

Speech Hester Bijl ter introductie van Jennifer Cumming
Opening Academisch Jaar, 6 september 2021

I am really pleased to introduce our keynote speakers, both world-renowned researchers on well-being: Jennifer Cumming from the University of Birmingham and Andrea Evers from Leiden University.

It is no coincidence that these two speakers are sharing their thoughts with us today: our universities – Leiden University and the University of Birmingham – work together in an international partnership: EUniWell, the European University for Well-Being.

Seven universities from seven countries – the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Sweden, France, Hungary and the Netherlands – are united in EUniWell. Here they devote their efforts to well-being in Europe: the well-being of our students and staff, the well-being of our communities and the well-being of our society as a whole. Leiden University and the LUMC have been involved in EUniWell since its inception in November last year.

We have all discovered the benefits of online meetings in the past year. I personally learned this just before the Covid pandemic when we gathered online with teams of enthusiastic students and staff scattered around Europe to write our proposal for EUniWell. Before the pandemic, we also had the chance to meet in person, for example at the rectors assembly in Birmingham and the student hackathon in PLNT in Leiden. I am looking forward to more of these in-person meetings once again because the energy and contacts they create are such an important aspect of our collaboration.

Working together in EUniWell has already brought great results. EUniWell has been awarded two highly competitive European Commission bids. And with our seed funding we have initiated a range of joint activities focusing not only on teaching and research, but also on connecting our communities and sharing best practices. These activities are aimed at researchers and students alike. To give just one example: the online EUniWell symposium of good practices on student well-being that will be held at the end of this month – you are all welcome to join.

EUniWell is about well-being in all its dimensions: from the well-being of our own students to the well-being of butterflies in Europe. From individual quality of life to social cohesion. From the health of the local environment to that of the whole planet. And it is in this partnership and with this research that we hope to have an impact in society.

Speaking of innovative research and societal impact, our two keynote speakers are an inspiring example. Jennifer Cumming is active in the area of physical and mental well-being at one of our EUniWell partner universities, the University of Birmingham, a research-intensive university in the UK that ranks in the world top 100. She has used her research in sports coaching to help young people with complex needs who are at risk of isolation, social disadvantage and poor mental health.

Andrea Evers has won the Stevin Prize for knowledge exchange and impact. She was often consulted about Covid last year. This varied from advising the Health Council of the Netherlands on the long-term effects of Covid to commenting on the government's Covid measures in talkshows on Dutch TV.

I am extremely pleased to be able to introduce to you today: Professor Jennifer Cumming, Full Professor of Sport and Exercise Psychology, head of research and knowledge transfer and co-director of the new transdisciplinary research center for urban well-being. She will begin by introducing the topic of well-being and will go on to discuss how to measure, investigate and improve this, using examples from her community-based research.

Then it is the turn of Professor Andrea Evers, Professor of Health Psychology and Scientific Director of our Institute of Psychology here at Leiden University, and Medical Delta Professor of Healthy Society. She will speak about her research and initiatives on well-being at the University, in our two cities, in our province and in the Netherlands as a whole.