Annual Review
University of Groningen
2014–2015
The Annual Review aims to provide a general impression of the University of Groningen in the academic year 2014-2015. The official facts and figures concerning the University's activities are shown in the University of Groningen Annual Reports: www.rug.nl/jaarverslag.
Foreword

The academic year 2014-2015 followed the very special year in which we celebrated our University’s 400th anniversary. Its 401st year might not – in terms of the figure, at least – speak quite so much to the imagination, but there were plenty of special moments to hold in our memories.

For instance, just as in the previous year, a University of Groningen researcher won the Spinoza Prize (sometimes referred to as ‘the Dutch Nobel Prize’). Where last year it was ‘bird professor’ Theunis Piersma who clocked up this achievement, this year it was Cisca Wijmenga, Professor of Medical Genetics.

And this was not the only interesting or important event. We also consolidated our place among the global top 100 research universities, and opened University College Groningen. One event that will most probably never be erased from our collective memory is the Netherlands Scientific Expedition Edgeøya Spitsbergen, the largest Dutch polar expedition ever.

While the ‘tree’ of the University is rooted firmly in Groningen, ‘branches’ were developed elsewhere: our Campus Fryslân in Leeuwarden, and the Yantai branch campus in China. Thanks in part to these developments, our teaching and research will continue to benefit from many diverse perspectives and approaches. This diversity is necessary to solve the great questions and issues with which our society is confronted.
SEPTEMBER

Opening of University College Groningen
University College Groningen (UCG) was officially opened. UCG offers an English-taught Bachelor’s degree programme in Liberal Arts and Sciences. The students live and study on their own campus.

SEPTEMBER

Life stories of Moroccan and Turkish-born Dutch citizens
PhD ceremony of Femke Stock, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

SEPTEMBER

Piersma awarded Spinoza Prize
Migratory bird ecologist Theunis Piersma was awarded a Spinoza prize by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), to the value of €2.5 million. This is the Netherlands’ highest scientific accolade and King Willem-Alexander attended the presentation.

SEPTEMBER

History of the University of Groningen
Professor of History Klaas van Berkel presented part I of his history of the University of Groningen to Rector Magnificus Elmer Sterken. The book examines the first two centuries of the University’s 400-year history.

SEPTEMBER

University of Groningen enrols 30,000th student
The University of Groningen reached a record number of enrolments: 30,041. The University has the third highest number of students in the Netherlands. The number of international students at the University of Groningen rose from 4,151 to 4,551 (13.2%).
Two sporting highlights

Student of Medicine Epke Zonderland retained his world title on the high bar in Nanning, China, making him reigning Olympic, European and World champion. In Tallinn (Estonia), Groningen physics student Roel Boomstra won the European draughts title. He also won a bronze medal in the 2013 World Championships.

‘Cuddle hormone’ oxytocin turns aggressive rat into social cage companion

PhD ceremony of Federica Calcagnoli, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences

Middle-English video goes viral

Three students of Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Studies made a video about the poem ‘Speke Parrot’ by John Skelton. Professor Sebastian Sobecki recited the poem in Middle-English. The video became an instant YouTube hit and was discussed on the BBC.

Anniversary film goes online

The RUG-400 anniversary film ‘For Infinity – The Movie’ was published on the University’s YouTube channel. The musical comedy was produced to mark the 400th anniversary of the University of Groningen.
DECEMBER

Monica Arac de Nyeko

Monica Arac de Nyeko declared Alumnus of the Year 2014

The Ugandan writer and UNICEF employee, Monica Arac de Nyeko, won the title University of Groningen Alumnus of the Year 2014. During the December dinner in the Academy building, she was presented with a sculpture, specially designed by the Groningen artist Jan Steen.

DECEMBER

Publication of book commemorating 400th anniversary of the University of Groningen

From 1 September 2014 to 1 September 2015, the University of Groningen organised various events in celebration of its 400th anniversary, under the slogan ‘For Infinity’. A commemorative book recorded all the special moments and events that took place, capturing them for posterity.

