard gives. Perhaps not every professor is in that HAY category. Although that discrepancy doesn't affect the M/F ratio much. Forty-one of the 168 professors in that overview are women (20 chair holders and 21 personal professors), a share of 24.4

Resource's tally puts the share of women professors at 21.8 per cent

per cent. When *Resource* includes the professors by special appointment or with an endowed chair (52, seven of whom are women), the share of female professors at WUR falls to 21.8 per cent. That is marginally less than the last count, when *Resource* arrived at a share of 21.9 per cent.

Both calculation methods show WUR still has a lot of work to do to reach its own target of 30 per cent female professors by 2025. Even so, D&I programme manager Eva Siebelink is upbeat. 'I found the past



Mien Visser, the first female professor in Wageningen. Photo Peter Drent, 1977

year encouraging. Bringing in an external diversity coach to help the appointment advisory committees is starting to pay off. More women are being appointed not only to professorships but also to other key positions. There is also far more awareness of gender diversity as an issue.' ME

Examining ChatGPT use

Should students and PhD candidates be allowed to use ChatGPT and if so, how? This is the question a WUR working group will be studying.

The working group was set up by the Dean of Education Arnold Bregt after a meeting with assessment experts at Education & Student Affairs. ChatGPT is software that generates original text based on questions put by the user. The texts can't be detected by plagiarism scanners because they aren't copied word for word from existing sources.

The working group has been asked to come up soon with recommendations on the use of ChatGPT by Bachelor's, Master's and PhD students. Bregt: 'The program can certainly be used to write

a general introduction. You have to ask whether that is a bad thing. That already led to a lively debate in the meeting. For example, should you mention ChatGPT

'The program raises numerous urgent issues, including about authorship'

in the author's statement? The program raises numerous urgent issues, including about authorship.'

Not rubbish

Bregt uses ChatGPT too. 'It works fine for general texts. Instead of googling information, you ask ChatGPT. It doesn't

produce rubbish, but it becomes less suitable once you go into more detail.' ChatGPT seems to signal the end of the classic essay assignment, but we will have to see whether that is actually the case. Bregt has suggested to the rector Arthur Mol that they discuss the problem with other universities. RK

See also *Never write again, page 20, and discover ChatGPT's poetic side.*

1,598

That is the energy support in euros for tenants in 'independent' flats with a shared gas and electricity supply. Tenants with a communal main entrance will get 670 euros.

The government is easing the pain of soaring energy prices with a price cap: a maximum price for energy consumption below a certain threshold per connection. But initially there was no solution for tenants with building-wide heating — which is often the case in student flats. Landlords will now probably be able to apply for the cash from the tax authority in two rounds from February. HOP

Read more at www.resource-online.nl

WUR people join XR's A12 action

Dozens of WUR students and staff joined Extinction Rebellion (XR) last Saturday in blocking the A12 motorway to protest against subsidies and tax breaks for the fossil fuel industry. A number of participants were arrested, like so many others at the demo. Recent graduate 'Mick' (real name known to the editors) was detained for 14 hours by the police, she said. It was a long wait and she was not officially charged. Fortunately she did not have to spend the night in a cell. 'The people with ID were released in the late afternoon and we were allowed to go just after 10 in the evening!' She does not regret taking part — her first time taking part in an XR action where there was the risk of arrest. 'The action was totally successful, with loads of demonstrators and lots of support on the sidelines. I felt so energized by it all.' ME

Traffic lights at site of fatal accident

Traffic lights are to be installed at the Nijenoord Allee crossing where Food Technology student Shreya Nair was killed — see the In Memoriam on page 31. However, it will take at least a year before the traffic lights are in place.

The fatal accident took place in the afternoon of Thursday, 19 January. Nair was cycling home from campus when

'People have been saying for years this spot is an accident waiting to happen'

she was hit by a taxi van as she crossed the road.

Several students witnessed the incident. The police are calling it a tragic accident; the driver was not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Gelderland provincial authority, which is tackling Nijenoord Allee as part of the More Accessible Wageningen project, expects the work to be carried out in the period 2024 to 2026. 'So it will take a while,' notes Roger Heijltjes of Wageningen's Cyclists Union, which organized a small demonstration at the crossing shortly after the fatal accident. 'People have been saying for years this spot is an accident waiting to happen,' says Heijltjes. 'And now sadly it has. We can't wait yet another year, or even longer, for measures to be taken.'

Perhaps earlier

A group of students have spoken to Wageningen's mayor Floor Vermeulen about the dangers of this crossing point. A spokesperson for the municipality does not rule out the possibility of action to



Photo Herman Stöver

improve the traffic situation earlier. 'We are shocked by this terrible accident and our thoughts are with the victim's family and others affected by what happened,' says the spokesperson. 'The police are currently investigating what happened exactly. We should wait for the investigation to finish first. If the findings suggest extra measures are needed, we will do that.' GELDERLANDER AW/ME

Jeroen Candel addresses MEPs on biodiversity and pesticides

Associate professor of Public Administration and Policy Jeroen Candel addressed members of the European Parliament on the biodiversity crisis and the need to reform the food system, but his message appeared to fall on deaf ears. 'It felt a bit like the film *Don't Look Up*.'

Candel was invited by the organizers of the European citizens' initiative Save Bees and Farmers. On 24 January, members of the initiative handed a petition with over a million signatures to the European Parliament in Brussels during a hearing. The signatories call on the EU to reduce the use of pesticides by 80 per cent by 2030, rather than by 50 per cent as envisaged in the Farm to Fork strategy. Last December, Candel also started a petition among European scientists calling for the pesticide regulation not to be delayed. Over 700 scientists signed his petition.

Candel has mixed feelings about the hearing. 'It was good to be there on behalf of the scientific community to stress the urgency of the problems relating to biodiversity and to call on politicians to take action.' But he also found it frustrating that a lot of politicians in the main parties didn't seem to be listening and appeared focused on preserving the status quo. 'It felt a bit like the film *Don't Look Up*: how much clearer do I need to be?'

More pressure

Candel thinks the pressure on Brussels should be increased. The EU's Green Deal shows this works. 'That deal came about because citizens throughout Europe took to the streets to campaign for the climate. The same combination of mobilization, media attention and protests is needed to get politicians to change course on this issue. That's why



Jeroen Candel addressing the European Parliament (EP). Still from the EP's recording.

I am pleased with this citizens' initiative! He sees two roles for academics. 'On the one hand we need to keep up the pressure and show we are monitoring this issue, while on the other hand we should offer our help. Our Wageningen know-how can help policy-makers formulate effective policies.' ss



Are we still evolving?

Everything is in flux in nature. The concept of evolution is all-embracing, but what about the human body? Are we still changing too? Evolution biologist Nico van Straalen (emeritus professor, VU University Amsterdam) will discuss this question in the Darwin Café event, on 12 February (Darwin's birthday) in café Rad van Wageningen. The talk starts at 15:00 and admission is free. Please register at www.facebook.com/DarwinCafe. You can also watch it on Zoom (KNNV website). RK / PHOTO UNSPLASH EUGENE ZHYVCHIK

Resource wants: new columnist

Resource is looking for a new columnist: an employee who can write well, wants to comment on WUR topics and isn't afraid of controversy.

Interested? Then send a 350-word example column to resource@wur.nl. Our team of editors will assess your text carefully and critically.

There are 20 issues of *Resource* a year but the column is shared between three columnists, so you would need to write about six columns a year.

To get a good balance in our team, we would prefer an international employee or PhD candidate (F).

Fibre for a healthier life with diabetes

Does dietary fibre improve the health of people with type 2 diabetes? That is the question PhD candidate Iris van Damme (Human Nutrition & Health) is studying.

The 'Better food for diabetes' study, a collaboration between WUR, the Nutrition & Healthcare Alliance and Ede and Arnhem hospitals, started last December. 'We know from other studies that diabetics who eat a lot of fibre are healthier,' says Van Damme. 'We want to see what those results mean for the Dutch context.'

Dietician

In this study, Van Damme splits the participants into two groups. The control group gets the usual care while the intervention group gets personalized dietary advice from a dietician as well. 'The dietician helps them increase the amount of dietary fibre in their diet.' They can do that for example by eating more fruit, vegetables, nuts or pulses or by replacing white bread with wholemeal bread. The researchers

'The key question is whether people have a reduced risk of cardiovascular diseases'

use the recommended dietary fibre intake from the Good Nutrition Guidelines.

Van Damme and her colleagues will also measure the physical and mental health of the participants at three points in the year. 'The key question is whether people have an increased or reduced risk of cardiovascular diseases,' says the nutritional expert. 'So we measure the blood pressure, blood sugar levels and cholesterol.' The researchers will also use questionnaires to assess whether people feel better when eating more dietary fibre. ss

Participants wanted

Van Damme still needs another 140 or so participants: people with type 2 diabetes who don't use insulin. For more information, see www.voedjebeter.nl.



Fund uses lottery to allocate 1.1 million euros

The Centre for Unusual Collaborations (CUCo) certainly used an unusual approach to select the projects for its grants. The lucky projects, announced on Wednesday 18 January, were selected not using a jury report but by a random draw. That is exactly what science needs, says director Corinne Lamain.

CUCo is an initiative of the EWUU alliance, which comprises Eindhoven University of Technology, WUR, Utrecht University and UMC Utrecht.

