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Interview with Rens Bod

An Academic's and Activist's View on Recent Policy and Change in Dutch Higher Education

Bod, R.; Waltzing, A.

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Géographies académiques

Interview with Rens Bod

An Academic's and Activist's View on Recent Policy and Change in Dutch Higher Education

Entretien avec Rens Bod. Le point de vue d'un universitaire et d'un militant sur la politique et les changements récents dans l'enseignement supérieur néerlandais

RENS BOD ET ALINE WALTZING

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Résumés

English Français

In this interview, Rens Bod, historian of the Humanities, guides us through the recent reforms in Dutch higher education and tells us about the role academics' activism has had in budgetary policy in the last decade. Bod is also the founder of WO in Actie (Higher Education in Action), a movement of Dutch academics that started advocating for adequate funding of universities in 2017. Since then, the movement has grown through various actions, targeted first and foremost at improving working conditions in Dutch academia. An increase in university funding has been achieved in 2021, after years of activism and contacts with the ministry. But the movement also raised awareness around other problematic issues in Dutch universities that impinge on working conditions: social safety, the amount of pressure on academics' careers and their evaluation, the lack of time dedicated to research in some academic positions, and the lack of democracy in decision making inside universities.

Dans cet entretien, Rens Bod, historien des sciences humaines, nous guide à travers les récentes réformes de l'enseignement supérieur néerlandais et nous parle du rôle que l'activisme des universitaires a joué dans les politiques budgétaires au cours de la dernière décennie. Bod est également le fondateur de WO in Actie (Enseignement supérieur en action), un mouvement d'universitaires néerlandais qui a commencé à plaider pour un financement adéquat des universités en 2017. Depuis lors, le mouvement s'est développé grâce à diverses actions, visant avant tout à améliorer les conditions de travail dans le monde universitaire néerlandais. Une augmentation du financement des universités a été obtenue en 2021, après des années d'activisme et de contacts avec le ministère. Mais le mouvement a également sensibilisé à d'autres problématiques dans les universités néerlandaises qui ont une incidence sur les conditions de travail : la protection sociale, la pression exercée sur les carrières des universitaires et leur



évaluation, le manque de temps consacré à la recherche dans certains postes universitaires et le manque de démocratie dans la prise de décision au sein des universités.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : activisme universitaire, réformes néerlandaises de l'enseignement supérieur, coupes budgétaires, financement des universités, conditions de travail dans le monde académique

Keywords: academic activism, Dutch higher education reforms, budget cuts, university funding, academic working conditions

Texte intégral

Aline Waltzing: Could you tell us about your position in the Dutch academic world and your point of view?

Rens Bod: I have a rather mixed position. I am a professor in Digital Humanities and History of the Humanities, and I am based in two faculties. This is for historical reasons: I was a professor in Artificial Intelligence at the University of St. Andrews and in 2008 I moved to what you might call the Humanities. I started to work in History, but also in the field of Computational Linguistics, which can be seen as part of Digital Humanities.

If you ask me what my most important contribution is, I often refer to my previous work on data oriented parsing, thus Computational Linguistics, because that has been used in a range of applications. But when I became an elected member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, it was mostly my work in History that was mentioned, especially the History of the Humanities.¹

You also asked me about my position as a founder of WO in Actie²: like many people in the Netherlands, especially in academia, I was greatly disappointed by the continuous budget cuts imposed on Dutch universities since the 1980s. I think ever since I started studying in university, in 1983, there have been financial cutbacks. The amount of money that was invested per student to universities has decreased consistently for more than 30 years. That has been quite dramatic with respect to work pressure, with respect to the balance between research and teaching—people teach more and can do less research. There are terrible effects on the hierarchy in academia that became more and more like a neoliberal system.

After yet another announcement of budget cuts, in September 2017, I thought, “This is enough. We should not accept this any longer.” And then I met a colleague somewhere later that day who suggested to me, “Why don’t you start a petition?” So, I set up a petition which was quite easy: you just fill in a form on the web, and then you distribute it stating, “It is unacceptable that there is yet another budget cut in academia. We want to strive for a balance between teaching and research, and less work pressure, and this can only be done with adequate funding.” In addition, I calculated on a sheet of paper that we needed: something like 1.1 billion euros in structural investments per year. This petition was sent around, and although most people replied saying that it probably would not change anything, at least they signed it. The petition was supported immediately by half of the academics in the Netherlands. We just had a couple of weeks before we had to present it to the Dutch parliament.

