

Date: 23 January 2020

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to our New Year reception in the Faculty of Humanities. I am pleased that so many of you can be here today.

A New Year speech is a real tradition. It also contains some traditional elements, like looking back on successes and looking ahead to challenges. I will honour this tradition, but not in the same way as the “firework tradition”; I will try to make sure that it doesn't result in more and louder bangs every year.

As far as I know, the longest speech ever given was by Lluís Colet in 1998. It was about the painter Salvador Dalí and went on for 24 hours and 21 minutes.

The shortest speech, on the other hand, was given by Dalí himself; it was: "I will be so brief that I have already finished." My speech today will be somewhere between these extremes.

I would like to start with what will come after this speech: our Faculty's first Impact Prize. The notion of “impact” has become increasingly important in how we think about our work. These days, it is a key theme in strategic sessions. It's not that impact is anything new, of course – just think of our graduates – but we're not making our importance to society sufficiently visible.

We need more recognition for people who put their energy into this endeavour; so today, for the first time, we will be presenting the Faculty of Humanities Impact Prize.

I will now give you the promised brief look back:

A great deal of groundbreaking research has been done and excellent education provided. We remain remarkably high in the rankings: we are a top faculty. And that's something we all work extremely hard for.

We came through last year's many education assessments with almost no problems: a fantastic achievement. Many people within the Faculty did a lot of work for this. It shows that all of us – both teaching staff and support staff – take our students very seriously. We are all performing very well.

The same applies for our research: in this field, too, we have received some extremely positive assessments of our quality and commitment. We may occasionally grumble – and sometimes with justification – but meanwhile we are indeed world leaders.

Of course, we regularly encounter problems and frictions. They are an inherent aspect of a large organisation like ours. We need to find solutions together. And we *can* find solutions together: by speaking constructively with each other, being considerate of each other and treating each other with decency and respect; but above all, by trusting that we all want the best for each other, on the basis of our responsibilities.

The excellent collective results are highlighted in the success of individuals: I won't list too many of them, but will just mention Nadine Akkerman's ERC grant, Thijs Porck's LUS Teaching Prize and Frank Chouraqui, who received our own Teaching Prize.

A vast amount of work has obviously been done. Think of the Open Days, the Master's Open Days and the Experience Days. This is important work: providing accurate, honest and transparent information for prospective students. The aim is to get the right student in the right place. If we do this well, then completion rates, efficiency, quality, and teacher and student satisfaction will not be opposites, but will augment each other.

I therefore pay tribute to everyone who plays a part in this: administrative and support staff, academic staff and the students. Together, we all make up the academic community.

An exceptional feature of the year was the great variety of 444 activities, reaching a highpoint in our Humanities party in the Stadsgehoorzaal. That was quite an event! But I would also like to mention the Education Parade for teaching staff in November, which was a special occasion that we could certainly repeat.

During the last year, we have had relocation, renovation, refurbishment and much more: our Humanities Campus is gradually taking shape. A splendid future lies ahead, but it will make many more demands on us all and our neighbours. We all have to work together to make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Another achievement last year is that our Campus in Rabat – the Netherlands Institute in Morocco (NIMAR) – acquired definitive funding from the Ministry.

This spring, many of our colleagues will move to the Arsenaal: it will be magnificent! I must confess that I'm sometimes slightly overcome by jealousy: do *not* become a member of the Faculty Board in Humanities if you want to have the best room.

Before Christmas, Egbert Fortuin stepped down as Vice-Dean. We are very grateful to him for all his efforts and his dedication to the Faculty.

Fortunately, we have found someone else who is equally committed to Humanities education, research and students: Jeroen Touwen. I'm pleased to say that he started in this role on 1 January, and the portfolio "fits him like a glove". A most cordial welcome to Jeroen.

And now the brief look ahead:

First of all, there are the Research Master's assessments. But of course they will all go well, right?

This spring, we need to share our ideas about the University's Strategic Plan, which will also form the basis for our own plan the year after. In short, your ideas will be very welcome!

Then there's the future of "Van Rijn", and dark clouds like the developments around research grants. There is still a great deal of conjecture, but at least we have two years of financial stability, thanks to the commitments of our Executive Board. I should also mention the solidarity among the faculties in Leiden; although there's considerable uncertainty in the medium term, one benefit is that much more coordination has developed in Leiden and nationally in the domain of SSH (Social Sciences & Humanities).

So we should not be too gloomy, and should continue with what we do well. It would certainly help, of course, if we could actually have the billion euros that higher education needs, according to our Minister!

This brings me to our ambitions – embodied in the Programme Standards project – to achieve more unity, clarity and balance, especially in the deployment of staff for teaching. We are working hard on this, and significant steps must be taken this spring.

We will naturally be safeguarding our learning outcomes, but we need to reduce the teaching workload to create time for rest and research. This will not be easy and not always painless, because fewer teaching hours will primarily mean that we have to offer fewer courses. Introducing these changes will demand a great deal of discussion and dialogue. This is something we all have to be open to and willing to make a contribution.

And now for something pleasant: as I said earlier, we need to present ourselves more emphatically to the world around us. And turning words into actions: the Communications department has produced a short film, giving a glimpse of the kinds of things we do, in the form of personal stories of various colleagues. There will be an actual sneak preview of the film on 9 March in Leiden's most beautiful cinema, the Trianon (put the date in your diary!) and today, as a sample, you can see the trailer: 57 seconds, and then I will finish ....

{ [the trailer is here on Youtube](#) }

... so if you'd like to see all 15 minutes of the film, come along on 9 March!

I have now been speaking for much too long. My impact is undoubtedly declining fast, so in conclusion and before we proceed to the Impact Prize:

On behalf of everyone on the Faculty Board, I would like to thank you all for your tremendous efforts over the past year, and raise a glass to another successful and healthy year for us all in 2020!