OCTOBER

International experts attended a two-day conference on the Star of Bethlehem from the biblical story. Calculations using modern computer programmes led to a new theory on the star’s authenticity.

University of Groningen and UMCG cornerstones of the North-Netherlands economy

Research by Biggar Economics showed that the University of Groningen and the UMCG are jointly responsible for 12,500 full-time jobs and an annual regional turnover of €1.4 billion. The national impact was even greater: more than 60,000 jobs and a turnover of €5.4 billion.

NOVEMBER

Installation of new Rosalind Franklin Fellows

The University of Groningen installed seventeen Rosalind Franklin Fellows (RFF). The University set up the RFF programme to increase the number of talented female researchers with a permanent contract.

Publications in Science and Nature

Publications by scientists from Groningen appeared in leading scientific journals in the same week. A group of physicists headed by Beatriz Noheda, Professor of Functional Nanomaterials, discovered a new manganese compound. The discovery was published in Nature. A week later, two articles about the genome sequencing of malaria mosquitoes were published in Science. Michael C. Fontaine was co-author of both articles.

NOVEMBER

Involvement in Chinese environmental legislation can lead to a better ecosystem

PhD ceremony of Huanlin Lang, Faculty of Law
Grants worth millions for top researchers from Groningen
Five University of Groningen employees received Vici grant, each worth €1.5 million to spend on research and setting up a research group over the next five years. Vici grants are awarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) to excellent, experienced researchers with a high international profile.

Earthquake resistance check
The University of Groningen is going to check all its buildings to see they need alterations to improve safety. The checks will be in line with the Netherlands Code of Practice issued by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which is a guideline to check the earthquake resistance of buildings.

Gas reserves can be used four times more efficiently
PhD ceremony of Ferry van Kann, Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Marketing through social media plays major role in brand recognition
PhD ceremony of Lisette de Vries, Faculty of Economics and Business

Lecturer of the Year
Anton Scheurink, Professor of Neuro-Endocrinology, won the election for the University of Groningen Lecturer of the Year 2014. He was presented with a work of art, an e-reader and prize money of €7,500. He also won the opportunity to develop a course unit for the Honours College.

University Campus Fryslân
The return of university education to the province of Friesland was announced. Campus Fryslân (Campus Frisia) in Leeuwarden will become the University of Groningen’s eleventh faculty. Prof. Jouke de Vries will be Dean of the new faculty.

Humanist Giannozzo Manetti translates Bible before Erasmus
PhD ceremony of Annet den Haan, Faculty of Philosophy
European grants for biochemical research
Two researchers received an ERC Advanced Grant of €2.5 million. Professor of Biochemistry Bert Poolman plans to build a synthetic cell in order to study a living cell. Professor of Molecular Dynamics Siewert-Jan Marrink is developing simulation techniques for studying cell membranes. Both research projects will run for five years.

Polish military in Western Europe during the Second World War
PhD ceremony of Florian Huiskamp, Faculty of Arts

Teaching project in Mozambique
A consortium led by the University of Groningen and the Energy Academy Europe went to Mozambique to reinforce the knowledge infrastructure regarding energy. The €4 million project is being funded by Nuffic, the Netherlands organization for international cooperation in higher education.

Seven Vidi grants for top Groningen researchers
Seven members of University of Groningen and UMCG staff were awarded Vidi grants of up to €0.8 million to set up a research line and establish a research group. Vidi grants are intended for outstanding researchers who have been conducting successful research for some years after gaining a PhD.

Branch campus in China
The University of Groningen will be the first Dutch university to establish a branch campus in China. The campus will be in Yantai, as a joint venture with the China Agricultural University in Beijing. President of the Board of the University, Sibrand Poppema, signed a cooperation agreement in Shanghai, in the presence of the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte.

