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# Performance agreements: the tension is rising

Quality of education is the objective of the agreements with OCW // In an effort to make education future-proof, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences (OCW) has made performance agreements with all universities. This also concerns the Faculty of Humanities (FGW).

With the benchmark moments approaching fast, it is essential to critically examine whether FGW is on track with respect to 'our' agreements. The more so because both success and failure have financial consequences. The quality of education, that is the objective of the performance agreements, for the students, for the Ministry, and most certainly also for the university. The academic landscape is changing

fast. Students are becoming more critical and want to see a return on their investment, in the form of a valuable diploma, a study programme with reasonable job prospects, and a pleasant modern study environment. In addition, the government sets increasingly specific conditions on the funding of universities. This fits into the current societal trend of the government wanting a greater say in education.

## The right instruments?

The performance agreements are clearly binding. All universities are facing concrete objectives to which financial consequences are coupled. This is not a best effort engagement, but an actual obligation to achieve certain results.

The most important question is whether FGW is currently using the right instruments to meet

the performance agreements. For example, it is a fact that we need to increase our number of students in order to obtain a proportionate share of the financial resources within the growing university landscape. We do not, however, have the option of introducing a more stringent selection procedure to prevent students dropping out or switching programme. This is why FGW is carefully studying the Performance Agreements Programme in order to identify the instruments that we can use or develop. By doing this, we contribute as best we can to meet the university's performance agreements.

## A critical approach

Teachers, study coordinators and support staff are all involved in a broad range of projects aimed at contributing to meeting the performance agreements. Now

## What they say

3 colleagues talk about the performance agreements

### Frank Pieke, Professor of Modern

**China Studies:** "I am constantly looking for things that stimulate my students' curiosity. If I can help them become the inquisitive students that they tend not to be at the start, they become motivated and become their own teachers. The performance agreements do not yet focus sufficiently on the qualities of the student. My proposal is to replace our current 'selection at the gate' and its minimal criteria with a 'selection in practice', such as a bridging programme and a solid first-year programme in which we as teachers can work intensively with the students. Drop-out or switching is not by definition bad in this phase. And following this kind of selection, I would even dare to agree to a 90% rate of bachelor output."



### Simone Buitendijk, Vice-Rector:

"Performance agreements are more than just cold-blooded figures, they are also apparent in the personal approach of our lecturers and staff, and their involvement with future generations. I have full confidence in this. Study guidance boils down to connection. An important component of the work satisfaction felt by lecturers lies in their contact with students. I know this from my own time as a lecturer. Everyone benefits from this contact becoming more personal and more intensive. It contributes to a better study tempo and study output."



### Gijs Dreijer, Assessor:

"At first it looked as if the agreements were just a way of guiding students through their study programmes more quickly, but if you look more carefully, you can see that the quality of education benefits from it. For instance, as a result of the focus on honours education and the completion of the BA in four years, attention is paid to quality and students can really achieve their full potential. In addition, students can expect real quality from their teachers as a result of the (rightly) high BKO requirements. Performance agreements bring out the best in both students and teachers."



## The agreements

**Drop-out rate in BA1:** maximum 17% of first-year students cancel their enrolment at our university after one year.

**Switch BA1:** maximum 8% of first-year students choose another study programme at our university after one year.

**Bachelor output:** minimum 70% of students complete their programme within 4 years

**Excellence education:** minimum 10% of final participants in honours education

**Contact hours:** minimum 12 contact hours per week in the first year

**BKO certificates:** minimum 80% of teachers with an appointment of 0.5 FTE or more

**Administrative and support staff (OBP):** maximum 18% of all staff



## Performance agreements in the media

NRC

“Measurable performance is not a problem in itself. (...) The **fixation on measurable performance only becomes a problem** if students are driven solely by grades and bits of paper, rather than by the acquisition of knowledge. If you are only learning to outrun the mob and earn lots of cash, you will turn into a selfish individual and a potential danger to society. (...) If you are learning out of interest and in order to contribute to a better world, you will be of immense value.”

(Martine Oldhoff, *Theology student in Amsterdam and Utrecht, in NRC Handelsblad, 16 January 2014*)

ScienceG

“Bussemaker announces that she will be ‘touring’ higher education to provide the new ‘strategic agenda’ with more substance. “In order to improve higher education even further, and in line with the successful MBO tour, we will also be **conducting interviews with students, teachers and administrators in higher education about the future of higher education.**”

(*Scienceguide, 17 April 2014*)

LSVb!

