

Can research done for the government be trusted?

There is a checklist now. Put it through the 'bullshit detector'. | p.8 |

Do we want Bachelor's degrees in English?

'Dutch students will get a shock if they are thrown in the deep end.' | p.22 |

'Students just mow you down'

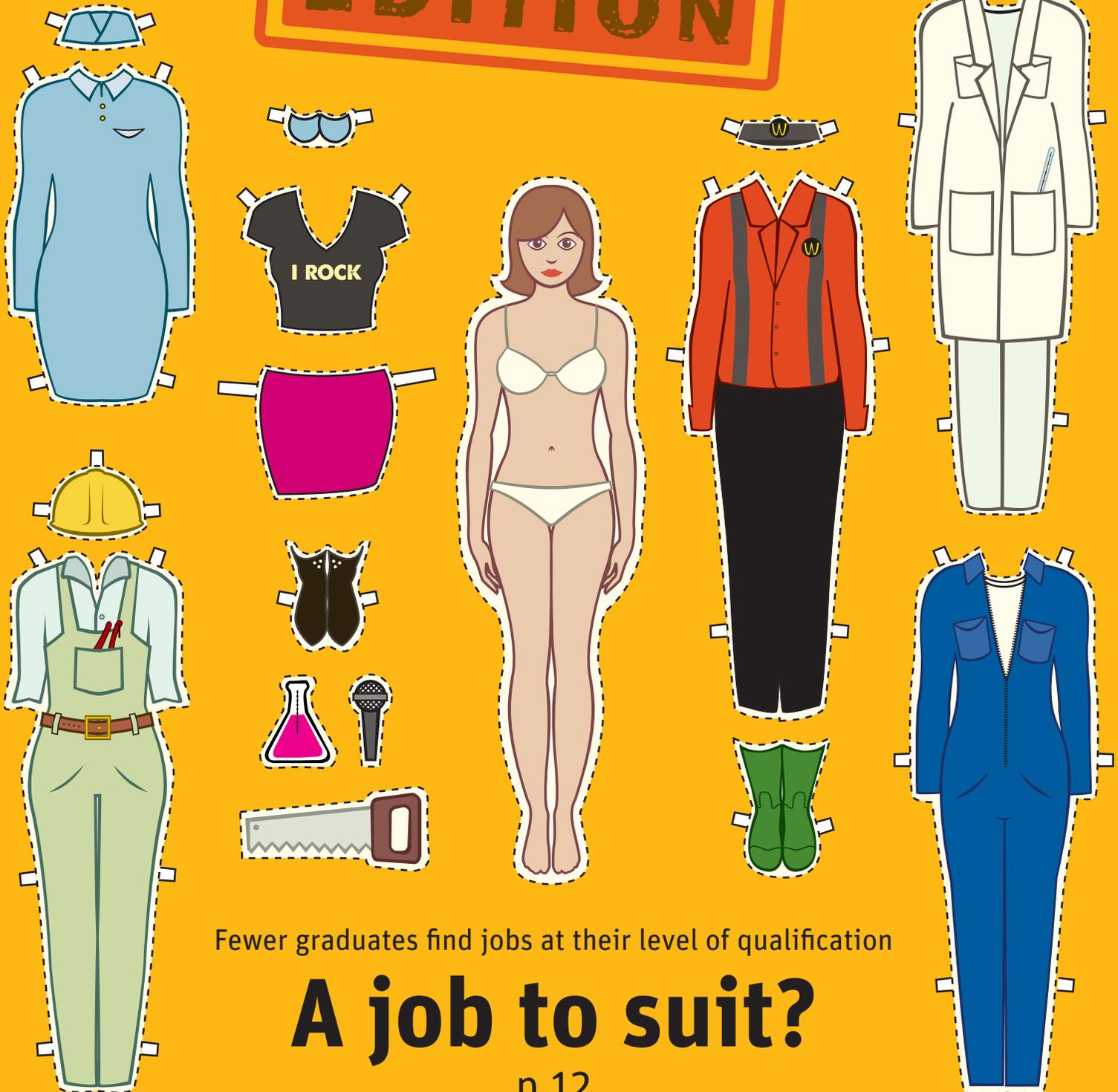
What's the solution: a bike tunnel, traffic signs, staggered class times? | p.25 |

RESOURCE [ENG]

For students and employees of Wageningen University

15 - 28 March 2013 - 7th Volume

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



Fewer graduates find jobs at their level of qualification

A job to suit?