'The random draw excludes all forms of unconscious bias'

The aim of the centre is to establish new collaborative ventures between the four

organizations. Each year, it hands out grants for unusual interdisciplinary projects. CUCo also experiments with new forms of funding. Last December, for the first time, it used a lottery to determine the winning projects.

'The lottery is needed for two reasons,' explains Corinne Lamain, a WUR employee and the CUCo

director. 'Firstly, the grant application process is incredibly time-consuming.' Researchers and assessors spend a lot of time on proposals, most of which don't get funding. That increases their workload.

Fairer

Secondly, the lottery approach fits the kind of research the centre finances, says Lamain. 'CUCo funds research on topics that have yet to be explored, with new forms of collaboration between disciplines.

That is why we prefer an approach that focuses on the process and where you don't need to specify the research activities in detail, as you do with a normal application. Another advantage of the random draw is that you exclude all forms of unconscious bias. The process is more inclusive and fairer.'

Seven teams got their grants and three lost out. But even the losers are enthusiastic about the lottery method, says Lamain. The winning interdisciplinary projects include collaborations on water security, chronic pain, the tight labour market and cohabitation of humans and animals. ss

[You win some & you lose some]

A failed experiment, an error in your model, a rejected article: in academia such things tend to be labelled failures. And do we talk about them? No way! But in this feature, WUR co-workers do just that. Because failures are useful. In this instalment, we hear from Iris van Damme, a PhD student in the Department of Human Nutrition and Health.

Text Milou van der Horst • Illustration Stijn Schreven

‘The unique thing about my PhD research was that there was no research question when I started. I enjoyed the freedom that gave me, but it also took time. I wanted to develop better dietary guidelines for people with type 2 diabetes, but there are already a lot of publications on that subject. What was innovative was that we conducted a randomized control trial, in which we tracked

‘I had to go back to the drawing board even though I’d been at it for a year’

people for more than a year. But it was difficult to decide on the control group. You are not going to deliberately put people on an unhealthy diet. I wanted patients and healthcare professionals to be involved in the research design, but it took a long time to arrange that. Due to time pressure, I started writing up the research plan in advance. I should not have done that, because when I had everything on paper, both patients and dieticians doubted whether

my research group was different enough to my control group. I had to go back to the drawing board, even though I’d already been at it for a year.

But I went on holiday and managed to get some distance from it all. At the same time, the time pressure galvanized me into action. I came up with a new focus: increasing the fibre intake of the intervention group. But six months later, the Medical Ethics Review Committee cast doubt on the relevance. After that I was grumpy for a week. Then I sharpened my research question and the committee approved it. Much relieved, I could start doing the research after 18 months of preparation.

As a PhD student you are still allowed to learn, so I never really felt like I was failing. I learned to invest more time in getting the research question clear – whether or not by involving the target groups – before writing a research plan. And not to be afraid to ask for input early on. I now take that into account in my research and when I develop new research proposals.’



New AFSG director wants to strengthen links

The Agrotechnology and Food Sciences Group has a new director as of 15 January: Gerda Feunekes, who succeeds Sjoukje Heimovaara, now the President of the Executive Board. Feunekes wants to further develop the integration of the university and research sides.

As a researcher at Unilever, she worked on the reduction of the amount of salt in foodstuffs. Then she became director of the Netherlands Nutrition Centre, where she set up a European alliance of nutrition centres. ‘In my new role, I will continue to encourage the transfer of new scientific knowledge to practitioners in the interests of healthy, sustainable food.’

Unique

One of Feunekes’s priorities for AFSG is to bolster One Wageningen – the integration of the university and research arms. ‘Wageningen is unique in having both university groups and the research side,’ says Feunekes. ‘We have also integrated

‘It is important for us to know what our colleagues are doing’

the social sciences in their entirety.’ In her opinion, this unique position gives WUR a responsibility to help

find solutions to the problems facing the world, such as climate change and hunger. ‘It is important for us to identify crosslinks, know what our colleagues are doing and where we could generate synergy — I want to optimize that. We could learn a lot from one another in areas where disciplines overlap or complement one another.’

The new director also believes Wageningen could have a stronger image. ‘We do a lot of good things but I think we could unlock more opportunities.’ As she is only in her second week, she says it is too soon to go into details about the opportunities she sees. ‘Of course I have a lot of ideas, but I need to check them internally first. Ask me in 100 days’ time.’ ss



Photo Unsplash/Jeremy Perkins

Flea collars pollute the water

Far-reaching restrictions have been placed on the use of the crop protection agent imidacloprid in agriculture. However, this 'bee poison' still gets into the environment via products such as flea collars for dogs and cats. This has been shown in a study headed by WUR eco-toxicologist Ivo Roessink.

Roessink and his colleagues found nine dog-owners prepared to collect hairs and urine from their pets for chemical analysis. The researchers tested the samples for the presence of four substances, including imidacloprid and fipronil. The substances

'We need to apply the same rules for veterinary medicine as for agriculture'

used to treat the dogs were found in the hairs or urine. But so were substances that the dogs were not treated with.

'That was an eye-opener,' says Roessink. 'In some dogs we saw substances the owners had not used. For example, we found imidacloprid in the hairs of all the dogs whereas only one

dog had been treated with it.' Mistakes in the analysis can be ruled out. 'So the conclusion is that the dogs must have picked up the substances in some other way.'

It is not clear how the dogs picked up the substances. 'This is an additional finding; it was not part of the original research question. But the most likely explanation is that the substances are passed from dog to dog when greeting one another and in play. In other words, direct physical contact. They might have picked the substances up in kennels, but we couldn't check that.'

Swimming

Roessink also let three of the dogs swim in water one after another to test whether the substances end up in the water. Those findings were possibly even more concerning. After only three dogs, the concentrations of some substances in the water already exceeded the quality norms for surface water.

'This is just a bath tub though,' says Roessink. 'In practice the volumes of water are much greater and the concentration is diluted. But this does show substances come off the dogs

and end up in the water. In small, self-contained volumes of water used by a lot of dogs, it could get quite worrying quite quickly.'

Grooming salon

However, Roessink does not see dogs swimming as the biggest problem. That is washing the dog, whether at home or in a dog grooming salon. 'The bathwater goes via the sewer system to the water treatment plant. All those substances accumulate there. The effluent — the water that leaves the treatment plants — is known to have concentration values above the norm. That polluted water is unlikely to come from agriculture.'

Roessink advocates stricter rules. 'We have been doing so much to phase out the use of substances such as imidacloprid, and now it is ending up in the environment anyway through the back door. Strict safety procedures apply for use in agriculture but not for the use of the same compounds in veterinary medicine. We need to apply consistent rules.' RK

THE PROPOSITION

For PhD candidates, their thesis propositions are an opportunity to publicly express their professional and personal convictions about science and society. In this feature they explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time, a proposition from Jasper Lamers who received his PhD in Plant Physiology on 13 January.



'Good birders make good scientists'

'While I was doing my PhD research, I went out birdwatching every weekend, preferably on both Saturday and Sunday. During the week, I set an alarm so I could go out into the water meadows before work. For me, being good at birding comes down to being able to identify something special. That is not just a matter of chance. There are four traits that birders have which come in handy in science too. Firstly, you need to have a good memory: good birders know all the bird calls by heart.

Secondly, you need perseverance. You have to go out looking a lot, and you often won't see anything. Sometimes you will, in which case you are lucky. You also need to recognize patterns, which is the third essential skill. You have to know where to look and what species to expect in a particular habitat. And if there are

10,000 birds there, you have to be able to pick out the one anomalous one. Finally, you have to document your observations well, because if you find something rare, you'll want to be able to prove it.

I myself identified a bird that's rare in the region: the Eurasian wryneck, a well-camouflaged woodpecker. I was out looking for another species, a black redstart. Suddenly there was the wryneck in a tree. It was sheer coincidence.

For my research, I made large datasets of the salt stress responses of plants, in order to identify sodium-specific responses. It helped that I was good at remembering the names of genes: I could quickly connect the genes with the literature and find out which process they were involved in. That could come from my birding, or vice versa. It's a chicken-or-egg situation.' ss

Long-term parkers, SAVE your bike!

February | August

All long-term parked bicycles will be marked with a ribbon.

March | September

Long-term parked bicycles will be labelled on 1 March / 1 September and collected on 1 April / 1 October.

April | October

WARNING: all bicycles with a label will be disposed of on 1 May / 1 November.

The bicycles will be sent to a recycle company, to make sure they get a second chance.

Twice a year long-term parked bicycles are collected to keep them from turning into wrecks.

A clean campus starts with you



MCB - 51403 : Commodity Futures & Options Markets

Always wondered about what is happening at the trading floor of exchanges like the ones in Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfurt, London and Chicago? Wondered about how (agribusiness) companies manage their risks and improve their financial performance using commodity futures and options markets? Wondered about how it would be if you were trading commodity futures in Amsterdam, Chicago, London, Frankfurt and Paris?

The *Marketing & Consumer Behavior Group* organizes a unique course that will introduce students to commodity futures and options markets. Students will develop an understanding of the markets and how they work, gain knowledge about the theory behind futures and options markets, identify their economic functions, and develop an analytical capability to evaluate their economic usefulness. This course is taught by Prof. dr ir Joost M.E. Pennings (*Marketing & Consumer Behavior Group*, Wageningen University). There are only 40 seats available. If you are interested in taking this course (3 Credits) please register in Osiris or contact Ellen Vossen, e-mail: Ellen.Vossen@wur.nl, tel. 0317-483385. Lecturers are on Fridays in period 5, one day a week, please check schedule in TimeEdit for time and location. Prerequisites: None.

