Heerlen, November 23, 2021

Open University now fourth shareholder of Brightlands Smart Services Campus

Effective January 1, 2022, the Open University (OU) will become a shareholder of Brightlands Smart Services Campus (BSSC) in Heerlen, joining founding fathers Maastricht University, Province of Limburg and APG to become the campus' fourth shareholder. The agreement between OU and BSSC was signed on November 23.

As a shareholder, the OU will be making a financial and strategic contribution to the further development of the Brightlands Smart Services Campus. With new educational programs and research lines, OU will be placing a strong emphasis on artificial intelligence and data science, dovetailing with the BSSC's activities focused on digitalization and the application of data science and artificial intelligence to public services, financial services, sustainability, education and healthcare.

As deputy of the Province of Limburg, Stephan Satijn is responsible for the Brightlands Campuses: "I'm delighted that the Open University will become a new cornerstone in the development of the Heerlen campus. The Open University's involvement as a shareholder is a sign for me that the campuses are becoming increasingly embedded in society. As a government body, we have laid a solid foundation, but now it's up to the various partners and parties to work together to build a wonderful house of knowledge and innovation on this foundation which Limburg can fully benefit from."

Pivotal role for research group
Since 2019, the OU has been one of the residents at the campus in Heerlen with the Open University's Centre for Actionable Research (CAROU). CAROU is a research group made up of scientists, engineers, facilitators and makers focused on the three research domains of Data Science & Artificial Intelligence, Social Innovation & Data Science and Business Analytics. The ecosystem of co-creation partners at the campus is valuable for CAROU's research efforts.

Social challenges
For the OU, being a shareholder offers opportunities to more effectively contribute to meeting socially relevant challenges. "This involves taking an interdisciplinary approach by working with partners such as companies, municipalities and knowledge institutes to look at major problems in society," according to *rector magnificus* Theo Bastiaens. "This is why the hubs at the Brightlands campuses are so important for innovation in the region. Besides, the OU specializes in educational innovation, from the professionalization of instructors to serious gaming products that we use to contribute to the concept of lifelong development. We feel at home at the campus as an innovative party."

Accelerating
"This is a fantastic development for our campus," says Astrid Boeijen, CEO of the BSSC. "Digitalization is at the heart of the OU organization; it is the Netherlands' leading expert when it comes to the digitalization of education, making it possible to accelerate the ambitions of the Brightlands AI-hub, for example. It enables us to make joint investments in

meeting the major challenges in digitalization facing sectors such as public services, financial services, health and sustainability, the ultimate goal of which is to generate broad prosperity for this region and the Netherlands as a whole."

Connecting
"For us, the Brightlands Smart Services Campus is the place to connect our knowledge with the entrepreneurship and development of young talent," says Theo Bastiaens, *rector magnificus*. "Participation in the campus ecosystem is aligned with the path OU has set out on to make data science and artificial intelligence a new focus."

Region
The OU also wants to play a bigger role in the development of the knowledge sector and make greater contributions to strengthening the economic and socio-cultural climate in the region. Frank van der Duijn Schouten, interim chairman of the board: "We may be a national distance learning university, but we feel a strong connection to this region. Strengthening the ecosystem will make the Brightlands campus in Heerlen even more attractive for young students and researchers and for employers in the public and private sectors." One of the founding fathers of the four Brightlands campuses in Limburg, Maastricht University enthusiastically applauds the addition of OU as a shareholder in BSSC. The development provides further evidence that Brightlands is the ideal place for the province and the region to create connections between academia in Limburg and local industry and institutions.

Boost
Astrid Boeijen: "The campus represents a major boost for this region, which will only gain in strength with the addition of OU. Together with the other three Brightlands campuses, we are a powerful engine driving development in the region."

About BSSC
Brightlands Smart Services Campus is a community of 80 large and small companies, startups, knowledge and other institutes, and organizations including APG, CBS, Accenture, Conclusion, the Dutch National Police, TNO and a.s.r. They work together on innovations in data science and artificial intelligence for public and financial services, sustainability, healthcare and education. The campus also forms the heart of the Brightlands AI-hub, one of the seven national data science and AI hubs in the Netherlands. The campus offers startups, students, entrepreneurs and researchers state-of-the-art facilities with scalable office space, meeting rooms, flexible workstations, data labs, lecture halls and conference rooms and a thriving community where open innovation plays a key role.
For further information: https://www.brightlands.com/brightlands-smart-services-campus

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