



Transfer of rectorship

prof. dr. Theo Bastiaens

Rector magnificus, Open University of the Netherlands



Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and pleased to stand here before you today and accept the great responsibilities inherent to the role of Rector of the Open University of the Netherlands.

I owe this position to the confidence of the Supervisory Board, the Works Council, the Students Council and the entire community of the Open University of the Netherlands. I am deeply touched by this and will do my utmost to never betray your confidence.

That the Open University of the Netherlands is in transition, really is an obvious point. Anybody continuously is in transition.

People and organisations need to keep on adapting to the context in which they act. The world is changing, we keep on adapting. The way in which we adapt, that is interesting.

You continuously hear that we are living in an information society that is digitalizing. Work and the workplace are changing. We are supported by more and more newer technologies, we need to flexibly respond to many things and we don't sit in one place from nine to five anymore. In addition, our society is globalizing. We often work for and in cooperation with others all over the world. All this has consequences for the education, research and valorisation of the universities. We have to deal with different needs of students, we will have to prepare and train those students differently and we will need to adapt the contents of our research and its translation to society.

Students expect more flexible, motivating and activating ways of teaching than before and they expect a diploma of important value in order to stand out in society and the labour market. Employers expect employable employees who stay up-to-date with short learning programmes. Society expects more than ever that academic research contributes to real solutions to issues in society. For a university embedded in tradition and in a culture of hundreds of years of science, this is not an easy task.

Fortunately, the Open University of the Netherlands is just 35 years old and this task is somewhat easier for us. We already have 35 years of flexibility in our DNA, and you can obtain an academic status through part-time study. From the very outset we have been educating students with technology. Previously this was through video tapes, discs and computer programmes. Today through digital learning environments, apps and such. And we have always practised educational innovation; which has resulted in a global reputation in the field of educational technology.

Our programmes have for many years scored highly in terms of quality. We are ranked number 3 on the list of the best Dutch universities for 2019 in the Selection Guide Universities. For this achievement I must thank former rector Anja Oskamp. She has, for years, guarded the academic level of our courses and has strengthened them where necessary.

Where others need a revolution, we can suffice with evolution. An evolution of our education, research and valorisation. Small adjustments which ensure a much better quality. Analogous to the famous car from Stuttgart, which essentially has not changed outward appearance for 50 years, but is the benchmark for others on aspects of technology, innovation and quality. The Open University of the Netherlands as the Porsche in the academic landscape.

Maybe we've not quite reached that point, because we do concretely need to address a number of affairs.

As a rector I want to empower the scientific areas, i.e. educational sciences, psychology, humanities, law, management sciences, natural sciences and informatics, to further excel in education and research. I would also like to increase the number of seven scientific fields. The Open University of the Netherlands would like to further serve the wider Dutch society by offering more disciplines as part-time options. Both the demand and the need exist.

The Open University of the Netherlands has seventeen study centres in the Netherlands and Dutch speaking Belgium, small campuses where students and staff meet. The employees working in these study centres are our ambassadors in these regions. The Open University of the Netherlands is a national university but it gets its effect also because of this regional presence. Good regional relations are essential to us; so we will intensify our cooperation with companies, organizations and colleagues in education in specific regions. Doing research together (by Open Innovation for example) and exploring how we can positively contribute to a region will become important. The province of Limburg has a special position in this investigation. The Open University of the Netherlands has its main campus in Heerlen, we are inextricably bound up with the history of the Eastern Mining Area after the closure of the mines. Yes, we have Limburg roots and we are proud of this. In the next year, the 35th anniversary year, we will therefor start a number of activities, strengthen the bonds with the city of Heerlen and preserve our relations in the region of South-Limburg.

With regard to education, continuous attention for the student is needed. As for pedagogics (the activating learning methods), technology (state-of-the-art) and student perception (personalized) our attention cannot flag. Co-creation with students is an effective tool to maintain focus.

In conclusion I would like to address the theme of 'interdisciplinarity in research'. A small specific university like the Open University of the Netherlands can be a global university by focusing in research. We can better stand out from other universities by combining expertise from various scientific fields of our university and by doing interdisciplinary research on society issues. A good example of this is the current interdisciplinary research programme 'The safe city'. All the same, possibilities of course remain for monodisciplinary research in the individual sections.

If you chose interdisciplinarity, you implicitly find a group effort to be more important than an individual one. I too think that in science there is too little attention for excellent groups and that there is too much focus on the individual academic. Fortunately we are not the only ones of that opinion, I understand that also The Association of Universities in the Netherlands, VSNU, is considering a new appraisal system for academics. Moreover attention for 'team science' is beneficial for the mutual relations and enhances cooperation in an organization.

I am almost at the end of my speech. I would now like to address my colleagues. Firstly, my colleagues, the *rectores magnifici*. I am looking forward to working with all of you and to join efforts to maintain and further improve the good position of academic research and education in the Netherlands. Although I already am part of an Executive Board for some years in Germany, I am a novice in a Dutch academic board. I hope I will learn a lot from all of you. I will call you shortly for an appointment.

Then finally I am addressing my direct colleague, the chairman of the Executive Board, Arent van der Feltz. We will be making the Executive Board of this beautiful organization together. We already had the privilege of working together intensively during the past months. Although we differ, I have noticed that we think alike about the course to follow for the Open University of the Netherlands and that we will complement each other in many fields. I am looking forward to working together in the years to come.

The fact that I am standing here so relaxed, I fully owe to Anja Oskamp. The *rector magnificus* of the past eight years, who leaves a university that is glittering, no it is even shining, in the sunlight. Anja, thank you warmly for all the good you have done and achieved.