

CAMPUS NEWS

Non-profit group brings Dutch-style student houses to internationals

TU Delft students have redeveloped a vacant apartment building in Delft to serve as student housing. Thirty of the 150 rooms in the Zusterflat will be furnished for internationals, giving them the chance to see Dutch student life up close.

Internationals who want to live amongst Dutch students do not have many options in Delft. Housing cooperation DUWO mainly offers private rooms in buildings with other foreign students. A group of Dutch TU Delft students called Stichting Herontwikkeling tot Studentenhuisvesting Delft (SHS

Delft) has recently redeveloped an apartment building with room for fifteen student houses. Three floors are reserved for internationals. It is SHS's mission to give empty buildings a new life as student housing. The Zusterflat meaning nurses flat used to house nurses in

The rooms are 11 m² in size and will cost, in total a little under €400 per month. Every house has a shared kitchen, bathroom and living room.

training, but has been vacant for the past ten years. It is the first project SHS has taken on. In December 2013



Students view one of the furnished rooms in the Zusterflat. (Photo: Sam Rentmeester)

contracts were signed with the owner, a mental health hospital. It is now up to the Delft municipality to give the final approval.

The thirty international students will live on three floors, in between the floors housing their Dutch peers. Every floor will function as a separate student house, with its own rules and customs. The international floors will be fully furnished and the students will lease their rooms from a different organisation yet to be contracted. The organisation will provide its

international tenants with specific support when needed.

The rooms are 11 m² in size and will cost, in total a little under €400 per month. Every house has a shared kitchen, bathroom and living room. On the ground floor of the building there is a large common space and a lush garden. TU Delft campus is five to ten minutes away on a bike. (SB)

The culture of six

Do different cultures perceive success differently? Does the approach to education and what is considered a good grade differ between Dutch and international students? The Dutch cultural phenomenon known as the *zesjescultuur* would indicate as much. But, does this wider social phenomenon exist within TU Delft? The *zesjescultuur* literally translates to the 'sixes culture'. It gets its name from the Dutch grading system of scoring students out of 10, with a 6 (almost always) being the lowest grade needed to pass. It is, however, more than its literal translation and describes a culture where it is acceptable for students to do the minimum required of them to pass.

In April 2014 the government released *Onderwijsverslag 2012/2013: Motivatie* – a report assessing motivation within the Dutch education system. Local newspaper *NRC* reported that the investigation found that Dutch students 'experienced their right to education merely as a duty'.

We asked students and faculty members if this is an attitude prevalent on campus too – the answers

were mixed. Former student council member Geertje van Engen believes that a *zesjescultuur* does exist at some levels of the university. "First year Bachelor students are used to studying for a sufficient grade to pass and not necessarily to actually learn something and develop themselves. Their high school attitude can result in less interest in the courses at university, which often creates a *zesjescultuur* among them," she says. However, the expectations and competition at this level is also different as most programmes are in Dutch and the number of international students is much lower. Things are different at the post graduate level though. "All post graduate students aim for the best result within their reach," says Rufus Velhorst, chairman of the student union VSSD. He adds that international students probably feel an additional pressure to perform better.

Dr Dap Hartmann, Associate Professor, TBM, agrees. "International students often have expectations and pressures placed on them that Dutch students do not, which motivates them to score well, as opposed to just 'pass'," he says. However, Hartmann also acknowledges that some students may have

a *zesjes*-approach. "There are a fair amount of students who have this approach but there are so many exceptions that it's not appropriate to generalise."

Last year the Dutch government put in a number of new measures aimed at increasing the standards of students and their motivation levels. TU Delft also introduced a number of changes to their academic system – such as *Harde Knip* (Bachelor to Master is no longer an automatic transition), *BSa* (Binding study advice) and stricter curricula.

The changes have been met with some criticism. "The current measures of TU are only stimulating the *zesjescultuur*. By implementing measures that force students to study [in a particular way], the university will become more like high school and students will learn only enough to pass their exam," says Van Engen. (DS)

Delta approached a number of international students for their comments. However, none were forthcoming on this subject. If you want to share your experience on this matter, write to deltainternational@tudelft.nl.