



Anton Pijpers

President

Executive Board

Ladies and gentlemen,

Two weeks ago the Shanghai Ranking was released, and it named Utrecht University as one of the top fifty universities in the world.

We tweeted about it.

We used the hashtag '#proud'.

For some people, this left a sour taste in their mouth.

At first, their irritated reactions somewhat annoyed me.

I thought: we shouldn't let this ranking define who we are, but surely we're allowed to be pleased with this recognition for the great work done by our people?

But I also understand the irritation. And it has everything to do with the topic we've been discussing today.

The Shanghai Ranking was the first worldwide ranking system, and in that sense it leads the way, but it's primarily based on publications and citations. Because of this one-sided focus, some people think the ranking is the ultimate expression of a system characterised by uncontrolled individualism and performance pressure.

A symbol of a dead-end street.

So I understand that sentiment – although I still think we should definitely share our feelings of pride with each other more often.

But we have to ask ourselves – what exactly are we proud of? What do we think is important? We have a system that has admittedly given us many benefits, but which is now getting in our way.

As a university sector, we fundamentally must seek out new ways of doing things, create a different culture and develop a new system.

Utrecht University aspires to play a pioneering role in this quest.



Today, important ingredients for a new direction have been suggested by Stan Gielen, Belle Derks and Annetje Ottow.

Let's put their ideas into action. Promoting Open Access publishing as a part of Plan S will play an important part in our new way of doing things. But we also need to adjust the evaluation criteria for research results. To that end, we recently set up a working group led by Paul Boselie.

I can announce today that Utrecht University is going to sign the much-discussed San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. This declaration, 'DORA' for short, is about the importance of alternatives to the current use of journal impact factors in assessment systems.

Signing the DORA is not a purely symbolic step. It's a 'pledge' for which Utrecht University can be held accountable. We want to take real, concrete steps to promote open and transparent research practice. That's our major challenge for this year and beyond.

But we will also face other challenges over the next few years. Including in the physical domain.

Some of our current buildings are not keeping pace with developments in teaching and research. Teaching is becoming more blended. Research is becoming more multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Some of our buildings are not tailored to this new reality; they're outdated, expensive and not particularly sustainable. This means that we're spending more on maintenance and energy than we'd like.

There's been intensive analysis and discussion around this issue in recent months. We can work towards a smaller, more modern and more affordable property portfolio.

Over the next ten years, we can reduce the environmental footprint of our buildings by 65 percent. That will require a huge investment, and some quite radical decisions. It's a challenge, but also an opportunity that we can't ignore; an opportunity which we will make the most of, together.

Dear colleagues,



By working over the coming year towards a better culture of recognising and valuing and also towards better premises, we will be preparing ourselves for the future.

Of course, Utrecht University can't do all of that by ourselves.

Collectively, the universities are working on an ambition document. I'm one of the drivers of this project, so I can specifically put forward the picture of what we want for Utrecht University. This works out well, because we're just beginning the process of drafting a new Strategic Plan for Utrecht University, in which we will create our own picture of where we want to be by 2030 and what we will therefore have to do over the next few years.

Together with the other universities, we can see that as universities we were crucial to the development of our country over the past few centuries. Partly thanks to the knowledge developed in universities and the dissemination of that knowledge, here in the Netherlands we've been able to build a democratic constitutional state and a prosperous nation. Many diseases have been eradicated, food production has been made safer. Those who have put academic knowledge into practice were able to do so in part thanks to the high quality of our university education.

And the value of our universities stretches further:

Universities are the ultimate sanctuary for talent, the place where the researchers and leaders of tomorrow are trained among the broad university community. In universities, engaged and passionate people come together to work on solutions to social issues. But also to engage in open and free debate; to discuss, develop, and stimulate their curiosity. To obtain the fundamental academic skills they need to be equipped for their future, for their 'sixth job'.

That is our *raison d'être*. That should be the focus of our attention. And in doing so, we must respond to the changes taking place around us.

As universities, we look around us and we see a society in which the pace of knowledge development is increasing, and in which universities are increasingly facing competition from other education providers and new knowledge economies such as China and India.

We see a society that is globalising and digitising, and in which employers and



students alike are demanding perpetual and rapid innovation in education.

We see the gap between the well-educated and the lesser educated growing wider, and trust in institutions and in academic knowledge being eroded.

We also see public policies that are explicitly driven by economic results.

And all of this is taking place in a world confronted with enormous social challenges, as described in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the next few decades universities in the Netherlands, and certainly our university, want to be and to remain a driving force for progress in this changing society.

And in our opinion, we can only achieve this through, yes, adequate funding (which is what today's WOinACTie meeting is about), and by changing our internal culture (which is what we've been talking about here today). And most importantly, through an open system in which we have a close connection with society and with each other.

Collaboration and team spirit will carry us forward.

In the intense discussions about funding, there's a risk that science/technology, arts/humanities/social sciences and medicine will be played off against each other. Or that we will create a false comparison between Dutch interests and internationalisation.

I hope we will not allow ourselves to be distracted by such tactics. The future lies in cooperation across the borders of countries, institutions and academic disciplines.

That's why, as Henk said at the start of this meeting, at Utrecht University we are not going to internally redistribute our funding.

And it's why Utrecht University and UMCU are going to form a new, external alliance. An alliance with – don't be alarmed – two universities of technology.

I'm talking about Eindhoven University of Technology and Wageningen University and Research. We're doing so in the firm belief that we should strengthen the cooperation that is already there of course. The Utrecht–



Wageningen–Eindhoven cluster is unique for the complementarity of the available knowledge, offering and talent, in both education and research.

We're focusing on young, highly-talented staff and students, and on those areas where we can have the most impact, namely the necessary system transitions in fields such as energy, food, health and the circular society.

As Executive Board we have high expectations for this alliance.

We strongly urge you to work with us to make this alliance an enormous success.

A success that we will define, recognise and value in a new way.

On behalf of the Board, I wish you all an inspirational new academic year.
Thank you.