“The question is whether the indicators of the performance agreements will **really set in motion a quality impulse.**” ([www.lsvb.nl](http://www.lsvb.nl))

Mare

“The universities immediately got to work to achieve the target ambitions. However, achieving these targets is rendered difficult by the fact that the government has so far failed to meet some of the agreements,” writes the VSNU. Minister of Education Bussemaker recognised that ‘the appointment of a new Cabinet has led to **some conditions being different from what was expected.**’

(*De Mare, 27 February 2014*)

deVolkst

‘It would have been **a demographic miracle** if the quality (of our higher education) had remained the same while the number of students grew from 160,000 to 245,000 in a period of fewer than ten years (!) and the government contribution per student dropped continuously over the last thirty years.’

(Rutger Bregman on ‘the strongly communistic traits of our system of higher education’, *De Volkskrant, 23 April 2013*)



that the benchmarking moments are approaching, the faculty has to make a more critical appraisal. Will we manage to achieve the required results with our current projects? Are additional efforts required to meet particular agreements? What can we ask of our staff, and most importantly: how can we use this point in time to learn from each other's projects and help each other within the faculty? This is no easy task. Henk Kok has been appointed Performance Agreements Programme Manager to guide the process.

**It may not always feel that way, but quality and being assessed on results are closely related**

We are committed both to quality and to output. This may seem like a contradiction: aiming for quality while being assessed on results. And yet, the two are closely related, even if it doesn't always feel that way. The priorities set by the Ministry of Education to a large extent match those of the university and faculty. Most students benefit from completing their study programme within the set time limits. This makes the study period more compact and more transparent for both students and teachers. And it is obvious that everyone benefits from students choosing the right study programme and not quitting in their first year.

### Are we going to make it?

It is as yet uncertain whether we will meet the performance agreements. It is most certainly our ambition. We are on track with respect to the agreements regarding BKO certification, a minimum of 12 contact hours per week in the first year, and the percentage of support staff. With regard to the other agreements, the results are less predictable:

- In the last two years, we have witnessed a decrease in the number of students dropping out or making a switch. This seems to indicate that we are on the right path, but it doesn't provide any certainty: only the 2014-2015 cohort counts towards the assessment of the agreements.
- Our bachelor's output is currently moving in the wrong direction; our output was lower in 2013 than in 2012. For the performance agreements, it is the 2011-2012 cohort that matters; these students have to complete their programme before 1 September 2015. One of the measures that will help is the introduction of faculty-wide thesis seminars which will be offered as of 2014-2015.
- Excellence education is a major challenge for our faculty. Last year, FGW made a tremendous effort to recruit bachelor's students and this effort has been fruitful. But there is still a lot of work to be done. In addition to recruitment efforts, lecturers and study coordinators also have an impact through their ability to stimulate excellent students to participate in the new Honours College programme:

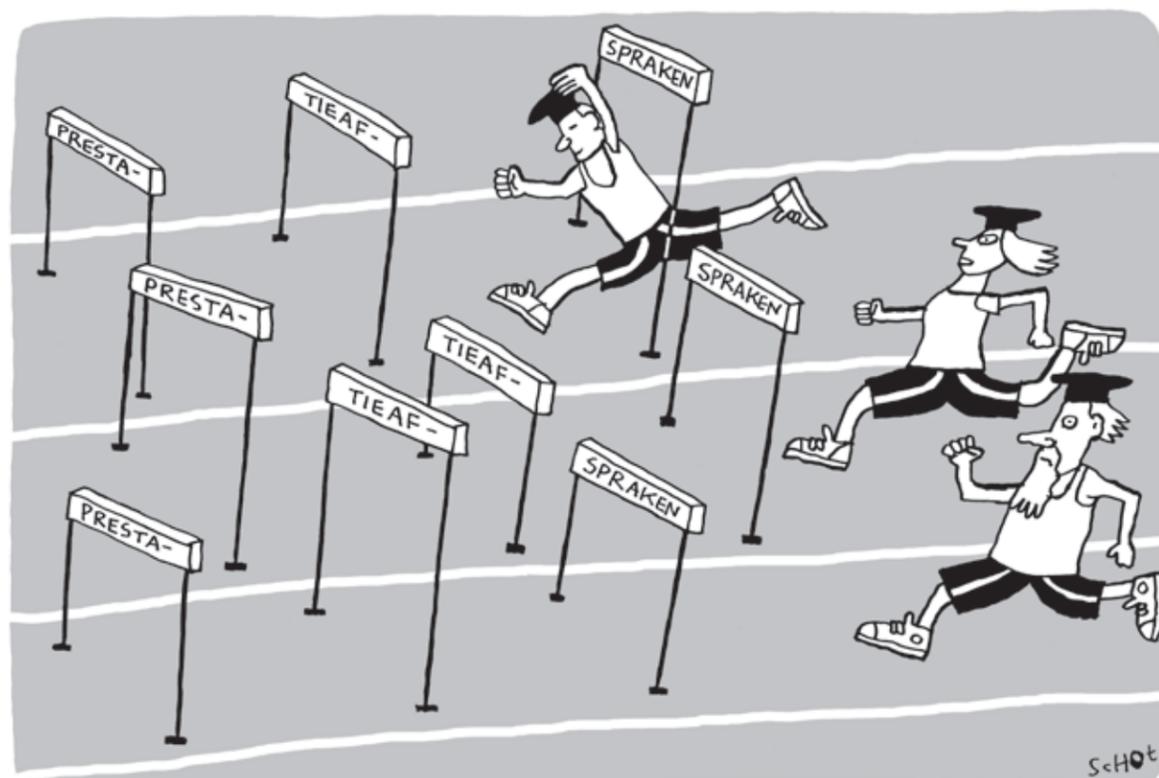
Humanities Lab. It all comes down to the 2014-2015 cohort that is enrolled in the honours programme.

