

Members of the Board of the University,
Members of the Board of Trustees of the University,
Commissioner of the King of the Province of Groningen
Paas,
Mayor of the City of Groningen Den Oudsten,
Staff-members and students of the University of
Groningen,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

Welcome to the University of Groningen. Today we celebrate the Opening of the Academic Year 2018/2019 and the 404th *Dies Natalis* of our university.

The University of Groningen has experienced a successful last year. Just to give you an example – for the first time we are the best bachelor and master university in the section of general universities of the *Keuzegids Hoger Onderwijs*. I want to congratulate all staf-members who have been responsible for this effort! And in the next few minutes I want to share some thoughts about our next steps toward new success.

This year will be the year of attention for sustainability and so the topic of sustainability will be the main theme of this meeting as well.

This will be the year of the awarding of a Doctorate Honoris Causa to former United Nations Secretary-General Dr Ban Ki-moon for his contributions to developing the United Nations *Sustainable Development*

Goals among others. Our university is proud to run the new *Global Centre of Excellence on Climate Adaptation*. This Global Center will be opened by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on October 17.

And this will be the year of our own institutional sustainability: we will face an institutional accreditation round; one can say a serious examination for the university as a whole. I am confident that we will pass.

And – finally - this will be the year of our 81st lustrum celebration in June 2019. Today I can reveal the theme of the lustrum – it will be '**All Inclusive**'! And this is not a reference to a cheap holiday resort, but relates to one of our main goals: to be a safe and inclusive community for all students and staff. And I mean inclusive in all respects: in our academic programmes and all non-curricular activities. And at this occasion I would like to thank all students, staff and citizens of the Municipality of Groningen and around who help to make international students feel welcome.

I want to emphasize that a university is a community of learners, teachers and researchers. We care about inclusion and safety and want all community members to feel at home.

Commemoration

Unfortunately, last year a number of students and staff have passed away. Right now we would like to pay our respects and commemorate both students and staff. May I ask you to rise please.

Students

Samir Fetrat, Science and Engineering

Pablo Guzman Velez, Science and Engineering

Kaethe van der Vlugt, Economics and Business / Philosophy

Assid Zafar, Science and Engineering

Michele (Miki) Selle, Science and Engineering

Laurie Mazereeuw, Arts

Marieke van den Brink, Medical Sciences

Staff

Professor Kalverboer, Behavioural and Social Sciences

Professor Nieuwenhuis, Medical Sciences

Mrs van der Voort-Toisuta, Economics and Business

Mr Preuter, University of Groningen Library

Professor Radt, Arts

Professor Van der Werff, Behavioural and Social Sciences

Professor Kuiper, Science and Engineering

Mr Vink, Behavioural and Social Sciences

Dr Van der Geld, Behavioural and Social Sciences

Professor Van der Lugt, Science and Engineering

Mr De Vlugt, Science and Engineering

Professor Daan, Science and Engineering

Mr Faber, Medical Sciences

Professor Boerma, Science and Engineering

Professor Molenaar, Behavioural and Social Sciences

Mrs Fleurke-Rozema, Medical Sciences

Professor Curtain, Science and Engineering

Professor Pottasch, Science and Engineering

Professor Wegener Sleeswijk, Science and Engineering

Mr Zwanenburg, MSc, Medical Sciences

Mr Fledderus, Science and Engineering

Dr Dierssen, Medical Sciences

Professor Lang, Behavioural and Social Sciences

Professor Boonstra, Medical Sciences

Professor Den Boogert, Law

Please take your seats.

Sustainability

Universities propagate scientific progress and contribute to societal challenges. Universities do so by respecting the core academic values: honesty, accountability, transparency, independence and responsibility. In these days of misinformation and fake news, academic values prove to be more important than ever before.

Universities can do their job, but need a certain minimum level of financial support in order to fulfill expectations.

We observe debate about public financing of higher education and so it is necessary to make clear what the impact of universities on societies at large is. In a recent paper Anna Valero and John van Reenen¹ of the London School of Economics review the impact channels of establishing and financing universities. I think it is relevant to present those four channels for you here today.

¹ Anna Valero and John Van Reenen (2016), The Economic Impact of Universities: Evidence from Across the Globe, London School of Economics, Centre for Economic Performance, London.

Universities contribute to: (1) increasing human capital, (2) enlarging the number of inventions and speeding the adoption of new technology, (3) developing and maintaining democratic institutions, (4) increasing effective demand. It is good to note that all University of Groningen activities are somehow related to these four channels. Valero and Van Reenen use a worldwide database including 1500 regions in 78 countries between 1950 and 2010 and show that indeed the impact of increasing spending on universities in a region leads to a substantial additional income per capita. Universities bring both a higher welfare and well-being.

But universities also need to think **how** to bring welfare and well-being to society in general and more specific to the region though. Our university is no exception. More than 400 years ago the City and the Province of Groningen have founded our university – right here on this location in the beautiful Martini Church. And today we want – more than ever – to contribute to society.

This is why the University of Groningen has invested in three large societal themes: healthy ageing, energy and sustainable society. We can proudly say that in the last ten years serious and visible progress in all three fields – which are all three focused on some form of sustainability – has been made. And we will continue doing so and will use the UN framework to make our efforts more visible and attractive to society.

In the year 2000 UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – who unfortunately passed away a few weeks ago – has

launched the so-called Millennium Goals. The target year for the 8 Millennium Goals was 2015.

In 2015 UN SG Ban Ki-moon has published *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* or in short the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The transition of the 8 Millennium Goals to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals has both led to a renewed worldwide interest in sustainability and to a more precise formulation and communication of the goals.