Aline Waltzing: So, you started this petition, but there was already awareness of these problems for many academics?

Rens Bod: Yes, for a long time. There were many academics who wanted to reform the university and take it back from its new public management structure that was imposed by Dutch law in 1995, with the so-called MUB, “modernization of the university government.” There were also people complaining about the aforementioned budget cuts. But I think the Dutch government assumed that academics talk a lot about their

unhappiness, and they may write angry letters in newspapers, but they do not go on the streets, let alone strike (in the Netherlands).

What happened after we distributed the petition? Just a couple of days later, the head of the Dutch unions for education (FNV and AOb) offered their help. They did a marvelous job: while we were offering this petition to the parliament, on the square outside there were a number of people from universities, but also from the unions, offering coffee and distributing flyers with information, even a fully-designed cup with our demands. But the number of protesters was embarrassingly low, only twenty or twenty-five. This was on 5 December 2017.

Yet this was only the beginning. Just a year later, on 17 December 2018, we had a demonstration in the Hague, with more than two thousand people. This was quite a big thing, at least for the Netherlands. And a lot happened in that year, during which we grew from twenty to two thousand activists. It was a lot of extra work, since there were very few of us to organize events like a demonstration. But after December 2018, it started to boom, and it was also at that moment when I understood that I should take somewhat less initiative in the movement and share it with others.

After presenting the petition at the Dutch parliament, back in December 2017, we also had contact with the then head of the Dutch Association of Universities (VSNU)³, Pieter Duisenberg. We were very critical towards him at the time because before he had become the president of the VSNU, he had made some rather negative comments about the humanities and social sciences: he thought universities should mainly focus on the so-called “useful disciplines.” He had also made controversial comments about academic freedom: he wondered whether there is enough academic freedom if right-wing people do not dare to speak up at universities. He was indeed himself from a right-wing party.

He also immediately contacted me after we started the petition, inquiring what was happening. Yet the VSNU did not want to sign the petition—and that was a source of some frustration on our part. We, WO in Actie, argued that the employers, *i.e.*, the university boards, should join us. But the VSNU, consisting of the rectors and the heads of the universities basically said, “We agree with you, but our role is different; we have direct contact with the minister.” So, at the time I thought, “Well, probably nothing will change.”

But something interesting happened in February 2018. A university union, VAWO (Vakbond voor Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs) shortlisted WO in Actie for an encouragement prize, *Hart voor Wetenschap*, meaning “Heart for Science and Humanities.” This encouraged me to try to do a little bit more.

In February, a big debate was organized in Amsterdam, where students, some union members, people from the governing boards from various universities, the VSNU and the minister were invited—it was all about budget cuts. I thought, “Well, they should also invite somebody from the field, why not someone from WO in Actie?” So, I wrote them an e-mail, and they invited me.

That debate was a turning point for WO in Actie: it started as a very polite meeting. When I was finally allowed to say my part, I noted that there was a good vibe with the audience. There were many students, who tend to be a bit more activist than researchers, so I stressed the fact that WO in Actie included demands from the students—that is, they wanted to have their scholarships back, and we wanted to have substantial investments. Then I said, “It has been shown that there is actually no real investment in Dutch academia. Thus, what the minister has just claimed—she continued to say that the government invested in research, etc.—is simply untrue!” And then the audience started booing the minister. It was quite a big crowd: I think there were more than five hundred people there, and it was also streamed live. So, it got some attention. And the minister suffered a public blow.

After that, the minister invited us, that is me and some others who had become active in WO in Actie, to The Hague to talk in person. This was the start of a long series of meetings with the minister.

Aline Waltzing: Before we really get to the impact and what WO in Actie was able to provoke, could you give us a synthetic image of the things that you wanted to address? What were the things that were going wrong at that moment in academia?

Rens Bod: We always stressed three things: first, we wanted to reduce the immensely increased work pressure and temporary contracts in academia. That was something that many people suffered from. But this was connected to the hyper competition in competing for research funding. Some competition is good, but if less than 5% of the research proposals can get funded, clearly things get out of hand. Thus, we also wanted to reduce hyper competition in obtaining research funding, and this was the second point. We figured out that to obtain this goal, we must invest directly in the so-called first money stream, that is, the money that goes into the universities, so that people get more research time without first having to compete for it via funding agencies. Thirdly, we strived for a proper balance and even a “unity of teaching and research”: “Einheit von Lehre und Forschung”, as Wilhelm von Humboldt said it so beautifully.

