

Limburg appeals to Minister Bruins for customisation of border regions in education infrastructure

Today, the Province of Limburg and a broad network of regional governments, hospitals and educational institutions (MBO-HBO-WO), companies and social partners, presented a letter to Minister of Education, Eppo Bruins. In the letter, the province asks the minister to recognise the unique opportunities and challenges of Limburg – which is, after all, almost completely surrounded by foreign countries – and to take these into account during the budget debate of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, which will be held in the House of Representatives on 25 November.

Thanks to the collaboration between educational institutions, the businesses, and governments in the Euregion, in recent years, Limburg has positioned itself as one of the most innovative regions in Europe.

Euregional talent as a driving force for innovation and economy

The educational institutes of Limburg are working on various initiatives in close cooperation with the (Eu)regional chain of educational institutes. These initiatives include trinational curricula, collaborations on the Brightlands campuses and the establishment of an Einstein Academy for the Einstein Telescope.

Limburg has a strong international orientation, due to its location in the heart of the Euregion and its proximity to Belgium and Germany. The proposed policy of the ministry to *not* make an exception for our Limburg educational landscape, seriously weakens the future of the region and the vitality of its educational institutions. This policy not only threatens to undermine Limburg's innovative power: in the long run, the economic and social development of the region are also at risk.

'Limburg's collaboration with educational and knowledge institutions from Belgium and Germany is essential for the regional economy. Approximately 70 percent of the available talent is located within a radius of 100 to 150 kilometres across the border. The proposed cuts to the influx of international students from our Euregion would completely undermine these opportunities,' says Elianne Demollin-Schneiders, deputy for Education & Labour Market of the Province of Limburg. 'We must be able to continue to count on cross-border collaboration to promote innovation and achieve economic growth. The border is an opportunity, not a problem!'

Demographic challenges and the implications for Limburg

Limburg is facing demographic challenges, including an ageing population and a declining number of young people. Recent figures on demographic development show that the enrolment of HBO students in the Netherlands between 2013 and 2033 will decline most in Limburg. Research shows that the restriction of the inflow of international students will lead to a loss of 4,500 jobs and a decrease in Limburg's earning capacity by one billion euros per year. This has serious consequences for regional prosperity and innovation power.

In its urgent letter, the Province of Limburg asks for recognition of the regional differences and advocates for experimental space for the Euregion. This would provide space for, among other things, trinational cooperation, the continuation of national education initiatives and the possibility of offering foreign-language education – without this being at the expense of

the quality of education for Limburg's youth.

Appropriate customisation for border regions

Together with all partners involved, the Province of Limburg advocates for tailor-made agreements to recognise the specific situation of border regions. 'The policy must take into account Limburg's unique position as a border province and the structural shortages on the labour market. We must be given the opportunity to initiate multilingual education activities that are tailored to the needs of our Euroregion's labour market and encourage cross-border cooperation,' the deputy says. 'Limburg wants to continue to contribute to the further development of the Netherlands, but that is only possible under the right conditions for innovation and for attracting international talent,' Deputy Demollin states, on behalf of all partners. 'Broad prosperity and economic growth go hand in hand with an innovative and cross-border approach to education and the labour market. We therefore ask Minister Bruins to start a dialogue with us, so we can build a prosperous future for Limburg and the Netherlands, together.'