Fake security

My e-bike was stolen at Ede-Wageningen station. Damn! I bought it last year with Optare credit using my leave days. It was in the secure bike shed on the north side of the station on a Sunday afternoon. That bike shed inspires confidence. You have to use your NS card to enter through an electronic gate. And there are signs: 'For your safety and that of your bicycle, this parking is monitored with CCTV 24 hours a day.'

But now I know what that means. It means that although there are cameras, no one is watching them.

'The worst of it is feeling such an idiot because I thought the bike shed was safe'

In fact, no one except the police is even allowed to look at those images. And the police don't look at those six hours of footage. 'You don't think we have the staffing to do that, do you? We have to set priorities.' And at NS, you don't get much beyond the call centre, which doesn't know anything about it.

In short, this is lucrative business for bicycle thieves. Gullible travellers like me park their expensive bikes there in the belief that they are safe. And then gangs of thieves can go

about their business unhindered because, after all, there is no one there. Within the safe walls of the shed, they can liberate one pricy bike after another using a bolt cutter or an angle grinder, and load them into their van, and no one will bat an eyelid.

If only I had looked on social media a bit more often. Because they are full of similar stories, all from Ede-Wageningen station. The regional paper *De Gelderlander* has already devoted an article to it, with a video of a woman who had exactly the same thing happen to her. The person at the bike shop in Wageningen where I bought my bike also hits the roof when I tell my story, because I am 'already the third one this week', and it is only Wednesday.

The worst of it is not the loss of my bike, or even all the hassle. It is feeling such as idiot because I genuinely thought that bike shed was safe. This feeling brings out the worst in me. I now want to stand guard at Ede-Wageningen station and punch the thieves in the face. 'Don't do that,' say the police, 'because you'll be liable to prosecution.'

Sjoukje Osinga (55) is a university lecturer in Information Technology. She sings alto in the Wageningen chamber choir Musica Vocale, has three sons at university and enjoys bird-watching in the Binnenveldse Hooilanden with her husband.



Sjoukje Osinga

BEWARE, SCAMMERS AT WORK

Students looking for a room in Wageningen should be wary of scams. Foreign students are particularly vulnerable, according to a survey by *Resource*. Under time pressure, they sometimes pay for a non-existent room.



Text Ilja Bouwknegt

Every six months, another wave of new students comes to Wageningen, all needing a room. The pressure to find a room is especially great for international students: without a residential address, they can't register with the municipality or get a citizen service number – without which they can't access their bank accounts. Scammers exploit that pressure and get students to pay for rooms that don't exist.

'I think you are an easy target as a desperate exchange student,' says Mathilde Richard (21). She came to Wageningen this year as an Environmental Sciences exchange student and lost 1100 euros to a scammer when she was looking for somewhere to live. 'I felt terrible. How could I tell my mother about it?'

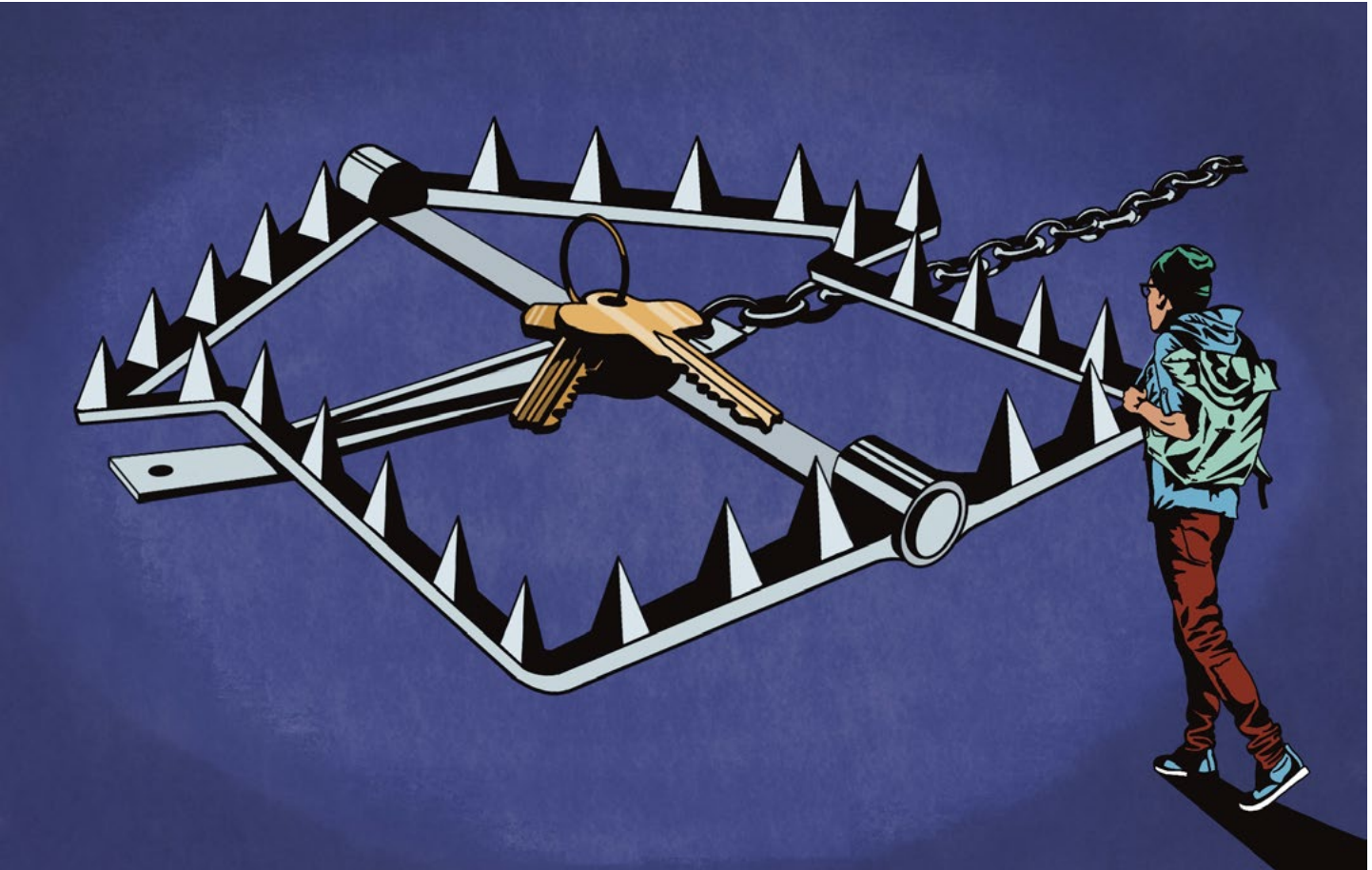
She had found the flat through an ad posted by a girl on Wageningen Student Plaza on Facebook. The description was detailed, the room was furnished and the price was reasonable. 'I was very interested so I said: okay, what should I do? Then I received a per-

fect-looking contract by email – which I was told to sign quickly, because the first one to sign it would get the room. The address existed; I had already cycled past it.' When Mathilde asked if she could have a look at the flat, the 'landlady' said she was about to become a grandmother and would not be back in Wageningen for another two days. But Mathilde could transfer the money meanwhile. 'That was a pity but I saw no other option. I sent the money: 500 euros deposit and 600 euros for the first month's rent.' The money would be in the landlady's bank account two days later. 'I emailed her to check if the money had arrived. She said yes, but that she had spoken to her lawyer, who had advised her to ask for the second month's rent as well. That was so weird that I immediately realized I'd been scammed.'

In a tent

Students regularly warn each other about scammers on Wageningen Student Plaza. 'I know you have to be careful with Facebook,' says Mathilde. 'But I was sleeping in a tent and had already enquired about maybe 100 rooms.' She is not the only one to have been

I HAD TO SIGN QUICKLY
BECAUSE THE FIRST TO
SIGN WOULD GET THE
ROOM



Illustrations Valerie Geelen

scammed when looking for a room in Wageningen this year. Students Emma and Lucas* both lost 1500 euros to a scammer. Like Mathilde, they were taken in by a girl on Facebook who passed them on to a landlord. Lucas hesitated from the start. 'I wasn't in the Netherlands and couldn't check it out. But the contract looked good and so did the photos.'

Close call

As soon as *Resource* put out a call on Student Plaza, 10 students came forward who had been in contact with scammers. They realized it was a scam in time, but for several of them it was a close call. 'I have had contact with three scammers,' says Isabella*. 'You don't notice anything at first, of course. Some of them even send a copy of their passport to gain your trust.' Several students report having been in contact with up to five different scammers in one day.

