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Women in physics in the Netherlands

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Published in:
Women in Physics

DOI:
[10.1063/1.4937680](https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4937680)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2015

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Rudolf, P., De Graaf, N., Koornstra, R. A., Van Tijn, P., & Kool, D. (2015). Women in physics in the Netherlands: Progress and developments. In B. A. Cunningham, S. Ghose, & C. O'Riordan (Eds.), *Women in Physics: 5th IUPAP International Conference on Women in Physics* [4937680] (AIP Conference Proceedings; Vol. 1697). American Institute of Physics Inc.. <https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4937680>

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Women in physics in the Netherlands: Progress and developments

Cite as: AIP Conference Proceedings **1697**, 060033 (2015); <https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4937680>
Published Online: 31 December 2015

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Women in Physics in the Netherlands: Progress and Developments

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Abstract. The visibility of women and the awareness of a healthy gender balance in physics in the Netherlands have clearly improved over the last few years. Initiatives to promote women and their possibilities to pursue a career in physics are plentiful and commendable. Nevertheless, the numbers do not yet show the desired impact of all these initiatives. Although student numbers have increased, the percentage of female first-year student remains at approximately 13% of the total students in physics. Similarly, the relative numbers of female PhD candidates and postdocs have been stable over the last years at (both) approximately 20% to 25%. Despite the number of women obtaining a PhD in physics and continuing a scientific career as postdoc, the presence of women further up on the scientific ladder in physics remains strikingly low. We will here focus on the current status, ambitions, and initiatives in the Netherlands to promote women, and especially to *keep* them, in physics.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND NUMBERS

Total numbers of physics students at Dutch colleges and universities have steadily increased since 2007. However, the aim to enhance the percentage of female students in physics has not been realized, and women continuing to make up approximately 13% of the total physics student population (Table 1). Similarly, relative numbers of female PhD candidates and postdocs have been stable over the last years at (both) approximately 20% to 25% percent. Although the number of women obtaining a PhD in physics and continuing a scientific career as postdoc may seem relatively high, it has been steady over the last years, and the presence of women further up on the scientific ladder in physics remains strikingly low. Especially after the PhD and postdoc, there is a big “drop-out”

TABLE 1. Percentages of female first-year students at all colleges and universities, and PhD candidates, postdoc researchers, and permanent staff employed at FOM over 2010 to 2013.

	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)
First-year students at all colleges and universities	12	12	13	14
PhDs at FOM	23	23	23	24
Postdocs at FOM	20	20	20	25
Permanent staff at FOM	8	10	9	8
Group leaders (scientific staff) related to FOM	8	10	10	10

Note: At the level of permanent scientific staff, researchers are mainly employed at universities and research institutes; permanent staff at FOM includes scientific staff at FOM research institutes, but mainly comprises nonscientific staff. The group leaders related to FOM comprise assistant, associate, and full professors at universities and research institutes, allowing a comparison of the percentage of women among permanent scientific staff.

of women from science. For example, within the Dutch Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (FOM), the percentage of women in positions beyond the postdoc is currently 9%, where it was 7% in 2010 but 11% in between.

CURRENT INITIATIVES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN PHYSICS OR IN SCIENCE IN GENERAL IN THE NETHERLANDS

- The government-funded joint mission statement and plans for the physics and chemistry sectors formulates clear ambitions and targets for the male/female balance in physics and chemistry for the future. It facilitates 88 tenure track positions (from 2011 until 2016), with a target of 40% to be filled by women. To achieve this, 20 of the 88 positions are specifically reserved for women.
- FOM supports women in physics through several instruments:
 - Through the FOM/f Programme, FOM provides grants (for postdoc positions, and to support the promotion of women to tenure positions), awards the biannual Minerva Prize for the best physics paper by a female author, offers individual coaching for PhD students, and organizes the FOM/f Symposium for all women in physics in the Netherlands.
 - A new initiative in 2014 is the FOM mentoring program, which will support female physicists in tenure-track positions or early-stage group leaders in building their career in science. This program should contribute to the ambition of FOM to achieve “20% in 2020”; that is, in the year 2020, 20% of the top positions (assistant professor and up) should be occupied by women.
 - Further, FOM is starting to offer training on gender bias, specifically for researchers as employers, to improve their awareness of potential gender bias in selecting new academic staff.
- The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) offers Aspasia grants to enable the promotion of female scientists from assistant professor positions to associate or full professor.
- Several universities offer fellowships especially for women to improve their possibilities to pursue an academic career in physics through tenure-track subsidies (Rosalind Franklin Fellowships at University of Groningen, tenure-track program at TU Eindhoven, MacGillavry Fellowships at University of Amsterdam, Technology Fellowships at TU Delft).
- The Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH) is a network of more than 850 female professors and associate professors. Together they represent every discipline and all Dutch universities, promoting the visibility and opportunities for women in academia in the Netherlands.

CONCLUSION

Although there seems to be no lack of initiatives, awareness among and an active contribution from the entire community is still needed to improve the gender balance in physics; it doesn't come naturally!