

## THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain the most thought-provoking proposition from their thesis. This time, a proposition from Tom Theeuwen, who obtained a PhD in Plant Science on 24 February. He studied the cyto-nuclear interactions in *Arabidopsis thaliana* (thale cress) to improve photosynthesis.



# ‘Too much wisdom is bad for creativity’

‘Wisdom is commonly associated with seniority and the knowledge and experience it comes with. We often think of an established professor as a wise person, and we tend to lend authority to their opinions and conclusions. In my opinion, the “I already knew that” mindset of established scientists can stifle the ability to think outside the box, whereas that’s something they and other people wish to do. It inhibits any willingness to explore possible connections or test hypotheses. When I started my PhD on photosynthesis, I had very little knowledge of the field. When discussing my observations with fellow researchers, I was often told, “We already know a lot about this topic, and the explanation you are proposing won’t work”. As a

young novice, I did not have much “wisdom”, but I had the ambition and curiosity to go on testing my observations. My research has actually proven the validity of some hypotheses that my senior colleagues had previously rejected. I think that if you are truly wise, you should always be prepared to think creatively and have the courage to study data that do not immediately make sense to you.’ NF