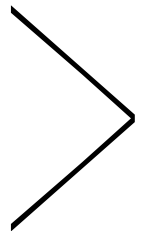
Ingrid Hijman, head of WUR's Student Service Centre, knows of a number of cases of room fraud in Wageningen. 'Most of them are exchange students. I'd say it does happen now and then, but not as much as in other cities.' The Exchange Team tries to warn incoming students about fraud too. 'Like: don't pay a deposit before

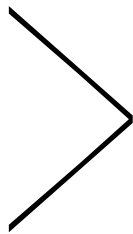
Response from Wageningen police force

Erwin Vissers, Wageningen police: 'In the past year, the police have received a few dozen reports of scams or fraud relating to offers of rooms in Wageningen. The actual number of incidents is probably much higher, as victims often don't report the fraud because they are ashamed or because the amount of money involved was small. We can't get a good picture of the problem without those reports, so our first tip is to always report the fraud. In addition, these scams mainly take place via adverts in Facebook groups so be on the look-out for that. A third tip: don't transfer money or a deposit to a foreign account without good reason!'

you get the room, and if it seems too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.' No rooms are reserved for exchange students coming to Wageningen, the way they are for longer-term international students. 'Every year there are lots of Wageningen students going abroad and subletting their rooms, so it usually works out fine,' says Hijman. It was harder this year, though, because of the more acute room shortage.

Besides Idealis and Facebook, the university also recommends HousingDesk Wageningen to students looking for accommodation. The staff of HousingDesk Wageningen check up on the landlord before posting the advertisement on their website. When students





are doubtful as to whether an ad they have seen is genuine, they can ask HousingDesk to check the room, says Suzanna from HousingDesk. 'You can do a reverse image search on Google of the photos accompanying an advert, to see if they are the same anywhere else on the internet. And sometimes I just get on my bike and go and ring the doorbell.' She also advises foreign students to have a video call with the provider.

Emotional impact

Mathilde, Emma and Lucas all realized they'd been scammed when the supposed landlord asked for a second and third month's rent for no clear reason. Emma also found the name of the girl who posted the ad on Facebook on a list of 12 scammers on the HousingDesk website. The emotional impact was big. 'It's a terrible feeling. Like, how could I have been so stupid?' says Emma. Mathilde agrees. 'I felt really, really stupid.' The three students reported the incident to the police. Mathilde and Lucas tried to do so in their home countries, but neither heard back. Emma has not yet heard back from the police in the Netherlands, but hopes they will contact her. 'I am still in contact with my scammer. I hope this way I can help the police catch him or her.'

Mathilde still sees the same type of scam on Facebook, where the landlord is away from Wageningen



SOME EVEN SEND A COPY OF THEIR PASSPORT TO GAIN YOUR TRUST'

for a couple of days but still gets the new tenant to pay up front. Lucas also notices that the girl who reeled him in is still active on Student Plaza. Mathilde only found a room after she'd been in Wageningen a month. 'Through a friend on WhatsApp. I think we paid too much, but at least I have a roof over my head.' ■

**Emma, Lucas and Isabelle are pseudonyms. The real names are known to the editors.*



Red Flags

How to recognize a scammer

- The scammer has an excuse why you cannot view the room or flat before you transfer the money. 'I am out of the country to visit my child' is a common one.
- They're in a hurry: the first person to sign the contract gets the room.
- The person posting the ad on Facebook has little or no information on their personal page.
- There are anomalous details in the use of language. These are often quickly noticed by a Dutch student, but are not always obvious to a foreign student. Besides spelling mistakes or a poor command of the (English) language, there are other characteristics. Suzanna from HousingDesk: 'It's strange if the advertisement states that the flat is "near a shopping mall", because we don't any of those in Wageningen.'
- The scammer asks for personal documents. A landlord is not allowed to ask for such documents, like a copy of your passport. The citizen service number is also not required for the rental agreement. Landlords can ask for personal information and your ID number, however.

First Engineering Doctorate cohort (EngD) gets going

Wageningen has a new type of degree programme with an emphasis on design. This two-year post-Master's programme is called Design for Agrifood & Ecological Systems. The first cohort of 10 students got started on Monday 23 January.

Femke Brouwer coordinates the new programme. 'Like a PhD, an EngD is a post-Master's programme. Whereas a PhD focuses on generating new scientific knowledge, EngD is about applying new and existing scientific knowledge to design technological solutions to practical problems. In other words, in a PhD you do fundamental research and in an EngD you use fundamental science to design something tangible to put into practice.'

The EngD is a two-year programme comprising a total of 120 ECTS: half is for training and education and the other half for developing a design that is also the final product (the equivalent of a PhD thesis). The design commissions come from practitioners, e.g. companies, government bodies, NGOs and educational and research institutes with practical problems to solve. Each EngD candidate has a supervisor in one of the chair groups.

Practical

'At the start of the programme, the focus is on education, so that EngD candidates gain the knowledge they need to execute their design later,' explains Brouwer. 'At this stage, they pick courses that match what they want to design. Someone who wants to make machines, for example, takes

a course on robotics, while someone who wants to design a computer model chooses a course on big data.' Gradually, the emphasis shifts towards design. Other technical universities have been offering programmes like this for some time, says Brouwer. 'Wageningen was the only university without one. In Eindhoven, for example, they have been doing things like this for 35 years in various forms.' The first cohort has now started the first of two compulsory courses: Principles of Design. 'That course was designed specifically for the EngD programme,' Brouwer says. The other compulsory subject is Grasping Sustainability, taught by Wageningen Institute for Environment and Climate Research and Graduate School for Production Ecology & Resource Conservation.

Broad scope

The name of the programme – Design for Agrifood & Ecological Systems – reflects its broad scope. 'In Eindhoven, they have a bunch of separate small programmes. We opted for one broad programme which you can come into from different directions, whether your background is in Environmental Sciences, Food Sciences, Social Sciences, Animal Sciences or Plant Sciences.' This makes the first 10 EngD candidates a



EngD-candidates during the introductions.
Photo Design for Agrifood & Ecological Systems

diverse group. 'There are young people who have just finished their Master's, as well as someone with over 25 years of

If you do a PhD, you write a thesis; on an EngD, you design something

work experience. And there are participants from Iran, France and Mexico as well as from the Netherlands.' LZ

Candidates for the programme can join it throughout the year. Any questions? Email engd@wur.nl

SEAWATER AND HYDROGEN

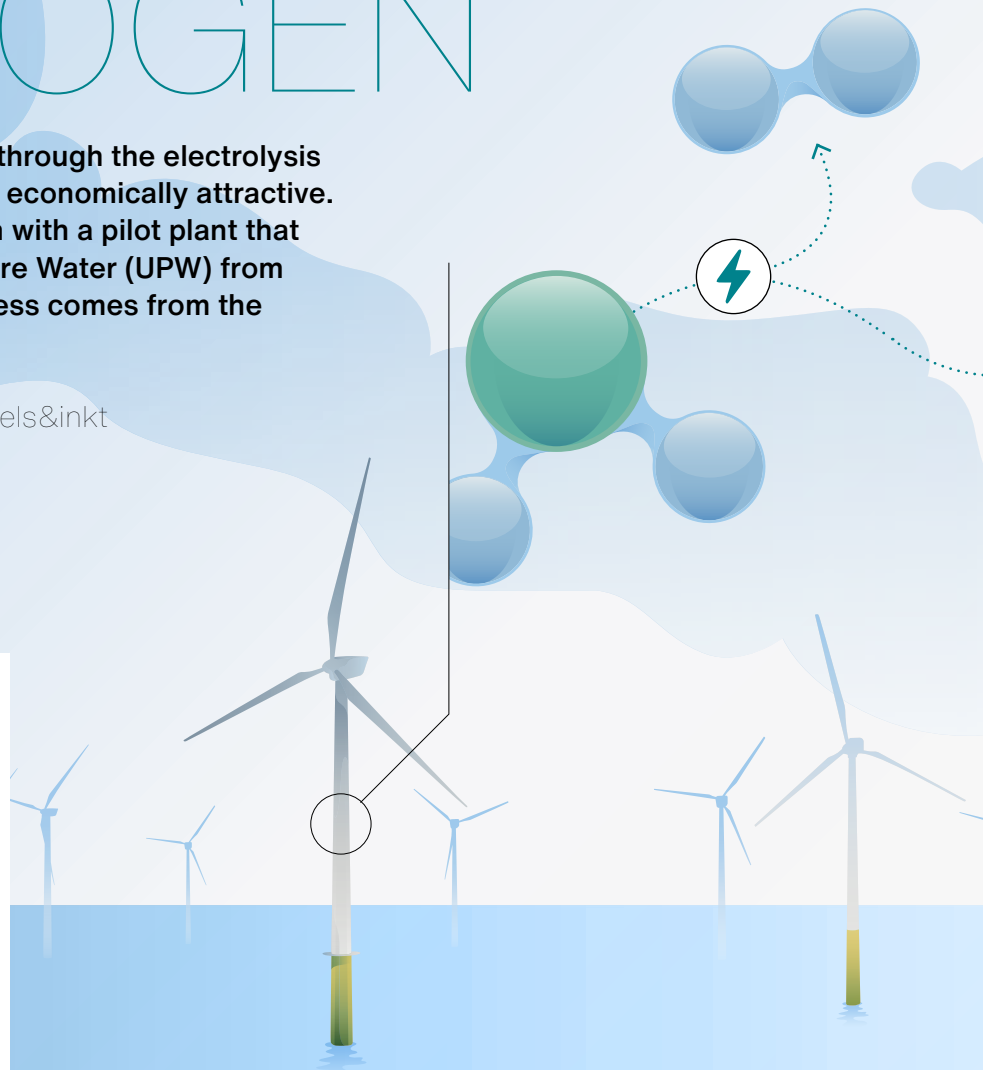
The production of green hydrogen through the electrolysis of seawater has become a lot more economically attractive. Wageningen scientists have proven with a pilot plant that it is possible to extract the Ultra-Pure Water (UPW) from seawater. The energy for that process comes from the residual heat of the electrolyser.

