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Ladies and gentlemen,

Competitive, performance-focused, individualistic, assertive and self-assured. If you ask researchers in the Netherlands what qualities are important in order to be successful in research, these are the qualities that top the list. This was revealed by a survey of more than 4000 Dutch researchers which my colleague Ruth van Veelen and I conducted last year.

It won't be news to you that there's an extremely competitive culture in the academic world. We build our careers on being more productive, assertive and excellent than our colleagues. And we do this under the increasing financial pressure that is weighing on the sector. There's a good reason why WOInActie is organising today in Leiden the 'True Start of the Academic Year', as a protest against the proposed upheaval and budget cuts in higher education.

A noteworthy finding in our research was that most researchers in the Netherlands don't think they are particularly competitive, performance-focused or self-assured. Instead, they named other qualities, such as being cooperative, showing your colleagues how committed you are, and making an effort to deliver good teaching.

So there seems to be a gap between the image we researchers think we have to comply with in order to be valued, and the kind of researchers that most of us actually are. We learn that in order to climb higher on the academic ladder, we must focus first and foremost on our individual academic performance and on angling for person-oriented research grants. And yet many of us are researchers who want to contribute to a bigger picture, who value good collaboration with our colleagues and who are committed to good teaching.

I'm delighted to have been asked to speak today at this Start of the Academic Year, as Chair of The Young Academy, about the theme of 'Recognising and Valuing'. The VSNU has suggested three ways in which the talents of researchers could be recognised, valued and fostered in a more balanced way: Creating diverse career paths, updating the research assessment system, and making more space for 'team science'.

In my view, this new approach to valuing the various roles required for a team to achieve good scientific results comes not a moment too soon. My hope is that new ways of recognising and valuing will change the hyper-competitive and

individualistic culture that currently prevails in many research groups, and will make scientific research better and more enjoyable.

Why is this important? I'd like to give three reasons.

First, the narrow focus on individual research performance leads to a cold-blooded culture in which talent is wasted. In our own research, we saw that the idea that many academics have that they are not individualistic, performance-focused or competitive enough, contributes to the enormous workload and exhaustion they experience. We see this effect most strongly among young researchers, and it leads to many talented researchers not feeling at home at the university and looking for work elsewhere.

To prevent this brain drain, it's in the interests of the university community for us to value greater diversity in roles and talents. It shouldn't only be individual excellence in the area of research that leads to permanent contracts and promotion; excellence in dedication to the collective good should also lead to promotion. We should recognise that in order to work in teams, we don't just need people who know how to bring out the best in themselves, but also people who know how to bring out the best in others. If we can do that, then it won't only be researchers who thrive in a competitive environment who feel at home at the university; the university will also be a place where people work together to advance scientific knowledge.

A second benefit of valuing and recognising a broader spectrum of talents and roles is that this could give a major boost to the diversity and inclusion that the university has been pursuing for years. A big disadvantage of the current narrow definition of excellence is that it creates a very narrow and specific image of what an excellent researcher looks like. We know, for example, that we tend to associate individualism, assertiveness and self-assurance with men, and that these qualities are also easier to recognise in male researchers than in female researchers. When we make our picture of the successful researcher more diverse, for instance by not defining excellence solely as obtaining personal NWO grants, and by instead broadening the definition to include inspirational leadership of a research group, this will automatically give greater scope for diversity. And that is good not only for groups that are currently under-represented, but for example also for many men who, as our research shows, do not feel at home in the current individualistic organisational culture.



Thirdly, changing our structure of recognising and valuing will also ease the transition to Open Science. In our current system, research quality is often assessed solely on the basis of h-indices and impact factors. But in the transition to more open science it's crucial that we look at the actual impact and also take into consideration the level of openness of the research. At present, many researchers are happy to contribute to open science. In Utrecht, for example, the Open Science Community has been set up by Anita Eerland and Loek Brinkman. But many researchers who already have a high workload experience Open Science as a burden. It's another box to tick in a list that's getting longer and longer, of things you have to do to be a good researcher. Open Science can only become a permanent part of our research practice if we give space and value to improving the way we do research; if we reward the efforts of the pioneers in the Open Science movement and give them space to work.

In short: new ways of recognising and valuing are important and necessary. But how can we make this happen? For this transition to succeed, action is required from all parties involved in scientific research.

Such as the NWO, which I would strongly urge to develop new grants so that young researchers who work as part of a team can also receive research funding. Why must we first prove our individual excellence through Veni-Vidi-Vici grants before we can be a promising applicant for a consortium grant such as the National Science Agenda? The same applies to team science: rewarding young researchers with NWO grants puts them on the right path for the future.

I hope that our fourteen universities will actually introduce new ways of Recognising and Valuing. This topic is now on the VSNU's agenda, but what are individual universities going to do to bring about change? The Young Academy continues to run into the 'five-legged sheep' model in conversations with university boards: board members recognise that as well as the research dimension, it's important to also value performance in the areas of teaching, impact and leadership. But at the same time, they say that only researchers who show excellent performance in all of these dimensions deserve to become professors. If universities continue to look for sheep with five legs, true team science will never get off the ground. For team science to work, we need to have the courage to say, "Your talent in the area of leadership is just as important to the team as my success in the area of research".

Finally, I am here today not only as the Chair of The Young Academy, but also as



a professor of this distinguished university. Revamping our reward structure will not make any difference if we professors do not actively think about how we can ensure that our research groups are actually teams instead of groups of excellent individuals. We are the leaders who have to make this happen. I therefore call upon you all to contribute to the innovation of our academic culture and make scientific research better, brighter and more fun.

Thank you for your attention.