

## **Final address and speech by Henk Kummeling – Rector Magnificus**

Dear all, we're now approaching the end of this afternoon's programme.

You have heard a great deal about public engagement today, and about the various ways in which we are putting it into practice at our university.

As brilliantly explained by Madelijn Strick earlier today, this is not some newfangled fashion, but an approach that fits in perfectly with the university's traditional task, which is to provide services to society - more commonly known these days as 'social impact'.

So the university's task is not new. What is new, however, is that we are looking far more critically at the effects of our public engagement, as again quite effectively articulated by Madelijn Strick earlier today.

This critical approach is totally consistent with the major cultural transformation that universities are going through on their path towards Open Science, and reflects the way we wish to position ourselves as a university in society. Over time, that transition has gained acceptance. Huge strides forward are being made in this field, especially within Europe.

And I am proud of the important role that our university has played in this regard, still plays and will continue to play going forward.

On behalf of the Executive Board and the university community, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to this, and especially to Frank Miedema, Vice Rector for Research, as leader of the Open Science programme. With contagious and seemingly inexhaustible enthusiasm, he has propagated the blessings of Open Science in Utrecht, the Netherlands, Europe and far beyond and ensured that it is actually implemented.

Frank, many thanks for your efforts, on behalf of all of us. Although you have retired now, of course you are not truly gone. Whatever the case, we are going to make sure that the Open Science philosophy is given the attention it deserves in the years ahead, that the many good things that have been set in motion are developed further, and that enthusiastic people are given the space they need to make further steps, in part under the inspiring leadership of our new Chief Open Science professor Paul Boselie. We'll hear more about this in the months to come.

Later today we'll have the pleasure of inviting all of you who are gathered here for a visit to the renovated University Museum, or UMU.

For us as a university, UMU is an important platform for connecting with society and for opening up science to a wider audience, and to families in particular. The University Museum has existed since 1928. After changing quarters several times in the city of Utrecht, it can now be found in Lange Nieuwstraat, in the heart of the city's Museum District.

Over the past three years, the museum has undergone an amazing transformation. Its entire concept has changed, and visitors can now get to work themselves to experience science in its full breadth.

The emphasis is not on the *results* of scientific research, but rather on the *process* of conducting research. And that is fully consistent with the principles of Open Science. At UMU, visitors get to see how science really works.

They are assisted in formulating the right questions, looking for answers and distinguishing facts from fiction. In my view, that is the essence of science: a continuous process of asking questions, conducting research and verifying results and questions. In this way, we promote scientific literacy among the public - which is all the more crucial in these times of fake news, alternative facts and assertions that 'science is just another opinion'.

This does not mean that we aim to discourage a critical perspective on science. Indeed, when people improve their insight into the scientific process, they're in a better position to appreciate the value of scientific knowledge. And also, perhaps, to understand that science is never finished; that new, further questions are likely to emerge.

The museum offers five exhibition rooms where visitors can do their own research. For example, they can design a heart-lung machine or study the behaviour of monkeys and humans.

Special programmes for schools help to make the scientific process really come to life. For example, the museum offers research workshops under the guidance of the university's own students. The splendid historic greenhouses and the Zaadhuis in the old botanical garden have also reopened to the public, after three years of renovation.

In this way we hope to increase scientific literacy among our 90,000 annual visitors, including 10,000 schoolchildren.

One of my favourite collections is a very special set of 128 glass models of marine animals. They were made in 1882 by Leopold Blaschka and his son, Rudolf Blaschka, commissioned by Utrecht University. In those days, scientists needed these glass models to study invertebrate marine animals such as sea anemones and sea slugs, which were difficult to conserve as specimens. And even if you ignore the science behind the models, you can still admire their beauty. So for over a year now I have been showing off a Blaschka on the lapel of my best suit at every academic event.

Everybody can support the restoration of this delicate heritage with a donation, using a QR code. You'll find instructions on how to do so on the flyer that you found on your seat. Many thanks to all of you who contribute. This exceptional academic heritage, like so many other objects, will be on display again from the sixth of September.

Anton has already sung the praises of the wonderful team who devoted so much time and energy to the new museum. This Wednesday it will finally open its doors again to the public, and we're proud of that.

I can imagine that this story has aroused your curiosity, so let's now watch a short film about the museum.

#### **<Start video 4: UMU>**

In the museum you will actually see the mystery box that was being passed around in the film. It contains an unknown object. When you've thoroughly examined the box, you can vote on what you think is in it and find out if other people arrived at the same conclusion. If you're not sure, that's fine too.

We hope that this will let visitors experience the sensation that our scientists often feel; the thrill and excitement of examining something that is still partly unknown.

You will experience it all in the museum, shortly. But I'd also like to invite the people at home to visit our new museum in the period ahead and see and especially experience the collection for themselves.

Then let's take a look now at the museum to see if they're ready.

Hester, how's it going there? Are you guys ready?

[Answer]

Thank you Hester, see you later!

Apart from the museum, there are many other ways in which we as a university seek connections with society. Examples include the Betweter Festival in late September, and Operatie Breinbreker in June, where I and my grandson had our eyes popping last time. I should also mention Utrecht Science Week, the Weekend of Science in early October, with a wonderful programme that we present with our colleagues at Utrecht Science Park and that is open for all to enjoy. And let's not forget the exciting Studium Generale discussions, which are organised throughout the year.

I would now like to invite you to enjoy the Utrechtse Studenten Cantorij, who will be singing the University Anthem. Please rise from your seats. You found the text of the anthem on your seats when you arrived, so there is really no good reason not to sing along loudly and clearly! 😊

After this performance, the beadle will lead the procession, the student procession and all of you to the University Museum, where the opening ceremony will take place. That will be a very special event indeed. The traditional reception with drinks will also be held there, which is all the more reason to attend!

Transport will be available for those among you who have difficulty walking.

And for those at home: thank you for your interest and attention! Until next time.

(May I now invite you all to rise)