Text Marieke Enter | Infographic Pixels&inkt

HYDROGEN: WHY

In the electricity grid, supply and demand must be balanced. No electricity must be 'thrown out': that's the law of conservation of energy, $E_{in} = E_{out}$. So when offshore wind energy production exceeds demand, wind turbines have to be shut down – unless the energy surplus can be used for electrolysis. Then the electric current is used to split the compound water (H_2O) into oxygen O_2 , and hydrogen H_2 , an energy carrier. In the process, about 20-25% of the electricity is converted into heat, which is otherwise usually lost. Electrolysis requires Ultra-Pure Water (UPW), water without the carbonate and magnesium and calcium ions that are still present in demineralized water. The best-known methods for extracting UPW from seawater are reverse osmosis and membrane distillation.

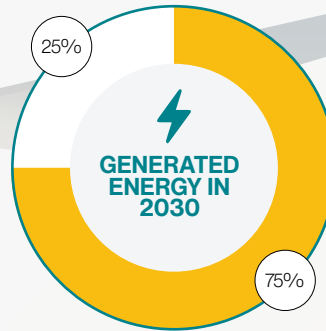
- Hydrogen (H_2)
- Oxygen (O_2)



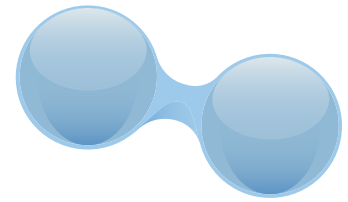
1 MEMBRANE DISTILLATION is a separation process in which two aqueous solutions at different temperatures are separated (by evaporation and condensation) via a microporous hydrophobic membrane that is gas-permeable. The success of the pilot plant brings several pluses with it:

- + No chemical pre-treatment of seawater required.
- + The salt content of the residual seawater is not much higher than seawater.
- + Energy-efficient: residual heat from the electrolyser is (pretty much) the only source of energy for the membrane distillation.
- + Ultra-Pure Water as valuable surplus yield: the residual heat from the electrolyser can be used to produce 3 times more UPW than is needed for electrolysis.

The Netherlands wants to generate 21 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030, which is about 75% of the country's electricity consumption.

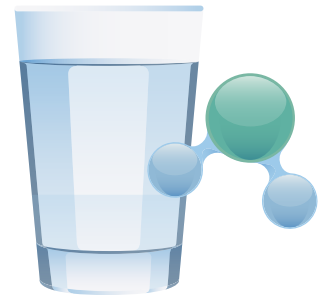
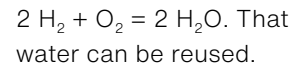


2 REVERSE OSMOSIS demineralizes seawater by pushing it through a very fine membrane under high pressure (around 80 bars). The chief disadvantages of this production method for Ultra-Pure Water are that the seawater requires pre-treatment with chemicals and the salinity of the 'residual water' is twice as high as that of seawater. Plus, it requires a lot of electricity.



HYDROGEN

(officially: dihydrogen) is an energy conductor. The energy is released by creating a controlled reaction with oxygen via a fuel cell, with water and heat as the only emissions:



SURPLUS YIELD

The principles of the trial can also be applied on-shore, and using 'surplus' solar energy. This could be particularly valuable in the summer, when solar farm production peaks at the same time as demand for freshwater. The surplus Ultra-Pure Water yield that is not needed for electrolysis can be used for horticulture or drinking water.

PROJECT SEA2H2

This project is part of Wageningen Food & Biobased Research's work on Water Technology for the Energy Transition. It is headed by Jolanda van Medevoort and is part of the Water Treatment and Technology programme led by Irma Steemers-Rijke.



Research and education combine well – as do carnivores and veggies

HOW A FIRST - YEAR COURSE LED TO AN ARTICLE

In only her first year as a Bachelor's student, Selke Riedel co-authored a scientific article in the journal *Consumption & Society*. And the data for the article came from interviews of 119 Wageningen students conducted by 60 first-years on the Eating, Customs and Health course. This showed students still eat together even when some eat meat and others are vegetarians.

Selke Riedel could not have guessed a year and a half ago that her name would now be appearing on a scientific publication as a co-author (see inset for the results of the study). Back in period 6 of 2021, she was a first-year undergraduate student of Health and Society taking the course Eating, Customs and Health. Every year students on that course learn how to conduct interviews, but this time teacher Esther Veen (now a lecturer in Urban Food Issues at Aeres Hogeschool in Almere) had a new idea: to combine education with research and, if that went well, publish a scientific article. Her fellow lecturer Anke de Vrieze (Rural Sociology) was involved in the interview technique practicals, and explains why they approached it differently this time: 'Esther thought it was a shame we never did anything with the data from the interviews. Besides, we thought it would motivate students if we used the interviews for real research.' That was certainly the case for student Selke Riedel: 'I thought it was an interesting idea that

this course could produce something special, something that other people could actually use.' It was a win-win situation for students and teachers, says De Vrieze: 'As teachers, we don't have much time for research, so you are looking for data. Esther and I set up the course in a way that enabled us to use the data if it turned out to be good enough.'

Wageningen kitchen

To find a suitable research question, the lecturers went to Yolie Michielsen, a PhD student at Consumption and Healthy Lifestyles. Her research focuses on vegetarianism and the way meat eaters react to it. De Vrieze: 'She studies what happens when meat eaters and non-meat eaters have a meal together.' The student kitchens of Wageningen lend themselves to that question, as many WUR students have consciously adopted particular eating habits: meat eaters, vegetarians, flexitarians and vegans are all well-represented here. So the research question was clear, but the lecturers faced a dilemma. 'Previ-



Text Stijn Schreven

ously, students got into groups to devise their own interview questions,' says De Vrieze. 'But if we want to use the data for research, we need everyone to work with the same questions so we can compare the interviews. But that takes away the learning experience of coming up with your own questions.' As a middle way, the students made a list of questions in groups, which the teachers then went through with them, distilling them to create the same questionnaire for everyone. 'That way we had student input and still got a standardized questionnaire,' says De Vrieze.

'WHO GETS A CHANCE LIKE THIS, TO CO-WRITE AN ARTICLE AS A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT?'



The study shows that Wageningen students avoid conflicts about being meat eaters or vegetarian at the table but use jokes to make it easier to talk about their own choices and those of others. Pictured are students in a student room on Haarweg. ♦ Photo Sarah Scheid

Each student taking the course interviewed one meat eater living among vegetarians and one vegetarian among meat eaters. Beforehand, they practised interview techniques by interviewing each other and learning how to pursue a line of questioning. In total, each group collected eight interviews, which they shared with another group. With the data from those 16 interviews, the groups each wrote their own report. Those reports and the data underpinning them were then sent to the teacher.

Student co-author

At that point, the course was over and the scientific research could begin. De Vrieze: 'Esther compiled the data and decided that there was enough material to write an article about it. Then we asked students if they wanted to be co-authors.'

Riedel jumped at the opportunity: 'I'm going for it,' she thought. 'Who gets a chance like this, to co-write an article as a student in your first year – something that only teachers and real researchers normally do? I saw it as a valuable learning opportunity.' In the autumn of 2021,

Riedel helped analyse the interviews to identify trends and exceptions. That took her a couple of weekends. She also participated in all the online meetings with the researchers and teachers and

co-wrote the results section of the manuscript. She looks back on it now, a year and a half later. 'I gained a lot of respect for the authors of the articles you have to read for every course. Now I know how much time goes into it. I found it really interesting.' ■

Humour keeps things amicable

'This research reveals new trends: a vegetarian diet is becoming increasingly normal and is accepted as a personal choice,' says Hans Dagevos, a consumption sociologist at Wageningen Economic Research. 'In short, plant-based is fine.' Dagevos joined the team at the request of Esther Veen, then a lecturer at WUR, to link the study with the scientific literature. As diets become more individualized in the West, some experts predict that shared meals will become a thing of the past. The Wageningen students show that this is not necessarily so, says Dagevos: 'They find ways of eating together in spite of their different diets.' For example, by cooking vegetarian for everyone when a vegetarian is joining in, or cooking both a meat-based and a vegetarian version of the main course.

Students also appear to be tolerant of housemates with different diets. 'They respect each other's personal choice to eat meat or not,' says the sociologist. Instead of moralizing about it, they use humour. 'They avoid conflict at the table, but use jokes to make it easier to talk about their own choices and those of others.' Although the interviews are limited to the WUR bubble, the research paints an optimistic picture of the future, according to the scientists.

Never write again

ChatGPT allows students to automatically generate texts that are indistinguishable from real ones in no time. Will this make writing assignments a thing of the past?



Text Roelof Kleis

When assessment specialist Jolanda Soeting was confronted with ChatGPT late last year, her first reaction was certainly not ‘Oh help!’ ‘I saw a few examples of exam questions generated by the program. Hey, I thought, that could be of interest for help in writing a good model answer. I shared it with our team of assessment specialists straightaway.’ But lecturer and researcher in Socially Responsible Innovation Auke Pols did immediately see trouble ahead. ‘I am also on the Social Sciences examination board and I did a degree in artificial intelligence. I quickly realized that ChatGPT could be misused for plagiarism purposes. Existing tools such as Turnitin, which WUR uses, cannot currently detect its use. For some kinds of writing assignments, that means you can’t carry on doing things in the same

way. Gone are the days when you could send a student home to write an essay, trusting that they won’t get ChatGPT to do it.’

