

## **Word of welcome and speech by Anton Pijpers – President Executive Board**

Dear students, colleagues and friends of Utrecht University, both here in the Dom Church and those attending online,

Allow me to welcome you all on behalf of my colleagues Margot van der Starre, Henk Kummeling and our new student assessor, Chiara Stam. It's wonderful to join you here as we mark the start of the 2023-2024 Academic Year.

In recent weeks, thousands of new students from vocational education and training, higher professional education and the university have been getting to know the city of Utrecht, during the Utrecht Orientation Period (known in Dutch as the UIT).

The UIT board organised a truly memorable week. On behalf of our Executive Board, I would like to thank the organisers and extend a warm welcome to our new crop of students.

One of the things I enjoy when meeting a new generation of students is the open mind and open attitude with which they approach the world. They show a certain kind of eagerness to get started, to learn new things and discover new horizons.

I'd like to encourage each and every one of you to maintain that open and curious attitude. Or to try and push open doors which, under the force of circumstances, have somehow remained closed. We all stand to gain from an open attitude.

It is important to remain curious and involved. Indeed, this is a prerequisite for meaningful dialogue and interaction. And that's exactly what we need to be able to address the big themes and challenges of our time, both in the world of science and in broader society.

One of those challenges is climate change. We've seen various examples of that this summer, in the form of extreme weather events in many parts of the world.

As a university, we are constantly looking for ways to increase our positive impact on the climate, through research, education and in our operational management. For example, over the past year we've invested a large amount of energy in talks about collaboration with the fossil energy sector.

Thanks to the input of countless employees and students, we're now about to introduce a 'No, unless' policy. In other words, Utrecht University will only engage in collaborative research with fossil energy businesses and organisations if they commit themselves intensively and demonstrably to accelerating the energy transition, in line with the Paris Climate Agreement.

Over the next few months we will elaborate that policy into clear guidelines for researchers, lecturers and student associations. Of course we will do so in close consultation with the employees and students concerned. That democratic approach is crucial for us.

As I pointed out a minute ago: our objective as Utrecht University is to tackle the big challenges of our time. We want to create a better world. We connect thinkers and doers, as we're convinced that this is how new insights emerge. Public engagement activities greatly help us achieve this objective.

But what do we actually mean by that term, public engagement? In my view, it's all about promoting the involvement of a wide and diverse audience in science. There are

various ways in which this can be achieved; via 'citizen science', through entrepreneurial initiatives, by giving interviews in the media or by publishing policy recommendations.

Another method is 'community engaged learning', an approach that strengthens traditional university education by combining it with a direct dialogue with society. The main focus in this approach is on collective learning and collective reflection.

The film crew of Orange Films have gathered a number of responses regarding public engagement and people's views on the issue. Let's watch their video for a moment.

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Public engagement promotes mutual understanding, opens up new perspectives and results in better decisions. Madelijn Strick, our keynote speaker, will tell you a lot more about that later.

However, I'd first like to move on from the importance of an open attitude to the importance of Open Science. Besides public engagement, Recognition and Rewards is one of the other themes we focus on in our transition towards Open Science.

Recognition and Rewards is about the way we work together at our university. Feeling safe and at home, while at work. Having a sense that you're contributing something. That your efforts do not go unnoticed. We all know how important these things are.

At Utrecht University, we recognise and reward the commitment and contributions of each and every one of us. Our ultimate objective is to generate societal impact – one of the university's core tasks. We're most successful in that if we all join forces.

Our vision on recognition and rewards is evolving all the time. And we're increasingly aware that its scope should include not only scientists, but other colleagues within the university as well. By this I mean our support and administrative staff, or OBP in Dutch.

There is now an awareness that if we are to maximise our collective impact, we need a more balanced relationship between academics on the one hand and support and administrative staff on the other. That we should no longer maintain this divide, and indeed should not want to do so, because both are extremely important.

From now on, therefore, we will use a single term to cover both groups at Utrecht University: **university staff**. And what are we going to call each other, as colleagues? Well, quite simply, colleagues.

This better reflects the diversity of our work and its outcomes. In practice, you will notice that you are more likely to be addressed in terms of the role or expertise you contribute in a particular context, rather than in terms of your formal position.

This more inclusive approach will enrich our vision on Recognition and Rewards, thereby increasing its significance for everyone within our organisation.

To reflect the crucial role of teamwork in Recognition and Rewards, we intend to highlight one interdisciplinary team every year, starting this year, in which contributions from various fields of expertise have created high-impact results. So this year there is of course every reason to highlight the team of...

... our University Museum! Following a major renovation project, the University Museum will reopen to the public on the sixth of September. A diverse and creative team has made a tremendous effort to make this possible. The result is amazing. Many thanks to

the project leaders and project staff, curators, educators, receptionists, the gardener and his many volunteers, the facility staff, administration and conservation staff, and communications and marketing officers. And we should also acknowledge the contributions of many people from other departments, such as Corporate Real Estate & Campus and Facilities Services.

Let's have a big round of applause for this extraordinary feat of collaboration.

We're proud of being able to open our doors again, and proud of the people who have made this happen. You will hear a lot more about the renovated University Museum later this afternoon.

Now the moment has come to pass the floor to this afternoon's keynote speaker, Madelijn Strick, Associate Professor of Social Psychology. Madelijn specialises in social influencing, communication and behavioural change.

She is both a researcher and an experiential expert in the field of public engagement. This makes her the perfect person to tell us exactly how to engage the public in a *truly* effective way.

So Madelijn, the floor is yours.