

Recognition & Rewards testimonial – Robbert Rademakers & Annemiek Schilpzand

'You are thrown in at the deep end, but you are also taken seriously right from the start.'

In 2016 and 2017, economists Robbert Rademakers and Annemiek Schilpzand respectively began a career path that combined education and research at the Nijmegen School of Management at Radboud University. The unique factor about this six-year trajectory is that, if all goes well, they will eventually obtain a PhD and a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) – plus a wealth of teaching experience. At best, this is an inspiring albeit demanding combination.

After they had both graduated, Robbert and Annemiek had been working for some time as a student assistant and junior lecturer for the Economics study programme when they applied for their current jobs. The combination of education and research and the duration of the programme appealed to them both. Robbert: "A standard PhD programme takes four years, so I'm really happy that this programme gives me a bit more time to develop my ideas. And it's also great that it provides you with the opportunity to gain your UTQ. If you wish to continue working in the academic world, this obviously gives you an advantage."

Inspirational added bonus

Annemiek believes that you need to be cut out for this sort of career path. "We do a lot of teaching, which goes hand in hand with both a great deal of responsibility and extra deadlines. If you've got a class to teach tomorrow, you need to be prepared – and that sort of preparation is not something that you can put off until another day. When it comes to research, it's often a slightly different story."

In addition to his research, Robbert is also fond of such short-term deadlines: "I recently had my first paper published. And I know it won't always be like this, but in all reality it took about three or four years from the moment that I wrote my first word to the moment that my paper was published. And then sometimes you've got to ask yourself: 'What am I doing with my life?' But when my paper was finally published, I have to say that it was pretty exhilarating."

Which is an emotion that Annemiek recognises only too well. "I think that every PhD candidate experiences moments of despair. And teaching, the contact that you have with your students, can therefore be an inspirational added bonus."

Thrown in right at the deep end

When it comes to completing their PhD programme and obtaining their UTQ, everything is going according to plan for both Annemiek and Robbert. Both of them admit that it made a difference that they already had some teaching experience, "because at the university you tend to get thrown in right at the deep end."

Robbert: "When it comes to guidance, we're given a great deal of support by our

department and we also receive a lot of central support for the UTQ – but after a while you begin to notice that there are actually not enough people here to answer the wide range of questions that we have. If more of these kinds of career paths are to be offered, extra investment will be needed, because otherwise I only foresee problems. Academics have a great sense of responsibility, especially when it comes to their students. Nevertheless, this is an area that warrants improvement.”

“Education is much more than just teaching. You also need to be able to design and coordinate courses and design proper assessments. Obviously, we receive a lot of informal support from our colleagues. But more time and attention needs to be devoted to the real teaching methodology,” confirms Annemiek.

Taken seriously right from the start

The fact that there is recognition and appreciation from the entire university for what they do was evidenced by the fact that Robbert was named 2020 Lecturer of the Year. In addition to this, one of their faculty colleagues who is also following the same career path was named 2020 PhD Candidate of the Year.

Robbert: “When it comes to research, I’ve heard stories from colleagues about PhD candidates who were basically told: ‘Here’s your dataset; do what you have to do to make sure your results are published’. I’ve also heard stories about increasing competitiveness and rivalry, involving political games and that sort of thing. I was pretty hesitant about all of this, but fortunately the atmosphere here is nothing like that. It’s very open and horizontal.”

Annemiek agrees that this also applies to teaching: “We’ve said that you get thrown in at the deep end here, but right from the start we also felt that we were being taken seriously. When it comes to the courses that we teach, we have just as much input as others. Sometimes you hear stories from junior lecturers who’ve been forced into teaching a course that a professor no longer wants to teach – but those sorts of practices don’t apply to us.”