Not plagiarism

ChatGPT is a (so far) free online chatbot that can answer questions and write essays. The text generator was launched late last year by Open AI, an artificial intelligence development company. The program creates texts that seem stunningly good at first glance. There are a few examples on these pages. ‘ChatGPT is able to generate a fluent and coherent story out of large amounts of text,’ Pols explains. ‘It can be either academic or narrative in style. The

program combines information from a lot of sources, without quoting them verbatim.’ That’s an important point: ChatGPT generates new texts, and plagiarism detectors like Turnitin are powerless in the face of it.

Pols says he has no evidence yet of WUR students using ChatGPT. ‘But I can’t imagine they’re not trying it out,’ says Soeting. ‘Incidentally, I think it is less of an issue in higher education than in secondary education. We have more scope

Question: Is ChatGPT plagiarism?

ChatGPT’s answer (unedited):
No, ChatGPT is not plagiarism. Plagiarism is the unauthorized use or reproduction of another’s work without giving credit or permission. ChatGPT is a computer program that has been trained on a large amount of text, but it is not a copy of someone’s work. It uses the information it has learned to respond to questions and prompts that are submitted, but it is not a copy of someone’s work.



Just as some programs generate text, there are others that generate images. Like the open AI program that created this realistic and original 'photo' based on the input 'students walking on Wageningse berg with river down below'.

'It makes more sense to teach students how to use ChatGPT properly and responsibly'

for appealing to the students' academic principles.' A small poll on Resource's Instagram gives us a glimpse of the reality. A quarter of the respondents say they use ChatGPT 'sometimes' or 'constantly'. And not just students, PhD

candidates as well. Three quarters say they rely on their own writing skills. That seems wise. After all, ChatGPT can't do everything yet. It can't, for instance, properly reference the sources of its text. Soeting: 'It does give references, but a lot of them are made up. That's why ChatGPT is sometimes called a bullshit generator.' 'That is because the program can't differentiate between what is true and what is not,' Pols adds. 'It is based on information found on the internet. It can't reflect on its writing process either. You can ask a student how they created an essay and what stages their thinking went through. ChatGPT doesn't have a clue about that. Nor is there any personal reflection, because the program doesn't know the context of the question or assignment. And the program tends to beat about the bush when it doesn't have an answer.

Task:

Describe WUR in 100 words

ChatGPT's answer (unedited): Wageningen University & Research (WUR) is a leading international university in the Netherlands that focuses on the connection between food, feed, health, and the environment. The university has a strong reputation in the fields of life sciences and natural resources, and offers undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs in these areas. WUR also conducts research in collaboration with industry, government and non-profit organizations. The university also has a strong international focus, with students and researchers from all over the world. WUR is renowned for its research in the field of sustainable food production, with a focus on reducing the environmental impact of agriculture.





Then again, students can do that too when they don't know what to write.'

Don't ban it

So in view of these limitations, is ChatGPT an opportunity or a threat? Soeting created a discussion page on that question on the Education Support Centre's intranet. Personally, she sees the threats, but also the opportunities. 'Those threats are not new. I think we underestimate the extent to which ghost writing is already going on. ChatGPT makes it easier to avoid doing your own work. But the program can also be like an additional fellow student: someone you can always go to

with a question when a lecturer doesn't have time.'

On one point, both are adamant: banning ChatGPT won't help. Soeting: 'A ban is only any use if you can enforce it. It makes more sense to teach students how to use ChatGPT properly and responsibly. But this development is still in its infancy.' What responsible use looks like is still a grey area, Pols says. 'And actually that's the case even without ChatGPT. The exam board sometimes comes across text without

a source reference that you think has been copied, even if it's been paraphrased. At what point do you say: now that's plagiarism?' 'True,' says Soeting. 'There is now software that modifies texts so they don't look copied. In which case, I'd rather they used ChatGPT properly.'

It all starts with awareness, Pols believes. 'What can ChatGPT do and what can't it do? I think that's our starting point for setting conditions for its use and thinking about what steps we can reasonably take to stop students abusing it.' ■

'That's why ChatGPT is sometimes called a bullshit generator'

Task:

Write a sonnet for Sjoukje Heimovaara, WUR president

ChatGPT's answer (unedited):

*A leader strong and full of grace,
With knowledge deep and vast,
She guides the future of this place,
With vision that will last.*

*Sjoukje Heimovaara, head of WUR,
A force to be reckoned with,
Her determination, clear and pure,
A beacon for us to follow, forthwith.*

*She leads with passion, and with drive,
To make the world a better place,
With research, that will help thrive,
And give the future a brighter face.*

*So here's a sonnet for Sjoukje true,
A leader, scholar, and visionary too.*

Question:

Do humans have free will?

ChatGPT's answer (unedited):

The question of whether humans have free will is an ongoing debate in philosophy. Some philosophers believe that humans have free will and that they can make choices that are not determined by circumstances or prior events. Other philosophers believe that everything that humans do, including their choices, is determined by physical or natural laws, and that the human will is not truly free. This debate is still ongoing and there is no consensus.

Class with the Teacher of the Year

A NEW VIEW OF THE WORLD AND OF YOURSELF

'As a teacher, Birgit does much more than terrific work. What she does is nothing less than a labour of love'. Of all the fine words students spoke about Teacher of the Year Birgit Boogaard, these were perhaps the most touching. *Resource* sat in on the final lecture of her now famous African Philosophy course – and felt that love too. Text and Photos Marieke Enter

When Boogaard was honoured with the accolade Teacher of the Year earlier this academic year, she praised her students 'for their courage to be open to critical self-reflection and to other worldviews'. She also revealed that she saw the award as a token of appreciation 'for her creative and liberating teaching methods'. Intriguing words, so *Resource* dropped in on the last lecture of African Philosophy, one of Boogaard's most important courses.

At the start of the class, the 70-odd chairs are still neatly facing the screen while African pop music comes out of the speakers. 'From a playlist that the students and the teaching team constantly add to during the

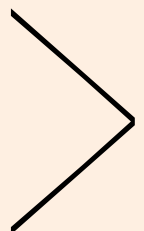
course,' Boogaard explains. Not just because of the fun of exchanging music tips, but also to underline that African philosophy is not primarily about written sources. 'In this field, oral and musical traditions are at least as influential,' she clarifies. So there's the first creative teaching method for *Resource* to tick on the list: making playlists together.

Different view

This is the fifth time Boogaard has taught this course. So it's an anniversary edition, but one she was a bit nervous about beforehand. Because, with the news spreading around the campus that African Philosophy was a great course, Boogaard suddenly no longer had a manageable 30 to 35 students to teach, but double that number – and from as many as 26 different degree programmes. With such a large group, can she still create the right, intimate setting for the sometimes life-changing personal reflections that make the course so special?

Yes she can, from what *Resource* sees at this final lecture – and that is confirmed wholeheartedly by the students. 'My worldview has changed quite a bit because of this course,' says Master's student of Organic Agriculture

'ACTUALLY, EVERYONE AT WUR SHOULD TAKE THIS COURSE'



Myriam de Vroome. ‘In part, that has to do with the subject matter. But it definitely also has to do with Birgit’s way of doing things. She puts a lot of emotion into her teaching. As does Pius.’

Co-teacher Pius Mosima is a lecturer in intercultural philosophy at the University of Bamenda (Cameroon) and is regularly in the Netherlands because of his close research ties with VU University Amsterdam, among others. And above all, he has known Boogaard for years. He can articulate African perspectives in unforgettable ways. During this class, for instance, he repeatedly emphasizes that knowledge and wisdom are more than your right brain. ‘Bodies too “know” certain things. Don’t underestimate what your body has to tell you,’ he tells the students.