Therefore, we needed this immense amount of investment, which I realized we perhaps would never get. We did get it in the end, but only after four years of activism. In any case, asking for money was something that the government in The Hague could understand. Whereas, say, social safety at universities is a more difficult issue to present to them—even if it was and still is a big issue in the Netherlands. One scandal after the other has come out during the last few years: people got harassed or abused, not only sexually but also socially. The Dutch system is very hierarchical: for a long time, only full professors had so-called promotion rights (to supervise a PhD student) and could create their own research groups. Around every full professor there are quite a few staff members that work more or less for them: associate professors, assistant professors, postdocs and PhD students.

Thus, we had several demands and we created a kind of manifesto, which was called “40 Theses on Academia”, published as a small open access book.⁴ Yet the most important demand was very simple and crystal clear: we wanted to properly balance teaching and research, so that academic staff could do both. And for that, we needed a huge investment. To some extent, this demand was conservative: we wanted to go back to the situation of the year 2000, to have at least enough money that people can invest in research so that we would arrive at basically 50% research and 50% teaching for all academic staff. We carried out a simple calculation that showed that we needed between 1.1 and 1.15 billion euros on a yearly basis to achieve this goal.

But honestly, I must say, we also wanted to change many other things, such as the neoliberal university system that was badly applied to Dutch academia. As you may know, there is basically no democracy at Dutch universities. So, we also demanded more democratic control, but we thought, “Maybe we should be careful demanding too much at the same time because otherwise the government will not give us more funding, but only the things that do not cost anything for them”. Therefore, we initially focused on the funding part only, but actually we wanted to change much more—even the entire academic system.

Aline Waltzing: I guess since the beginning, the problem was not only to have enough funding, but also the way to access funding, correct? Was it also linked to project funding, to research evaluation that had impacts on how funding was made accessible?

Rens Bod: Yes, sure. Still, we did believe that there is also a need for a separate funding body, where in case you need *extra* money, for extra PhD students, you can apply for project funding. In the Netherlands, this is the NWO⁵. And of course, there is, at the European level, the ERC. But we also argued that the so-called projectification of research had been detrimental. Nowadays, almost 95% of the research projects within NWO are part of some specific program, for instance in the so called “top sectors” that have been defined as being useful to Dutch society or technology. There are three kinds of “usefulness” defined: democratic usefulness, economic usefulness, and cultural usefulness. But there is very little room for fundamental, curiosity-driven research that does not have a direct application. The reason that we also need curiosity-driven

research is given by the historical insight that one cannot predict the usefulness of research beforehand. Much past research has become useful many decades or centuries later, often in entirely unexpected areas.

Aline Waltzing: For you as someone who studied history of knowledge, was that also a reason for being more interested or more invested in this movement and issues of higher education policies?

Rens Bod: You mean, as an activist for WO in Actie? Yes, the advantage of investigating the history of knowledge is that I have several examples at hand of past inventions and discoveries that have led to surprising applications many centuries later. In linguistics, for example, the notion of a formal grammar, which was introduced by the Indian linguist Panini in the 5th century BCE, only had an application more than two and a half millennia later, in creating formal grammars for programming languages in the 1950s. Now, I often use this example arguing that you never know how many centuries it can take before a great idea finds an application.⁶ Therefore, fundamental research is so incredibly important.

This argument did help a bit, but only when I also gave examples that had more immediate though unexpected impact. Some politicians were even flabbergasted to learn that in the field of literary studies, scholars invented a technique known as stemmatic philology, where by means of a history tree—a stemma—extant manuscripts are put in a genealogical structure such that the original manuscript can be reconstructed as well as possible. This technique greatly influenced early geneticists such as Francis, Crick, and Franklin who were classically trained in grammar schools and could apply the genealogical stemma technique to genetics. This is why it is so important that we try to keep all disciplines together, that we do not eliminate disciplines by arguing that they are not useful, because you simply cannot decide that beforehand.

I have often used this rhetoric in the Netherlands, and for a long time it had very little effect whatsoever, and certainly not with the minister, but I learned something about politics here: the power of repetition. The power of rhetorical, repetitive variation, expressed on different occasions. This insight is of course also frustrating, because as academics we are used to listening to arguments. But that is not the way it works in convincing politicians: people do not buy your arguments if you just express them once, they want to hear about results, they want to hear it from other, powerful people reiterating these arguments, and they preferably want to hear simple one-liners.

Aline Waltzing: Did you gain some kind of legitimacy as an activist from your work as an academic doing research on research?

Rens Bod: I am not sure whether I received legitimacy as an activist, but it did certainly help that I had examples of unexpected applications emerging from the humanities ready at hand. At a certain point, we noticed that even the minister reused our words by saying that it is so important to keep the whole tree of knowledge together. I was quite astonished: these were the words that we repeated for five years on many different occasions, and slowly but surely, politicians are taking this over. But it took a long time, because as you know politicians have been deeply convinced that the only important and useful disciplines are engineering and the exact sciences.

Aline Waltzing: You also saw the Dutch system evolve before you started being active with WO in Actie: you talked about the budget cuts in 2017, and some of the things that happened since the 1980s such as earlier budget cuts, the so-called conditional funding, the introduction of evaluation by the VSNU... and this changed a lot in nature in the mid- and late 1990s. I understood that was related to the MUB, right?

Rens Bod: Yes, that is indeed related to the MUB, the so-called modernization of the university government (“Moderniserende Universitaire Bestuursorganisatie”), where the rector was not democratically elected any longer, and neither were the deans, but where the governing body was basically appointed by the minister. Moreover, the deans and

rector had total power: while they had to listen to various advisory boards, to the student council, and the general working council, they could in principle enforce any decision. Via the MUB the entire university was restructured: it was no longer a self-governing body; it was redesigned as a commercial company. The councils did not have decision rights, but only advisory rights. That made a big difference compared to the democratic university before the MUB.

But what also made a big difference is the new evaluation structure. At one point, it was called the SEP, the Standard Evaluation Protocol, quite a heavy and important thing. Before that, every four or five years, we had *Visitatie Commissies*, as they were called: a separate committee visited each department. Initially these visits were relatively informal and relaxed. But then it got so professionalized that every time the evaluations came along, we had to write extremely precise reports, which became an immense time investment; external bureaus were even involved by the university to optimize these reports.

Aline Waltzing: Would that be the QANU, Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities?

Rens Bod: Yes! People were afraid of what would happen if they got a worse assessment than the time before. So there was a lot of stress for academics to publish as much as possible, where quantity risked overruling quality. Fortunately, this has now changed: since 2020 there is a new program on Recognition & Rewards in the Netherlands that does not evaluate on “production” anymore, but on quality—at least in theory.

One important thing I forgot to tell you about WO in Actie is that this movement was also striving for more permanent positions: around ten years ago up to 60% of academic staff consisted of temporary teaching positions, with no research time. There were many academics who had only temporary contracts: they were hired and fired after maximally four years, but after six months they could come back again and take another temporary contract. Of course, these precarious academics were continuously hoping to get a better position.

Aline Waltzing: These teaching positions did not include any research time?

Rens Bod: The system is as follows: there are UD's, *universitaire docenten*, which include research time. The amount depends a bit on the university, but it is around 40%, sometimes 50%, officially—but then it turns out you have to teach so much as a UD that in practice people spend almost all their official time teaching and do their research in their leisure time. Then you have the UHD's, the *universitaire hoofddocenten*, similar to associate professors, and then there are the full professors.

The lowest rank is the docent, who only has a teaching position, and now comes the ironic thing: there is no university who wants to hire a docent for more than 0.7 full time equivalent (FTE) because they know that it's virtually impossible to teach more than 0.7 FTE, or 70%. Everybody who gets a 100% teaching position (with no research) gets burnt out within a year. You notice here the perversity of this system, where it is not even possible to have a full-time teaching position because the university cannot, logistically, fit such a position in a forty-hour working week. All *docenten* we talked to—usually young academics hoping for permanent UD positions—told us it was a career killer for them, because they had no time to carry out any research.

A year after WO in Actie was founded, another action group, somewhat more radical, called itself 0.7, thus referring to these part-time teaching positions. This action group also helped us with obtaining our goals to get appropriate funding for universities. The members of 0.7 were younger than the average members at WO in Actie. We were sometimes also—justly, I think—criticized by these younger academics, since we were a bunch of relatively old professors and we were mostly people who already had permanent positions. But we immediately understood that we had better join forces, with 0.7 and with other actions groups that were founded roughly at the same time, such as Casual Academy.

We noticed that the universities got rather nervous about the emergence of these new action groups, because they were much more radical than we were. They wanted to organize disruptive actions, which they did. So, all of a sudden our many “white strikes,” (where people do not work more than the allotted forty hours a week) open air lectures and demonstrations, were seen as moderate and reasonable by the university boards. I remember some of the university rectors telling me, “We sincerely hope that you will not be taken over by the 0.7 or the Casual Academy groups.”