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A graduate. WI

There is a recession on. The news is full of redundancies, budget cuts and contracts that are not renewed. But how badly is the economic crisis affecting fresh graduates? Is it impossible for them to find work or are their job prospects not as bad as they are made out to be?

text: Milou van der Horst / **photos:** Guy Ackermans

The job market is undeniably bleaker than it was a couple of years ago. But it is not as bad as we sometimes think, says Silvia Blok, an expert on the employment market at KLV Wageningen Alumni Network. She keeps track of how many graduates find a job and whether it matches their level of education.

Data from the questionnaire filled in by every departing graduate suggest that the crisis has had a limited impact so far. Of those who graduated in 2008, 57 percent had a job in the bag before leaving Wageningen University. In the same year, the fall of Lehman Brothers threw the financial world into disarray and in 2010 the debt cri-

sis broke out in Europe. Nevertheless, four years later in 2012, 55 percent of Wageningen graduates were still securing jobs – a drop of only 2 percent.

If we compare this with the crisis at the beginning of the nineteen nineties, the impact of the current crisis seems negligible. At that time the proportion of students who found a job straightaway was less than 40 percent. It crept up to 50 percent around the turn of the century. So 55 percent is not bad and you might even be tempted to conclude that Wageningen graduates are recession-proof.

EAGER TO WORK

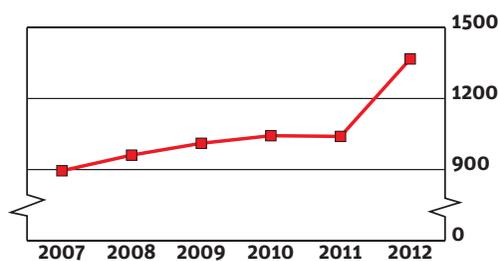
But that is not quite the case, says Blok. If you look at the level of the jobs graduates are finding now, you do see a significant shift. Of the 2008 graduates, 61 percent got jobs at the level you would expect for a Master's student. In 2012, that percentage had dropped by a quarter to 46 percent. Clearly, Wageningen graduates are eager to work, no matter what it takes. If they have to start lower down the ladder, so be it. This is how the crisis makes itself felt.

There are also significant differences between degree programmes, Blok indicates. In 2011, a graduate from the MSc in Food Technology took an average of 1.1 months to find a job. For graduates of International Development Studies it took quite a lot longer: 3.9 months.

So much for the statistics. But how does it actually work on the job market for graduates? And what are the choices you make in this respect as a Wageningen graduate? Do you keep looking for the ideal job? Do you lower your sights? Or do you just do something completely different instead? **6**

MORE GRADUATES

Since the start of the economic crisis in 2007 the number of students in the Netherlands has increased dramatically. Can't get a job? Then study: this seemed to be the prevailing attitude. And this trend became clear for the first time last year in the graduation figures. The number of degrees and diplomas



awarded at Wageningen University was 30 percent higher than the year before (see graphic). The

one-off impact of the now retracted threat of a slow student fine may well have played a role in this too.

What now?

'I am quite happy with this life, although I do have to start very early in the morning. I have money to do nice things and time to spare for my hobbies'

'Sometimes I think it will never work out'

Sjoerd de Beer graduated three years ago as an aquatic ecologist. He was eager to work, but finding a job turned out to be a difficult task, even though he started looking six months before graduating. Sjoerd wrote countless application letters but often did not even get an acknowledgement of receipt. Meanwhile he was living on benefit. 'Because I had never worked I was on social security straightaway. That was a job in itself. To qualify for benefit I had to apply for at least four jobs a week. I also had to go around employment agency offices and respond to adverts sent to me by the town council – preferably within two hours.'

Sjoerd decided to look for work outside his field and ended up at BLGG AgroXpertus, a research laboratory geared to agriculture. There he works on the production side but he does not mind that too much. 'Sitting at home is the worst of all: after a while you feel so pent up. I am quite happy with this life, although I do have to start very early in the morning. I have money to do nice things and time to spare for my hobbies.'

Sjoerd is still looking for something better, although his drive is dwindling. 'There are hardly any vacancies and when I do apply I don't hear a thing. I have had six interviews but I was never selected. My hopes of finding a job go up and down. Sometimes I think it will never work out.'





'A tight job market stimulates creative thinking, efficient ways of working and a willingness to tackle new challenges'

'Running a market garden is hard work'

Linde Swart got her BSc in Soil, Water and Atmosphere in 2009. She started on an MSc in Climate Studies but found it much too theoretical. 'I wanted to do practical work.' She dropped the course and went to work on a farm for a year to see if that suited her. Then she did a vocational course on organic agriculture in Dronten. She did an internship at De Stroom market garden in Hemmen, in the Betuwe district across the Rhine from Wageningen. That was such a success that the two girls running the company asked Linde to become a partner. 'That was a nice offer because it is difficult to find work in the organic farming sector. Land is expensive and you need money to start up your own company.' So she accepted the offer. Now she delivers 300 vegetable bags a week, 30 of them to the Wageningen Environmental Platform, where students can buy their 'veggiebags' containing five different seasons

vegetables.

Running a market garden is hard work, says Linde. 'I work long hours, especially in the summer when it all grows and blooms and we have to keep on weeding.' What she likes most about her work is how varied it is. 'One moment I am harvesting lettuce and the next I am working on the website. It is a challenge to run your own business.' Her decision to follow her university degree with a vocational training course was met with some bafflement in her social circle. 'A lot of people thought it was a waste. But I see it otherwise. Working as an entrepreneur is very demanding. You have to keep an eye on everything, and do everything yourself, as well as find out for yourself how things work. That takes discipline and you need the energy and willingness to put more into it than you would with a normal job.'



PHOTO: STUDIO WISSELOORD

'I follow my heart'

Jornt van Sandbergen graduated in Nutrition and Health last November. Instead of looking for a job he took a different path and trained to be a music producer. Even though there is a wide range of jobs related to nutrition and health, he saw that many of his ex-fellow students were having trouble finding a job and therefore tried their luck in another sector. 'I didn't want to wait for that to happen, so I started on the music production course in Utrecht while I was still finishing off my Master's.'

Jornt already played in a band when he was a student and did a lot with music besides that. The decision to make it his profession is something he has his father to thank for, to some extent. Jornt: 'My father died recently. On his deathbed he told me, "I have worked for 42 years for a pension I will never receive. Follow your heart and become really good in something you are passionate about." I took his advice to heart. I am following my heart now, and that means music.'

As far as Jornt is concerned, the crisis has its positive sides. 'A tight job market stimulates creative thinking, efficient ways of working and a willingness to tackle new challenges. I see the prospect of starting my own company as a tremendous opportunity.'

'Convince them they need you on their staff'

Koen Verhoeven could start work at a consultancy bureau on trees just two weeks after finishing his MSc Landscape Architecture. His work involved monitoring trees and making maps. How did Koen manage to get a job so quickly? 'I just approached the company and asked, "Can I come and work for you?" You have to put it across in a way that convinces them they need you on their staff. I was able to show them I could be useful to them. As an example, no one at my work had the knowledge to work with certain programmes which I did know my way around. It also helped that I had had odd jobs in my professional field for years, such as gardening for the town council.'

It is also important, according to Koen, not to be too demanding. 'You mustn't expect a top salary from the start. Certainly at this time you should be happy to have a job at all.' And of course the social media are important too. Koen: 'I think it helps to be on LinkedIn. If you can show them you are active, and that you have a lot of experience, it could make a difference.'