### The coming year will be crucial

In short, we are still facing many challenges with respect to the performance agreements. But we can influence the results in a number of ways: by organising our teaching and teaching staff, and by providing students with adequate information and guidance. The coming year is going to be crucial. But with the joint efforts of everyone involved, FGW will really be able to meet the agreements!

### A brief introduction: Henk Kok

As of mid-February 2014, Henk Kok has been appointed Manager of the Performance Agreements Programme. He will be supervising, stimulating, directing, contributing ideas and monitoring progress. “My goal is to have our faculty successfully meet the performance agreements, in collaboration with our colleagues in other parts of the university. This will result in improved education, a future-proof university, and happy students with excellent prospects on the labour market.”



## Colophon

fgw•nu is a periodical publication for all staff members of the Leiden University Faculty of Humanities.

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Image Bank, Shutterstock

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Printing // PrintGarden

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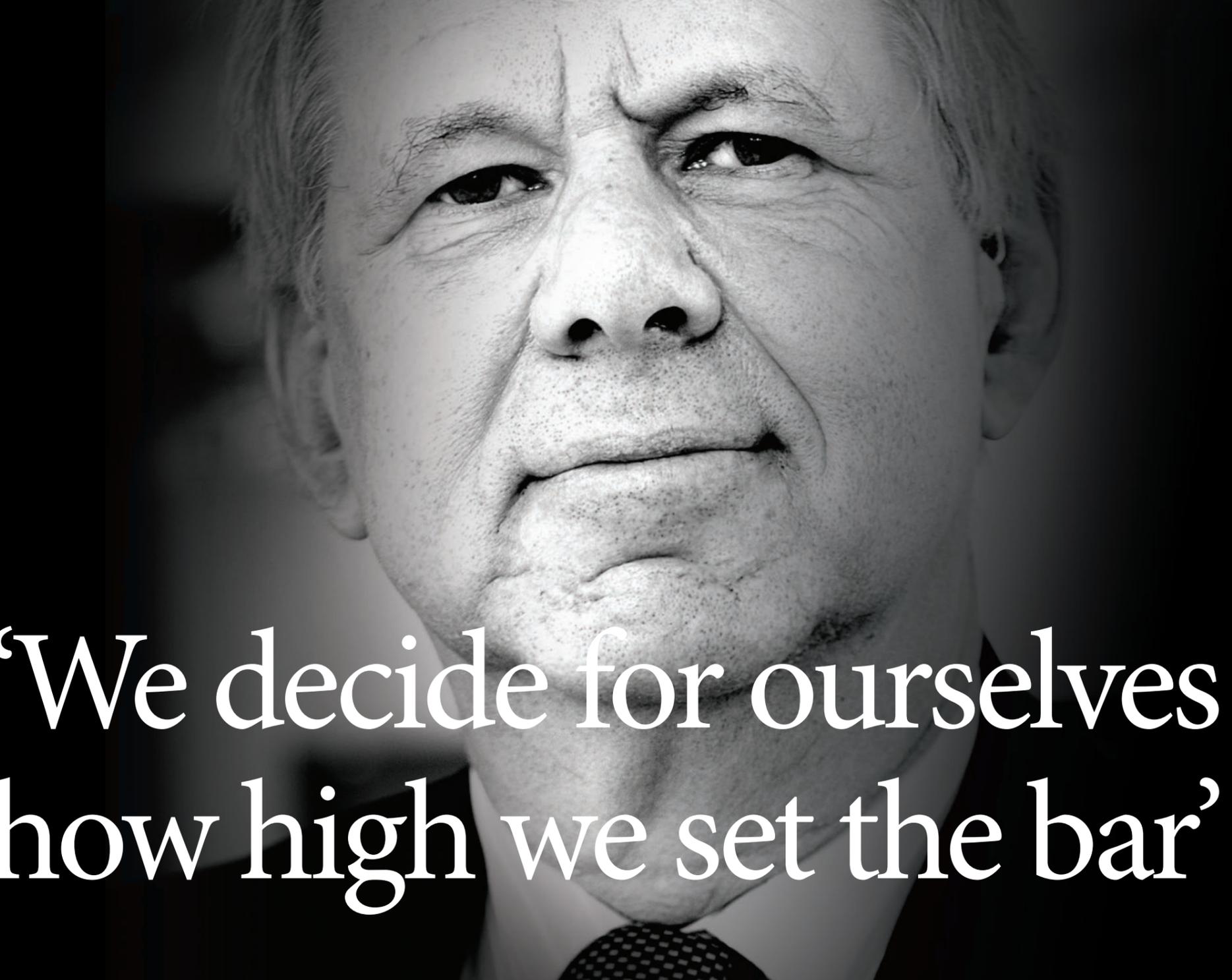
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# 'We decide for ourselves how high we set the bar'

