

Welcome address – opening of the academic year by Anton Pijpers - President

Many thanks, Naomi. I welcome you all, also on behalf of Margot van der Starre and Henk Kummeling, here in the Dom Church and online.

A special word of welcome for our honorary doctors. We are very pleased that you are with us here today, either live or online, to celebrate the opening of the academic year!

We're starting this year by reflecting on the term 'openness'. After all, our university's strategic plan is entitled 'Open outlook, open attitude, open science'. So what does this mean: openness? How do we put this into practice? And why is it important for a university?

I like what's said about this theme in the video we just saw. And if you're thinking: I'd like to know what else these people had to say, and what *other* students, colleagues and people from outside UU have to say about this – well, we asked this question, and we going to be broadcasting it *all* in the coming weeks.

By the way, did you know that Jose van Dijck, who spoke out in favour of open debate, was awarded a Spinoza Prize last Friday? Congratulations Jose!

I also like what another Spinoza Prize laureate (Bert Weckhuijsen) said. He suggested that we should all put the question to ourselves: what can *you* do better in terms of being open?

That's a great question, I think, to ask at the start of a new academic year.

It's an academic year in which we're celebrating 385 years of science and an anniversary, together with UMC Utrecht, under the motto 'Creating tomorrow together'. To underline this we asked several professors to bring along a guest, and students, support and administrative staff and other Utrecht citizens were all part of the cortège just now. Because we need to do things together!

In this new academic year we can finally meet each other face to face again!

That's crucial for the quality of our teaching and for the welfare of students.

I don't know how it was for you, but in recent weeks I've been cycling to work in a much more upbeat mood.

That's because all over the city I've seen people involved in the Utrecht Orientation Week. I saw an international student photographing a fellow student at the gate of the University College. Big smile. Thumbs up! It was so clear to see they were excited to be there and eager to get started.

Of course, the end of the 1.5-metre rule in higher education is also a source of worry. It's up to us to minimise the risks of infection. For ourselves, and for others. Consider people with fragile health. People who sometimes can't even allow themselves to be vaccinated. Just think about that. What that's like. And it means for all us: wear your mask when you're moving around in a university building. Maintain the 1.5-metre distance outside the classrooms. Carry out a self-test twice a week, even if you don't feel like doing it and you don't think you run any risk yourself. And above all: get vaccinated if you're able and you haven't done it yet. As of today you can do it at USP too. I'm counting on you all.

Dear all,

We are starting this academic year with more students than ever before.

This demands a great deal from all of us. In terms of accommodation, study advisors and Student Desks, and above all, of course, it demands a lot from lecturers. We still need to find some of these on a tight labour market. I'll take this opportunity to once again appeal strongly to the government to finally provide adequate funding for higher education. We've been advocating this for several years now, together with WOinActie and supported by many reports and, I would add, by the minister herself. Now the new cabinet needs to deliver, too.

By now the new cabinet is fully aware how important it is to tackle the issue of work pressure. The cabinet is well aware that we will desperately need science to sustain our Dutch knowledge economy. And – above all – to deal with the challenges facing all of humanity. These are grand words. But I mean what I say. It's been said, in a dramatic turn of phrase, that we are the first generation to know that we are polluting, over-exploiting and depleting the earth and the last that is able to do something about it. I regularly speak to students and colleagues who have a huge sense of urgency. I'm optimistic by nature, but I too think that the challenges are *unprecedented* and we must really bring all our human potential to bear *right now*. Just refer to the IPCC report. Look at the disruption that technological developments can cause if we do not look at the side effects, and that will further increase inequality in the world if we don't take care. This is not doomsaying. It is realism.

As Utrecht University we are in a good position, and on the basis of that realism, to play a role in turning the tide. We have a large group of very smart, creative and inspired people. Colleagues, students and partners at home and abroad who have consciously chosen Utrecht or who wish to collaborate with us.

The most recent employee survey shows that UU staff is the most satisfied and ranks highest on 'cooperation' of all universities. In the Shanghai ranking we are in the global top 50 universities, because the publications of our academics are frequently read and cited. This fills me with pride. But at Utrecht we want to make space for more than just publications and citations.

We believe that a different approach is needed, and a different academic culture. Less focused on competition. More on collaboration. Across disciplines and with other organisations. This requires a culture of openness. An interview that Paul Boselie recently gave in Nature was like a stone dropped into the global academic pond, which caused big waves. There was a lot of praise. But criticism too – which we also need to listen to and learn from; this too is part of an open attitude.

But we're staying on course. And we're taking concrete steps. To give one example, as of today we have a new profile for 'Professor 1', the group of professors who truly are our figureheads. This profile is now open science-proof.

The corona crisis has provided major impetus towards open science. More than ever before, data is being shared and publications are open access. The rapid progress towards vaccines has shown what humanity is able to achieve when we share openly.

Unfortunately, the distribution of these vaccines also clearly shows just how blatant and dangerous the level of inequality in the world is.

As a broad university we can and must research tendencies like these, and teach about them too. Educate and train new generations who don't close themselves off from other ideas, but who have an inquiring mindset and take an open attitude. Who learn to analyse and then integrate differences, using both their heads and their hearts.

We share our knowledge so that we, together with others, can contribute to a better world. Sharing science, shaping tomorrow. That's our goal. I warmly welcome the new first-years and invite them to contribute to this. And of course all other students, colleagues and friends of Utrecht University, too.

So please keep us, the Executive Board, on our toes. Tell us where things can be better. Share your knowledge and expertise, and so help to shape the future.

I wish you all an inspiring and successful academic year.