

## **Executive Summary Building Bridges, Keeping Minds – Governing the war for talent in Tilburg**

This report addresses the challenges faced by the Tilburg region in retaining graduates amidst the ongoing war for talent and subsequent brain drain out of the region. The municipality of Tilburg recognises that, to future-proof the region's economy, it needs to keep more talented students in the city after their graduation. The municipality considers graduate retention especially important for the growing sectors of IT, AI, technology, and data science, called 'emerging key sectors' in the report. Additionally, the municipality notes that there is a complex network of actors involved with graduate retention for the region. They believe that more coordination within the network is needed to effectively govern the problem of graduate retention. The report therefore aims to answer the following research question: "How can the governance network around graduate retention, with a focus on graduate retention in emerging key sectors, in the Tilburg region be improved?" Additional subquestions focus on identifying the needs of (future) graduates to stay in a city, and their perception of Tilburg.

To research both (future) graduate perception and address the underlying governance challenge, three primary research methods - combined with a literature review - were employed. First, a survey - targeted at students from Tilburg University or Fontys Tilburg residing in the Tilburg region - was set out to explore important topics for (future) graduates to stay in or leave a region. Consequently, focus groups were organised to delve deeper into students' and graduates' perceptions of Tilburg and motivations for staying or leaving. Additionally, interviews with key stakeholders in the network of graduate retention were conducted, to gather diverse perspectives on the network governance structure around graduate retention in the Tilburg region. The data gathered from surveys, focus groups, interviews and existing literature underwent triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings.

The results of the research highlight the motivations and needs of graduates, including job opportunities, affordable housing, cultural amenities, and social ties. The report identifies key actors in the governance network around graduate retention, such as educational institutions, the municipality and Citymarketing. Their input is used to identify points of improvement for the governance network around graduate retention. Based on the conducted research, a concrete set of recommendations is given to improve graduate retention in the region:

- Encourage and incentivise regional businesses to participate in career events, to boost students' awareness of regional opportunities.
- Improve collaboration between local businesses and knowledge institutions through letting them provide course assignments and internships for students. This also improves students' awareness of local companies and job opportunities.
- Foster connections between students and businesses facilitated by Tailors, to increase local businesses' understanding of the potential talents among regional students.
- Align the emerging key sectors with local strengths by positioning Tilburg as a 'high touch' hub: a combination of social sciences and high tech.
- Establish a framework with shared responsibilities among key actors in graduate retention.
- Create a shared vision and network governance structure to coordinate retention efforts, with the municipality of Tilburg as the network leader to oversee implementation of policies.
- Utilise Mindlabs as a central meeting place for stakeholders involved in graduate retention.