

Multi-talented Professor Gerard van den Berg awarded a royal decoration

Prof. G.J. Van den Berg received a royal decoration on Friday 26 April, nominated by the University of Groningen. He was appointed Officer of the Order of Orange-Nassau. The decorations were presented to him by Mayor Koen Schuiling of the Municipality of Groningen.

Gerard van den Berg (Almelo, 1962) is Professor of Health Economics at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the UG and the UMCG. After starting his academic career as a university student in Groningen, he spent many years working elsewhere: at the VU Amsterdam, where he became a professor at the age of 34, and subsequently in Germany, the UK, America, and Sweden. In 2019, he returned to Groningen, where he has since worked as Professor of Health Economics. His academic career is unprecedented according to Dutch standards: he is known as a leading international econometrist and labour and health economist who combines analytical depth with social relevance in a very straightforward way. As such, he advised several ministries. Very recently, for example, at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, he has made a major contribution to research that can be used to quantify the value of science. His research on cancer and epidemiology in collaboration with medical researchers is equally impressive and promising. Colleagues at home and abroad praise him for his leading academic work, his broad expertise and elegant solutions to complex problems, and his commitment to connecting science and society.

Top-level articles

The foundations for his current world-renowned and pioneering research were laid at the tender age of 28. At the time, he authored two publications on duration analysis, delving into data relating to the length of time someone is in a particular situation, such as unemployment or illness. During his career, he has published dozens of articles in top-level academic journals. His excellent scholarly work is frequently cited and has provided many highly valuable theoretical and empirical insights for economic science in general and for the assessment of policy interventions in the labour market and health care in particular.

Impactful research on labour market issues

His research is highly relevant for policymakers working on societal issues such as unemployment. For instance, Van den Berg conducted research on the effects of punitive cuts in unemployment benefits in Germany, and in the Netherlands he researched labour market policies and the effects of the minimum wage. He found, for example, that evaluations of programmes aimed at preventing unemployment often produce a distorted picture. His research subsequently led to the development of more appropriate evaluation techniques and more effective training programmes. His labour market assessments in Germany, Sweden, and France, among others, have significantly improved the lives of millions of unemployed people. For example, he carried out research into Germany's extremely strict sanctions policy, which resulted in many young people losing their welfare benefits and becoming homeless. This study led to changes being made in the policies of the German social security system.

Leading authority in health economics

In the field of health economics, Van den Berg also produced several authoritative results. He was the first to show that unfavourable economic conditions at birth can lead to a higher mortality rate later in life. He also studied the relationship between factors such as food intake, antibiotic use, and genetic predisposition, and certain health outcomes, such as survival rates. For these studies, he uses large cohorts, such as data from Lifelines. This source of data was of such interest to his research that it was in fact one of the reasons for his return to Groningen.

International reputation

His impressive national and international reputation is also evidenced by the fact that he is a much sought-after speaker at leading, international conferences. At the European Association of Labour Economists conference held in 2008, he was named the world's best researcher in the field of duration analysis. He was the first social scientist to win the prestigious German Alexander von Humboldt Professorship Prize in 2009 and was subsequently appointed Professor at the University of Mannheim. During his stay there, he was asked by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) to be one of its five correspondent members in economics: an honour reserved only for the most distinguished Dutch academics working abroad. After his return to the Netherlands, he became a regular member of the KNAW. Since 2018, he has been Chair of the Board of the Aletta School of Public Health. He was also editor-in-chief of *The Economic Journal* for many years and served on the editorial boards of several international economics journals.

Inspiring mentor

Van den Berg has successfully mentored numerous PhD students in an inspiring way. He encourages them to excel on an academic, administrative, and a societal level. Time and again, he manages to attract talented young people whom he then encourages to develop further. As a result, five of his former students are now working as professors and his PhD students have found their way to academic positions all over the world. He is also committed to mentoring talented young researchers at the Tinbergen Institute.