Talking with your feet

Boogaard brings that physicality into play later too, with an evaluation in which the chairs are pushed aside and students talk with their feet. This is how it works: Boogaard makes statements and the students

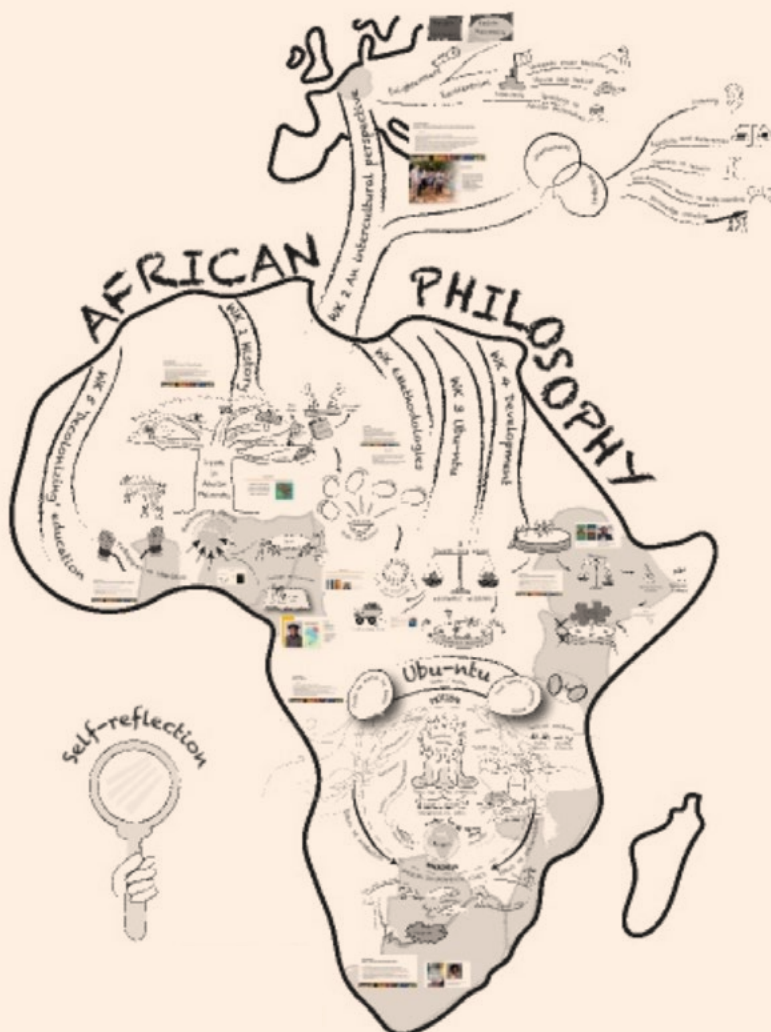
‘BIRGIT PUTS A LOT OF EMOTION INTO HER TEACHING’

express their responses through the direction they move in – and unconsciously also through the way they move: a decisive stride tells a different story than a few hesitant steps. Boogaard observes, occasionally asks for an explanation, and draws parallels with the material, together with Mosima. ‘No, an elder does not necessarily have the last word. Their main task is to inspire new thoughts and insights within a group. Which is exactly what Birgit does,’ says Mosima in response to a question about the dynamics of African decision-making.

There are quite a few nice asides like that between Boogaard and Mosima. The students enjoy their interaction immensely, as becomes clear when Boogaard deals with questions and feedback about the course content. One of the questions submitted reads: do Birgit and Pius ever disagree on anything? Besides a roar of laughter, this gets a perfectly serious answer: yes, indeed they do – on a semantic issue related to modern African history, for example. Boogaard and Mosima disagree on whether the word ‘decolonization’ is more apt, or the word ‘liberation’. No trivial matter, philosophically, they stress, because word choices define thought frames.

Understanding what you’re looking at

In this last class, Boogaard hands the students an A3 sheet with a large illustration, as a kind of visual summary of the past six weeks. She made and animated the illustration herself, to help her switch easily between details and the bigger picture during classes, without students losing the thread. ‘If there’s something in the illustration that you can’t place, you should pipe up now,’ Boogaard warns. No need, the students quite understand what they are looking at: six weeks of African Philosophy summed up in one slide. From the history and trends in African philosophy and a wake-up call about an overly Eurocentric view in the first classes, to an exploration of Ubuntu and the ethical principle of *Motho ke motho*





Teacher of the Year Birgit Bogaard (top right) and co-teacher Pius Mosima (top left) with students during the final lecture of the African Philosophy course.

ka batho (= a human being is a human being thanks to other people) in the later sessions. Just the final assignment to go, and the course is over. Remarkably, although the language of instruction is English, Boogaard asks the students to write a part of the final assignment in their mother tongue. 'In no language do you formulate things as precisely as the language you grew up with. And accuracy is important in a philosophical essay and for learning to understand your own background and thought frames,' says Boogaard by way of clarification.

Eyes opened

Boogaard winds up the class by taking the time to look back at the hopes and expectations with which the students started this course six weeks earlier. She is showered with compliments. Almost every student praises the new perspectives on the world and the different view of yourself kindled by this course – 'actually, everyone at WUR should take it'. Finally, Boogaard expresses her gratitude to her African co-lecturer and guest lecturers, who included leading South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose ('a dream come true'). And she doesn't forget her students. They finish up by listening to one last piece of music: Sawubona, 'I see you'. Students and teachers say goodbye and embrace each other warmly. Mosima has the last word: 'Spiritually we will stay connected.' ■

Orchestrated to the minute

'Extremely well prepared, but not in the way you might expect,' says co-teacher Pius Mosima about Boogaard's unusual teaching approach. Asked about this, Boogaard shows a plan outlining for each lecture precisely when she uses which exercises and techniques to work towards which learning objective. 'Students don't notice it, but these classes are orchestrated almost to the minute,' she agrees. Up to 50 per cent of her course preparation consists of designing the learning process, she reckons. 'That is quite different from what is common in academic teaching, with 80 per cent of the planning going into the content.'

In her classes, the Teacher of the Year makes extensive use of so-called Liberating Structures, a series of working methods that maximize the potential of a group by making every group member feel welcome to contribute freely. 'For the teacher, that provides you with very good, instructive questions, because everyone is thinking along. Another plus is that it creates a safe learning environment, so that no one is afraid to reflect critically – even on themselves. That leads to wonderful, extraordinary group discussions in which opinions really differ, but in which everyone treats each other with absolute respect.' You can read more about this at liberatingstructures.com.

Interdisciplinary: how?

From buzzword to conviction

Interdisciplinarity always pushes the right buttons in grant applications, articles and strategic plans, but what does it mean in practice? *Resource* asked two researchers how they collaborate with other disciplines, what it takes and what they get out of it. Text Stijn Schreven

‘When I joined WUR 20 years ago, people tended to work in silos,’ says Rutgerd Boelens (Water Resources Management). ‘People did work on the same issues but in their own world, with its assumptions and methods, and with no integration.’ Boelens studies the interaction between water management, technological interventions and social justice. ‘What a dam does to a river is a complex question. It involves nature, fishers, farmers, local communities, culture, the economy and policy. If you want to understand the river, you’ve got to collaborate with people outside your field of expertise.’

Looking beyond your own field is important to ecologist Lisa Becking (Aquaculture and Fisheries) too. She leads the INREF project INREEF, which aims at a healthy balance with tourism in marine natural parks such as coral reefs. The project involves expertise from both the social sciences and the natural sciences, and from non-profit organizations (NGOs), local village leaders and policymakers. ‘A natural park is a socio-ecological system, connected both above and below the water,’ says Becking. ‘You won’t arrive at a complete solution

starting from a single discipline. You only see part of the picture and the partial solution that leads to may even be harmful.’ Many Wageningen topics – like the transition to sustainable agriculture, or achieving healthy eating habits – need to be approached from several angles. It is not for nothing that the motto is ‘Finding answers together’. But how do you get beyond fine words?

New science

Truly interdisciplinary work means setting a number of preconditions, says Boelens. The first is to recognize that the different knowledge systems involved are of equal value. In his Riverhood (ERC) and River Commons (INREF) projects, Boelens works with indigenous and local groups, farmers, NGOs, governments and scientists, each with their own expertise. ‘Scientists sometimes look down on other forms of knowledge,’ says the researcher. ‘We make it a condition for cooperation that people are open to other forms of knowledge. To promote that, we organize training courses, discussions and continuous scientific self-reflection.’

Another requisite is that experts give up some of their own control, methods and comfort zone in the interests of integration with other disciplines, says Boelens. ‘After all, you are shaping a new science with new ways of thinking and researching.’

Dashboard

That integration does not materialize of its own accord. Becking and Boelens have devised systems for it. The PhD students in their projects are supervised by three or four supervisors from different disciplines, with at least one supervisor coming from the country where the research takes place. In Becking’s INREEF,

‘You won’t arrive at a complete solution starting from a single discipline’

for example, they have two supervisors from the natural sciences, and the third is an economist or sociologist. ‘Especially when drafting the research question, that person can keep a sharp eye on the cohesion across the various PhD projects.’

In terms of content, Becking’s project enforces integration through the ‘dashboard’: a control panel created by the researchers and other stakeholders for the management of marine parks. What happens to the reef when tourism increases due to more hotels? Where does the waste go? Building the dashboard together requires researchers and professionals in the field to keep talking to each other and combining their results, says Becking. Boelens’ projects look at rivers using four frames: the river as an eco-society, as a territory, as a legal entity and as a social movement. ‘These frames transcend the separate disciplines and require a common focus.’ The project partners also work together in four River Labs with the aim of finding local solutions to problems.

Film festival

Once the system is in place, it is time for participants to get to know each other. Becking prepared for an introductory month in Wageningen for the 14 PhD students from Indonesia and the Caribbean Netherlands. They come from widely varying professional backgrounds and bring their own experience from the field and their work for local NGOs or at universities. ‘As a team, we approached it a bit like course coordination, and it takes just as much time and commitment.’ After field trips, workshops and work on PhD proposals, the

month was wrapped up with a film festival of homemade video pitches. The group ate together a lot as well. Becking: ‘Sharing meals brings people together, it forms a bond.’ The month generated strong mutual trust and understanding, Becking observed. ‘There were lively discussions, with lots of energy and fun.’

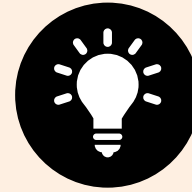
Long-term

Boelens too underlines the importance of taking the time to build mutual trust. In 2008, he set up the Water Justice Alliance: a group of organizations, universities and companies that research water rights together. ‘You don’t think in terms of four to five years but long-term.’ For each new project, he builds a network around established partners in the alliance, rather than seeking new partners each time.