Lower energy consumption during wheelchair propulsion
PhD ceremony of Riemer Vegter, Faculty of Medical Sciences

GELIFES
GELIFES (Groningen Institute for Evolutionary Life Sciences) research institute was officially opened. The institute brings together ecological, evolutionary and neuroscientific research groups from the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences.
Cisca Wijmenga wins Spinoza prize

Cisca Wijmenga, Professor of Medical Genetics at the University of Groningen/UMCG, was among the Spinoza prize-winners in 2015. She was awarded this prestigious Dutch research prize for her work on unravelling the genetic background to gluten intolerance (coeliac disease).

Website Protestant cultural treasures

Religious studies expert Justin Kroesen and programme maker Shanti van Dam launched a website on cultural treasures in Protestant church interiors. They were both given a KIEM grant by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for their work:

www.protestantse-cultuurschatten

Summer ceremony concludes academic year

GUF-100 prizes were awarded to nine outstanding students. Student of Economics and Business Economics Thijmen Callis won the Aart Bosman Student Excellence Award 2015. The winners were announced at the summer ceremony, organized to mark the end of the academic year.
North Pole expedition
Biologist Maarten Loonen from the Arctic Centre initiated a large-scale Dutch polar expedition with funding from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Fifty-five researchers took part in this Netherlands Scientific Expedition Edgeøya Spitsbergen (SEES.NL). They included NOS weatherman Peter Kuipers Munneke, a University of Groningen alumnus. A number of non-scientists joined the expedition, including actor-poet Ramsey Nasr and member of the Dutch House of Representatives, Stientje van Veldhoven.

The group set sail for Edgeøya from Longyearbyen on the ship De Ortelius. As there is daylight for 24 hours per day, the researchers had plenty of opportunity to go on land to explore the territory and collect data.

Teams on board processed the information they gathered. The island Edgeøya is on the cold south-east side of the Spitsbergen archipelago. A Dutch station based there from 1968 until 1988 had already collected lots of valuable ecological data. The new research data will be compared with the ‘old’ data, to get an idea of the impact of climate change.

First-year students start introduction week
This year was the 47th edition of the KEI Week, the general introduction week for all first-year students. New students get to know the city, student life and the University facilities. Attended by some 5,300 first-year students, this is Europe’s largest introduction week.

University of Groningen climbs up the prestigious Shanghai ranking
The University of Groningen once again rose in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (also known as the Shanghai ranking), this time to 75th place. The University occupies a similar position in other global rankings for universities.
North Pole expedition
University of Groningen

The University of Groningen is an international research university, founded in 1614. It offers a stimulating academic environment to students and researchers with a passion for knowledge and a drive to perform. The University is based in the North of the Netherlands, in Groningen. This City of Talent, with its picturesque old centre, is located in beautiful countryside. The character of the University is determined by the city and its environment, and vice versa. Groningen (200,000 inhabitants) is a very young city thanks to the presence of more than 30,000 students at the University and a similar number at other education institutes. The result is a stimulating intellectual and academic climate. The many international researchers and students contribute to a lively, cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Research
The University of Groningen is a global top 100 university, with world-renowned and outstanding research groups, such as the Zernike Institute for Advanced Materials. It is proud to be an innovative and reliable partner in answering the major questions of the 21st century. The themes it focuses on include sustainability, energy and water, medicine, food, carbohydrates, sensor technology, nanotechnology, new materials, social efficacy, law and administration, and cultural heritage. It cooperates with partner universities worldwide, including ones in developing countries. Research within the University of Groningen makes a special effort regarding three major social themes: Healthy Ageing, Energy and Sustainable Society.

Beyond Groningen
The newly established Campus Fryslân (‘Campus Frisia’) in the Frisian capital of Leeuwarden is catering to social and economic needs in the region. The faculty-in-the-making is boosting education at Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD degree level in the North of the Netherlands. On a global scale, the University of Groningen will be the first Dutch university to open an international joint university in Yantai, China, in collaboration with China Agricultural University, a top 40 university in China.