

International students and knowledge workers meet at Twente University



 High Tech NL

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Exchanging experiences, choices and future plans concerning beginning one's career and the attractiveness of the Twente region

The Twente region in the Netherlands is characterized by a large number of technology companies. Moreover, there are numerous companies involved in the energy, agrifood and chemical industries. Both Saxion University of Applied Sciences and Twente University offer programs for international students. Why did they choose to come to the Twente region? How do they like living, studying and working in Twente? Do foreign students intend to start their careers in Twente? These questions were discussed at the seminar "International Knowledge Workers Day Twente" held at Twente University on Tuesday March 17th.



Twente, reinventing its identity

Several organizations worked together to organize this meet and greet, including Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Twente University (Career Service Platform) and the Expat Center Twente. The program was managed by FME and High Tech NL. About 60 students, knowledge workers and other people involved in this issue registered for the event. In general, political decision makers, at the national as well as the regional level, are interested in knowing more about the experiences of international students in the Netherlands. After all, the demographic structure of those who work today is not in balance. Over the next ten years a lot of people will retire. At the same time, the educational level of those who will replace

them has to increase in order to sustain the innovation and R&D efforts of companies in the Netherlands. The Twente region in particular is reinventing its identity to be more attractive for those who were born there and for those who choose to move to the Eastern part of the Netherlands to study and work.

Very international

Jos van Erp, program director at the branch organization High Tech NL, welcomed the guests. It turned out to be a very international group of people. There were people from Bulgaria, Russia, Malaysia, Jordan, Iran, Indonesia, China and Kazakhstan, among others. Most of the guests were students from a variety of fields such as engineering, European studies and Business Administration. But they all had one thing in common: they all had chosen to study and live in the Netherlands. And, in this small country, which is just a spot on the map, they decided to come to the Twente region. Jos van Erp introduced the program in which a lot of interactive discussion would take place. The voice of every participant would be heard! A report concerning the findings of the meeting will be prepared and distributed not only among the participants but also among

regional and national decision makers working on labour market policy.



Jos van Erp: "We'd like to get to know you!"

Proud

After welcoming the guests Jos van Erp gave the floor to Mr Kees Eijkel who is Managing Director of the Twente Kennispark. Mr Eijkel explained in a very enthusiastic way that the world is changing rapidly. Technology is developing at an increasing rate and applications for these technologies are available all over the world. At the same time, people are taking the initiative to develop their skills and prepare for their professional future. That is why the Twente region is proud to have so many foreign students and knowledge workers. It is also why Twente-based employers should invest even more in getting to know promising students at an early stage of their studies. Mr Eijkel emphasized the fact that having a variety of nationalities in a company provides the company with complementary skills and approaches for all kinds of challenges.

Unique selling points

After the keynote speakers, the interactive discussion sessions began. Six small groups were composed. In each group a discussion was moderated by facilitators from Twente University, Maastricht University and Interlect, a business partner of High Tech NL. The following questions were discussed: Why did you choose to study in the Netherlands? What were your other options? Do you want to start



Kees Eijkel: "Complementary skills"

your career in Twente? What are the unique selling points of Twente? Everybody participated in a very enthusiastic way. People continued their dialogues even during the break time and the networking drinks. This is a clear indication that the issues discussed were important, both for the participants and for policy makers in the field of education, labour market and region branding.

We should acknowledge the existing obstacles

To summarize, we learned a lot during the interactive sessions we have already come to

some interesting conclusions. The Netherlands is attractive because the education here has high standards. Compared with some other countries, the costs of studying and living here are relatively low, especially in the Twente region. In general, the Dutch are perceived as nice and helpful people. Everybody speaks English at an understandable level, which is not always the case in the countries surrounding the Netherlands. The guests appreciated the characteristically non-hierarchical culture of Dutch schools and workplaces.



Interactive discussions

Twente has some advantages above other knowledge regions in Europe and the Netherlands. Life in Twente is peaceful and quiet. It is internationally orientated because of the large number of international students at Saxion and Twente University and because neighbouring Germany is very close to the campus. Despite these positive elements, we must acknowledge the serious obstacles graduates face when looking for a job here. Even large, international companies demand that employees speaking Dutch fluently, which is nearly impossible for those who study for a year or two in an international program where the language is English. Furthermore, most of the time employers request that applicants already have experience, which young people who have just graduated simply cannot have. Should we

accept these experiences as 'just the way things are'? No! Follow up will be conducted by the organizers of this event. They will invite regional decision makers to discuss this matter and define an infrastructure which allows employers to get to know their future employees at an early stage. The iHRD concept, which has been developed by High Tech NL and Interlect, might turn out to be a helpful instrument.

Follow up

A report on the content of our discussions will be drawn up by the supporting team of alumni of Maastricht University. It will be distributed among the participants and used as a building block in our work to match employers with future employees. And, of course, it offers new content to brand the Twente region!

By Jos van Erp



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This activity has been supported by:

