

Research retreat, Kloosterburen 2015



Marijke van der Sijde: It's December again and traditionally the time of the yearly departmental research retreat in Kloosterburen. This year's edition reverted more to its old format in the sense that it was more focused on 3rd and 4th year PhD students discussing their career plans. As I'm now in my final year, it is also time for me to think about my next step: what to do after finishing my PhD project? It's not an easy thing to think about, so I was happy to attend the retreat and discuss my ideas with my fellow PhD students and the senior staff.

The retreat programme was diverse, with a good mix of PhD students presenting their career plans and senior staff discussing potential new research projects or recent developments in the department. There were lively discussions on several interesting topics, including ELSI (*Ethical, Legal and Social Issues*) in genetic research, presented by our visiting professor Anneke Lucassen, the use of social media for giving wider exposure to the research we do in the department, and the value of having a coach during the PhD trajectory. It was great to hear about the different career plans of the other PhD students and I think all of us got valuable advice and many encouraging comments.

In the evening we enjoyed a fabulous dinner, after which we got to know our colleagues better during Jackie and Kate's spaghetti-marshmallow-tower-building challenge (a picture says more than words here ;-)).

I believe the retreat was a great success and I think it is a valuable addition to the more scientific discussions we have in the department. Many thanks to Jackie and Kate for putting together a great programme and organizing everything. This definitely raises the bar for next year!

Jackie Senior: This year, we had 37 people attending for 1 or both days of the retreat, including 10 PhD students and Richard Koekkoek, who came to see what it was all about. In addition, a baby and husband came to enjoy a short break so breast-feeding could continue as normal. Two gloriously sunny winter days meant we were able to enjoy walks after Jolanda's excellent lunches and clear our heads ready for the afternoon session.

Once again the benefit of getting PhD students to think about their future plans long before they finish was evident (although a few people still manage to slip through the net and get to graduation without any clear ideas of what they want to do...). It's good to realize that it takes time for plans to crystallize and contacts or applications to be made.

The Marshmallow Challenge was interesting - it showed that geneticists are prepared to bend the game's rules rather more than a group of English editors! Beware of participants who eat half the marshmallow or try to burn spaghetti ends together (it didn't work)!

Everyone was asked to prepare and practice their elevator pitch, giving Hermien de Walle the chance to excel with hers! Lude asked people to think about future developments in the field of genetics ("what apps will be on an iPhone 10?"). What will personal genomes mean for the provision of healthcare? What will it mean for lab facilities and counselling?



"It was a pleasure meeting so many of you at the retreat at Kloosterburen last week. I very much enjoyed hearing about the research that you are doing and hope there will be plenty of opportunities to explore the ethical, legal and social angles. I know some of my basic science colleagues in Southampton are also keen to build on collaborations between our two universities, so I hope to help facilitate this whilst I am still in the Bijtel chair.

Best wishes and thanks for an interesting and illuminating retreat, Anneke"

The Marshmallow Challenge