Aline Waltzing: Did you become more audible for the ministry at this point?

Rens Bod: Oh, yes. We initially had a complex relationship with the ministry, but as I said, after about four years of activism the minister finally started to repeat our words, by saying, “Yes, indeed, the universities need additional investment.” In the beginning, however, our relationship was tense: we insisted and calculated that we needed extra funding, but the minister continued to repeat in Dutch media that we were like the famous caterpillar in the children’s story that never has enough, *Rupsje Nooitgenoeg* or *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. The minister even decided to shift funding from the humanities to the exact sciences and declared that this had to be done in a “quick and dirty way” because of the importance of the exact sciences for the Dutch economy. She really used those words: “quick and dirty.”

In September 2019, we organized an alternative opening of the academic year with open air lectures and speeches. The entire square in front of Leiden University was packed: academics, students, and other interested people, including members of parliament. This was just after we had organized WO in Actie in a more national fashion: we had now members who coordinated local actions at all universities. For our alternative opening of the academic year, we asked them to invite as many people as possible to join the action in Leiden, and it was a success: we had wide coverage in all Dutch newspapers and broadcasting stations. During that alternative opening we expressed a motion of no-confidence against the minister. As a consequence we did not talk with the minister for several months, perhaps even a year. I heard that she also became quite isolated; even the VSNU started to have problems with her because she was deciding things entirely in a top-down manner. As a consequence, VSNU finally started to join forces with WO in Actie, which was a nightmare for the minister because the national university council and the various university boards were now joining the activists against the ministry.

Then something very interesting happened: the leader of the Dutch Democrats, Sigrid Kaag, the Vice Prime Minister of the Dutch cabinet, also started to take over our rhetoric. At a meeting at the University of Groningen, she said, “We need additional investments in Dutch academia; because academics have to teach during the day, they do their research in the evening and they write their project proposals on the weekends. This is no longer sustainable.” We were flabbergasted. Maybe it was suggested to her by the leader of the VSNU. Or maybe the Democrats wanted to get extra votes, because the elections were near. I do not know, but the situation she described was accurate for Dutch academics and it was unbearable.

As I already said, the minister also appropriated our words, but stated that this was something that the next government after the elections had to decide on. So, we saw that ministers were taking over our demands, and we were also given credit for that. Perhaps it had been more luck than wisdom that we decided to become very harsh towards Dutch politicians during our alternative openings of the academic year. But this had an effect, especially in the Dutch “consensus society”.

Then there were parliamentary elections in March 2021, and the Dutch Democrats, called D66, became the second party after the right-wing party VVD. Together with two other parties they created a government which did the incredible: a structural investment of 1.3 billion euros a year in Dutch universities, so as to reduce work load by creating extra structural positions with a balance between research and teaching. The goal was to create “calm and space,” in the words of the new minister of research and

education, Robbert Dijkgraaf, who is himself a scientist and who understood our needs. This was felt as a victory by most if not all of us.

But there are still two issues I want to stress. We are not satisfied with how this extra investment of 1.3 billion euros is currently implemented at the universities. Moreover, we also need to focus on the many other problems that exist at Dutch universities, ranging from the lack of social safety to excessive hierarchy. We are continuously bringing up these issues in our meetings with the new Dutch minister of research and education. He wants to invest direct research money without competition at Dutch universities. This is the idea of the so-called rolling grants system: new assistant professors directly receive 300,000 euros to get their research started. As the minister says, this reform should create more “rust and ruimte,” “calm and space.” The nice thing about it is that he wants to invest this money evenly for all academic disciplines. Indeed, young academics often have fascinating, even heterodox ideas: I agree they should have the opportunity to develop them.

But the negative side about it is that almost all this extra investment now goes to these rolling grants. So, the people that are still heavily suffering from work pressure, and that were already appointed, say, two years or even ten years ago, don't get any extra money. Lots of people are quite angry about this. Ingrid Robeyns, our colleague from the University of Utrecht, wrote an insightful document on how we believe, as WO in Actie, that this money could be better spent: the proposal is to simply divide the money from the rolling grants over *all* members of academic staff. This way, every member of staff gets something like 40,000 euros per year, which may not be enough in the Dutch system to hire a PhD student. But we claim—and this is shared by many other academics—that we stimulate members of staff to collaborate together, because if you have two or three persons collaborating, then you can hire a PhD student, or buy a new piece of equipment, or reduce your teaching load.