If there is trust, an interdisciplinary project can make a world of difference. Boelens looks back on a project addressing water conflicts in the Andes. Local people and nature often get a raw deal, while large agricultural and mining companies just carry on regardless with groundwater extraction. ‘Our research explicitly sought to integrate science and the local knowledge of groups that went unheard, such as indigenous people, women and small farmers,’ he explains. Local water users learned new things about water rights from the scientists, and vice versa. ‘That makes it possible to resolve water conflicts more fairly.’ ■



PhD candidates on the Riverhood and River Commons projects discuss river restoration with families whose farms adjoin Geleenbeek River. ♦ Photo Rutgerd Boelens



WHEN YOU GROW UP

It's a big step from student life to working life, so a bit of preparation can't hurt. How do you go about it? Five tips from experts and people who've been through it.

Tekst Luuk Zegers and Julia van der Westhuyzen • Illustration Marly Hendricks

1

Know yourself

There's plenty you can ask yourself about your future career. What issue or theme do you want to work with? Would you prefer to work in your home country or abroad? For a start-up or a multinational, the government or an NGO? Or in academia?

Maybe you already know which way you want to go, thanks to some of your courses or internships, or your thesis. But many students have doubts about whether they even want to work in their field of study. Head of Student Career Services (SCS) Astrid van Noordenburg has good news for these students: you can still go different ways with your career. 'For many employers nowadays, it is not super important what someone has studied. They are more interested in your potential and motivation than in the right degree subject.'

She advises students who are not yet sure which direction they want to go to in come to the Career Day on Tuesday 7 February. 'There you can meet some 60 companies in a low-stakes way. Go along and see what energizes you.'

2

List your skills

Do you feel that other students are doing more than you? You are not the only one, says student career coach Elizabeth Oenema. 'Many students have a side job, do voluntary work or are on a committee. But when they compare themselves to others, they still get the feeling it's not enough. As a coach, I try to show them what they do well.' Oenema's tip: take a good look: analyse what experiences and skills you have. Where do your strengths lie, what are your weaknesses and in what areas do you want to grow? Melina (25) completed her Master's in Plant Sciences in the summer of 2022 and had a session with a career coach to identify her skills. 'It's useful for people who don't yet have experience in the field they want to work in. It helps you figure out what skills you have and how to communicate them well to potential employers.'

EMPLOYERS ARE MORE INTERESTED IN YOUR POTENTIAL AND MOTIVATION



‘FOR ME, A COACH WAS A GOOD INVESTMENT’

3

Talk to your network

When Indonesian-born Aika Foppen graduated from Wageningen in 2015, it wasn't easy to find a job. Her own 'bumpy start' motivated her to help others on their way: she became a career coach. Some 30

per cent of her clients are WUR students. 'My approach depends on how qualified someone is, where they come from and what field they want to work in,' she says. For example, she is more likely to help Dutch students with salary negotiations and international students with knowledge about the Dutch labour market, communication skills and expectation management.

Foppen's tip: networking. Taking part in social activities and joining associations inside and outside WUR is a good start, but you can make it more focussed than that. 'Find people a bit older than you who are in the kind of post you aspire to and ask how they got there.'

Van Noordenburg also has a networking tip for students who already know what they want: 'Express it. The more people you tell, the better. Then if someone in your network hears about something in that area, they are more likely to come to you.'

4

Make use of the help on offer

Could you use some help with your career orientation? WUR's Student Career Services offers a range of free workshops, training courses and coaching. And they run a Career

Day twice a year at which you can do things like having a free professional LinkedIn photo taken, or getting help looking for suitable vacancies. Melina (from tip 2) will soon be getting a CV check done at Career Services. 'To check together whether my CV is tailored to the vacancies I want to respond to. You can do this by repeating words from the vacancy in your CV, for example.' Van Noordenburg also advises international students who want to work in the Netherlands to take the Social Dutch course. 'And mention that in your CV. Some Dutch employers are keen on you speaking the language.'

Career coaches (like Foppen, mentioned above) can be found outside WUR too, but they don't work for nothing, of course. Tom from Indonesia recently graduated in Organic Agriculture and engaged such an external coach. 'The SCS helped me with tips for events and CV checks, but I needed more personal guidance.' After several months of searching, he found a job of the kind he wanted with the help of his coach. 'For me, it was a good investment.'

5

Start early

Second-year Master's students are the main users of SCS services, Van Noordenburg says. That makes sense: the closer you get to graduating, the more you think about finding a job. But it can be smart to start earlier, Melina thinks. 'I missed out on some events such as lunches with potential employers because I signed up too late. Although you get to use SCS's services for some time after graduating*, I would have liked to get my bearings earlier.'

** Alumni are allowed to use SCS services for free for up to a year after graduation.*



THE SIDE JOB

You've got to make ends meet somehow. We can all borrow from Uncle Duo, but there are also students who earn money in unusual ways, like Roald Nooijens (24), a Master's student of Forest and Nature Conservation. As a 'draughtbuster', he calls on Wageningen residents to help them reduce their energy bills.

Text Steven Snijders

'I visit people in their homes. I bring all sorts of things with me, such as draught strips, insulating window foil, radiator foil, low-energy light bulbs and flaps for the inside of the letterbox. I install it all as well, and I provide advice along with material. The most important suggestion is of course: see if you are still comfortable with the thermostat

'This job takes me right out of my academic bubble'

one degree lower. And then: a sofa or curtains in front of the radiator prevent the heat from spreading, and then you'll set the thermostat higher than necessary. This project started with the slogan 'how low can you go?' It was already the case that any resident of Wageningen could request a visit from me or my colleagues. But now there is an energy crisis and the project has entered a second phase. Now I go door-to-door with the housing association. The more major interventions like wall insulation or fixing a crooked window frame have to be dealt with by the housing association. We concentrate on older streets and buildings where more vulnerable



Photo Joëlle Schokker

Roald saves energy

Who: Roald Nooijens (24)

What: 'Draughtbuster', or energy expert

Why? Roald wants a more equal society

Hourly wage: 29 euros per hour (gross), as energy expert

people live. There I am sometimes able to hand out more luxury items, such as a smart meter or an electric blanket. 'The city council noticed a growing gap between rich and poor and a group of residents that struggled to keep up with the energy transition. With this project, we want to counter inequality while making Wageningen greener and more environmentally friendly. I am eager to help create a more equal society. In my opinion, a lot of policy is a long way off what is needed. That big subsidy for electric cars, for example: that is no use to the families I visit. This job takes me right out of my academic bubble. I come across some harrowing cases. Houses that are one big mess and people screaming at each other. I encounter a lot of frustration with the authorities. But most of all, I meet with a lot of gratitude. People are very happy with the help we can give them.'

Do you have an unusual side job or know someone else who does? Send an email to steven.snijders@wur.nl

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WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent



IN MEMORIAM

SHREYA NAIR

Among Food Tech students of WUR there was Shreya Nair, 18 years young. Her courage, brilliance and immaculate vibes led her here to Wageningen, where we fell in love with the stunning, curly-haired girl-boss. Shreya's was a beautiful presence that brought us comfort: all fatigue would evaporate in the face of her infectious joy. Shreya was our everything.

It is unfortunate we can no longer tell her how much we love her. Shreya bid her farewell to our world on Thursday, 19 January in a cruel and unexpected accident.

She left behind her loving parents, her cool brother and her dear friends. She left

behind her dreams, her youth and so many plans. No one is there to wait for us each afternoon, no one is there to laugh or cry with us – nothing will fill the void she left behind. If you know Shreya, please think about her in these bitter hours. If you haven't met our stunning lady, please think of your loved ones and hug them a bit tighter today.

'The girl with pretty curls in front of me, might you be Shreya?'

We love you!

*Her friends from the Food
Technology programme*

Colophon

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CARS OUT, PRIVATE JETS IN

WUR wants to deal with the traffic problem around the campus by introducing parking charges. The proceeds will finance the construction of a small runway.

‘WUR is known as a green university and regularly wins awards for that,’ explains spokesperson Dotty Prattle. ‘Then it makes sense to introduce parking charges to make staff and students think twice before coming by car.’ According to Prattle, parking will cost around 100 euros per day. ‘We are still thinking about the exact amount. It has to be a rate that puts you off a bit, even on a professor’s salary, so that people only come by car if there really is no alternative.’

With the parking revenue, WUR plans to build a runway for private jets, plus a small air traffic control tower and a helicopter pad. WUR hopes this will help it attract even more multinationals to the campus. ‘As the best university in our field, a lot of large corporates are eager to influence our research agenda. But our business facilities and accessibility could be better. The traffic jams are a disaster if you have to get from Schiphol Airport to the campus by car.’

The location of the helipad and landing strip has not yet been decided, says Prattle. The football fields near the Bongerd were favoured at first, but the field between Orion, Forum and Atlas now seems a better option. Then the parked private jets and helicopters can be used for educational purposes as well. ‘Wageningen education is becoming increasingly activist. So this will provide a safe way for students to learn how to chain themselves to jets or block traffic flows.’

As with the education buildings, students and staff are allowed to contribute ideas on the name of the runway. Prattle: ‘I submitted a name myself: Volare.’

 Submissions can be sent to resource@wur.nl