Since 2015 there is an increasing attention for the Sustainable Development Goals. Our three societal fields, healthy ageing, energy and sustainable society are truly interrelated with the 17 goals. So in the years to come we will show how we contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals starting of today. Universities should take the lead in research and education to contribute to fight poverty and inequality, to take action on climate, to guarantee peace and justice, to name a few.

As it concerns climate, in September 2014 – Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had a famous statement on climate change: There is no Plan B for climate action as there is no “Planet B”. And so we are proud that Secretary General Ban is coming to Groningen and willing to both act as Chair of the Governing Board of the Global Center on Adaptation and moreover to open it.

So what can our university do further? In education we will stimulate students to work on sustainability, for instance in our new bachelor programme *Global Responsibility & Leadership* of the University College Fryslân. We will also start cross-disciplinary minor programmes in the three societal themes for all students. And in research we will show how we contribute to the goals and we will make this clear in engagement with society at large.

No time to loose – solving the issues raised in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is not easy. But insights generated by curiosity-driven education and the deep interest of students in today's sustainability issues really can contribute. More attention for sustainability and public engagement is the way forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the University of Groningen is in excellent shape and we can be very optimistic about the future. The university will continue to shine in research and education, engage with society and contribute to the development goals. We will have an exciting year ahead and I hereby open the Academic Year 2018/2019!

Sytze Pruikma and Theunis Piersma

At the Opening Ceremony it is common to pay attention to the 'Beauty of Research and Life as a Researcher'. We also value artistic and/or musical contributions. This year we will combine the two: research and music.

Today's general theme is sustainability and I am proud to introduce the next item on today's programme. Sytze Pruikma is an independent sound artist and composer of '*Conference of the Birds*', the recent large theatrical outdoor spectacle on the occasion of Leeuwarden as Cultural Capital of Europe 2018. Theunis Piersma occupies the Chair in Global Flyway Ecology at this university and is also a scientist at the NIOZ, the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research. He is a recipient of the prestigious 2014 Spinoza Prize. He just published a book together with University of Groningen graduate Thomas Oudman. Called '*De Ontsnapping van de Natuur*', the book presents us with a new view of the scientific enterprise. For the last 10 years, Sytze and Theunis have worked together to tell about the plight of our birds, our countryside and, indeed, our planet. Following up from the 2017 Oerol hit TRACKS, this afternoon they will share their latest news in a performance called '*Sentinel Birds*'.

I ask your attention for a very special item of the Opening Ceremony – today in the Martini Church - Theunis Piersma and Sytze Pruikma!

Alumnus of the Year 2017 – Carolien de Bruin

Since 2009 our university has organized the selection of the Alumnus of the Year and previous winners have been for example Jeroen Smit, Stine Jensen, Jelle Brandt Corstius, Wim Pijbes and last year Merel Rumping.

To qualify for the title of Alumnus of the Year, a candidate must meet the following criteria:

1. Have made an exceptional contribution to society, research, culture or sports,
2. Are an inspiration to others,
3. Are a promise for the future (the Alumnus of the Year award is a midcareer prize).

It is a great privilege to announce that Carolien de Bruin is the University of Groningen Alumnus of the Year 2017. Carolien de Bruin holds a Master Finance and has completed an MBA from Columbia Business School in New York.

Carolien de Bruin is CEO and founder of the Amsterdam-based social enterprise C-Change. Having witnessed the complexities and persistent barriers that underpin the world of social change and sustainability, she left her corporate career in New York with a single goal: Transform our collective ability to achieve the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through technology and facilitation.

Carolien de Bruin is an ambassador of sustainability and combines her economic and financial knowledge with her societal engagement. The Alumnus of the Year 2017 Jury, consisting of Jeroen Smit, Roelof Joosten,

Claartje Mulder and myself, has made an unanimous decision. We think that Carolien de Bruin has made and is making an exceptional contribution to society, is a true example for others and will do so in the near future.

The prize for the Alumnus of the Year is a specially designed sculpture of visual artist Wia van Dijk. The 'Athena Noctua' is a pure and powerful bronze statue that stands for wisdom, curiosity and pride. Each year the sculpture is personalized by changing the color of the eyes to match the personality of the winner.

Carolien, may I invite you to come to the fore and receive your award.

University Poet-in-Residence

Each year we appoint a university poet-in-residence. In the last year Rachel Raetzer has been our poet and she has been so kind with Jeanette den Toonder and Marlene Bakker to act as a jury to appoint the new university poet. For the first time in history the jury has proposed to appoint a poet who writes in English. It is no wonder why: her name is Sofia Manouki – having a Greek-Japanese background – a bachelor degree in law - and Sofia has just arrived to become a Master Student Religion, Conflict and Globalisation.

Sofia Manouki's poetry can be described as immensely bold and powerful. The verses seem to jump off the paper and keep us thinking long after one has finished reading them. She is not afraid to choose her own style and let go of conventions. Both on paper and on stage, the poems she sent in will succeed to impress readers as well as listeners. Sofia clearly does not shy away from either critique or self-reflection, which gives the jury faith in her professional development as University Poet.

Sofia, the floor is yours!

Rick Middelbos

Each year we pay attention to education and student life during this ceremony. This year our student Biology Rick Middelbos will share his thoughts with us. Rick is a bachelor-student Biology, interested in ecology and bird-life, and has also completed an Educational Minor. Rick, the floor is yours!

Estrellas

Time for some music again! The Groningen Student popchoir Estrellas has its home base at the University's cultural center USVA. Today they will present two songs: *Trouble* and *The Scientist*. The Estrellas are conducted by Wilfred Reneman and supported by Bram van der Veen on piano.

Closing

It is time to close now. I invite all of you for drinks and snacks at the back of the church. After our invited guests have left their seats please use both entries at the left and right to enter the reception. I want to thank you for coming and showing interest in our university and wish you all a productive and pleasant academic season.