So, we did a lot of negotiations and lobbying in the beginning of 2022. We were taken seriously by the new minister, but the only thing we managed to change in the way the money was spent is that, next to these rolling grants for new assistant professors, there will also be a limited amount of money reserved for incentive grants for the rest of the academic staff, which are, like the starting grants, distributed *without* competition. Our colleague Remco Breuker from WO in Actie was in a working group that defined the rules for attributing these incentive grants. We believe these grants should especially go to disciplines where teaching load is heaviest, thus where people have very little time to write research proposals. As a consequence, there will be less money left for the starting grants. But this is where we stand today with WO in Actie.

Aline Waltzing: You also mentioned strong hierarchy as a problem in academia: how do you link this to the different issues that you just mentioned?

Rens Bod: Every time we talk about hierarchy, we get into controversies: as you can perhaps imagine, there are members of staff who still believe that only full professors should have the right to be the official supervisor of PhD students, as this has been the case for centuries in the Netherlands. But it is based on a “feudal” university system where academic staff is fully at the service of a full professor who gets all the credit even if actual supervision is carried out by someone lower in rank. Most people who are active in WO in Actie agree that we need to get rid of these privileges by imposing less hierarchy, so that every member of staff can create his or her own research group. This is also what the current minister wants with the new investments granted to universities, so this is promising.

Another point is that there is too little democracy at Dutch universities: to give you just one example, when the current rector of the University of Amsterdam was appointed, no professor or other members of staff had any influence on the selection process. The appointment is entirely done from above, by a supervisory council appointed by the minister. Even though this new rector at the University of Amsterdam is a great academic, the way he was appointed, I think, is done in the wrong way. The current law on university government (introduced in 1995) was a reaction to the thoroughly

democratic way universities were governed before 1995, which often led to long and extremely slow procedures. But the current law is detrimental: everything is decided from above in a top-down manner, which has led to the situation that many young academics do not dare to speak out anymore since there are no guarantees from below. These young academics are often afraid of expressing their ideas or even criticism. And that is what I mean by hierarchy and lack of democracy: people are afraid to talk.

Aline Waltzing: Because of the pressure on their careers?

Rens Bod: Yes. This can of course also happen if there is democracy; people are not always speaking out, but at least it is normal that you express your opinion. You try to convince others, and then you have to vote during meetings and elections of rectors. You can also ask for secret voting. Sadly, democratic and transparent culture has disappeared.

Universities have become huge organizations; thus, I understand that they have become too complex to do everything democratically at every level. But the selection of deans and the rector can be carried out democratically, as our neighboring countries show, so we want to change that. And I very much hope that the minister or the future minister will listen to us.

Aline Waltzing: If I summarize WO in Actie's activities: it started with a petition, you organized several public demonstrations, open-air lectures, a strike, and negotiations with the ministry...?

Rens Bod: Yes. And to top it off, we also filed a mass complaint with the labor inspection that universities abuse their staff by giving them structural overwork for too long a period. We collected over seven hundred official complaints, which were very detailed. The first step for the "Arbeidsinspectie" (Labor Inspectorate) was to visit the universities, and now they are investigating these complaints in detail, and they will have to give a judgment within the next six months.

Aline Waltzing: So you worked on a lot of different actions with WO in Actie.

Rens Bod: I learned a lot from it. Originally, I did not have an activist background myself, but together with other people from Dutch universities, we got a lot of inspiring ideas on how to change universities for the better. I very much hope that we can create a more balanced and inspiring working environment in academia.

Notes

¹ See e.g., Bod, R., *A New History of the Humanities*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; id., *World of Patterns. A Global History of Knowledge*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022.

² Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs in Actie (Higher Education in Action), is a movement of academics that started advocating for adequate funding of universities in 2017. Its activities are described in the interview. Their website is: <https://woinactie.blogspot.com> (accessed 06/03/2024).

³ Vereniging van Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten (VSNU), Association of Dutch Universities, nowadays called UNL.

⁴ Bod, R., Breuker, R. Robeyns, I., *40 stellingen over de wetenschap*, Boom, 2020, online: [https://www.boomfilosofie.nl/media/26/40_stellingen_open_acces\(1\).pdf](https://www.boomfilosofie.nl/media/26/40_stellingen_open_acces(1).pdf) (accessed 06/03/2024).

⁵ Dutch Research Council.

⁶ For more examples, see Bod, R., *A New History of the Humanities*, *op. cit.*

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Auteurs

Rens Bod

University of Amsterdam

Aline Waltzing

Centre de sociologie des organisations (CSO), SciencesPo et Adoc Mètis

Articles du même auteur

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