

YOUR DEGREE AS YOUR JOB TICKET?

It's nice to go to university but with a recession in full swing the question of what you can do with your degree is more and more pressing. And can you start preparing for a successful career while you study? KLV, the Wageningen Alumni Network, keeps careful track of how Wageningen graduates fare on the job market. Here are five key facts.

1 Good prospects but recession noticeable

In the Netherlands at least, a degree still improves your job prospects. And Wageningen is no exception to the rule. Of Wageningen graduates in the academic year 2010/11, 85 percent were in paid employment within six months, just 2 percent below the national average. Yet the recession is definitely beginning to be reflected in the figures, says employment expert Silvia Blok of KLV. Three years ago it took the average Wageningen graduate 2.2 months to find a job; now it is taking 3.2 months. Women are finding jobs noticeably faster than men (in 3 months rather than 3.6).

2 Big differences between degree programmes

What you study makes quite a difference to your job prospects. For example: of all those completing the MSc in Food Technology in 2011, 92 percent had landed a job within three months. For the MSc in Landscape, Architecture & Planning, however, the proportion did not rise about 45 percent. International Development also scored a mere 51 percent, whereas Biotechnology (85 percent), Food Safety (76 percent) and International Land & Water Management (75 percent) were all well above average. Nevertheless, Silvia Blok of KLV advises against basing your choice on these statistics alone. 'They can change a lot from one year to the next. Five years ago, for instance, Food Technology was not scoring very highly at all. So she still thinks it is best to let your interests guide your choice of degree.

3 Active students have a headstart

Many students enhance their university experience with non-compulsory activities such as an internship abroad, serving on a student organization board, or getting some relevant work experience. Wageningen students are more active in these areas than others: 87 percent can put useful extra-curricular activities on their CVs when they graduate, as opposed to a national average of 78 percent. They particularly stand out for the number of internships abroad: 44 percent (the national average being 20 percent!) A smart move, it seems, since a minimum of one of these activities raises your chance of work by three to five percent. 'Relevant work experience' scores the highest, followed by 'an internship' and then 'board experience' and 'studying abroad'. Of those who did none of these things, only 79 percent got paid jobs.



The red line is 2008, the blue line is 2011. It is clearly getting more difficult for graduates to find a job.

4 The job market is going global

The chances of a Wageningen graduate living and working abroad later are fairly high. Of the Dutch graduates of 2010/11, 13 percent now live and work elsewhere in the world. Foreign graduates increasingly often stay on in the Netherlands to work: almost twice as many, at 25 percent. The job market for Dutch graduates hoping to work in development aid is getting tighter as more and more posts are being filled by local experts, says Silvia Blok. On the other hand, the Dutch market seems to offer more scope to foreign graduates, especially in a few specific sectors such as the food industry and the plant breeding sector.

5 More academic careers

In the old days a university was intended as a preparation for an academic career. Since the nineteen seventies, however, more and more graduates have ended up in other jobs. Strikingly, this trend has been reverse in recent years. More graduates are opting to do a PhD, the gateway to a scientific career. And Wageningen is in the lead here, with more than a quarter (26 percent) of the class of 2010/11 going for a PhD, 6 percent up on three years earlier. The national figure was 14 percent, a rise of 4 percent. There is also a trend for more fresh graduates to seek work as researchers at a university or research institute. If you are aiming at a PhD, the advice on priorities during your student years is slightly different, says Silvia Blok. In this case your results are more important whereas extra-curricular activities such as board experience weigh less heavily when an application for a PhD place is being considered.  Rob Goossens