Performance agreements express the universities' ambitions //

Policy from The Hague and the academic world: not necessarily the ideal recipe for consensus. What is the situation with respect to the performance agreements? Is there a lot of controversy? Fgw.nu asked Karl Dittrich, Chairman of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), to share his vision. "We too had the feeling that performance could be improved."

## What do you think of the performance agreements?

"These agreements represent the political translation of two widely held views: universities should perform better and they should differentiate more strongly from each other through their research. I fully support the idea of securing a greater return from higher and scientific education. More students who complete their programme! With respect to raising the profile of universities by differentiating their research: I think this is a more complex matter. I am actually often surprised and amazed at how dynamic research and development already are. My opinion is that we should not try and control this process too much."

## From 'The Netherlands, knowledge-based society' to the individual student: what is the effect of the performance agreements?

"The quality of our education will improve. Quantitatively, this means there will be more people with a diploma. This will strengthen our position as a knowledge-based society, allowing us to continue to compete with the best universities in the world. As far as individual students are concerned: the study period is currently experienced as being too short for other matters such as serving on a committee or studying abroad. Students undoubtedly feel a lot of pressure, caught as they are between the need to grow up, their own personal development, and how to remain motivated about their study

programme. I can understand that, because there is so much to discover when you are between 18 and 22. I still think, though, that there are 168 hours in a week, and you can do a lot in that time. It is a matter of structure and discipline. In the end, a good education offers the best prospects on the labour market."

## Are the performance agreements not simply budget cuts in disguise?

"One would be inclined to think so if the performance agreements were imposed on us by the government. But that's not the case. No one has said: you have to achieve these results. The universities are free to determine how high they set the bar; we are the ones to have expressed this ambition. And rightly so, the output was clearly too low ten years ago. In some cases, shamefully so. These are our performance agreements, they arise from our intrinsic motivation. The financial consequences are nothing more than a political measure. I am fairly relaxed about it. Money is money, it functions as a kind of carrot dangling in front of us. Sometimes it makes us run faster."

## How high is the risk of our becoming too internally oriented as a result of these performance agreements?

"We cannot afford any navel-gazing. The scientific dynamic is so high. Everyone is looking outward, everyone is exploring territory

beyond their own boundaries. Everyone wants to keep up, to participate. I don't believe that any of our universities suffer from an overly strong internal focus."

## How will the performance agreements change the future of the educational landscape?

"There will be more differentiation in terms of student type. There will be more variation in programmes, teaching methods and collaboration. The internationalisation process will progress further. This is already visible in the student population, but teachers and staff members will also increasingly specialise and spread their knowledge online, both nationally and internationally. I believe in 'flipping the classroom': students prepare everything themselves, and then come together to deepen their understanding of the material. I think that there will be a better balance between education and research. In particular in the scientific disciplines."

## Do the universities themselves see any progress yet?

"Yes they do! Everyone is very much on top of things. I notice this in every single conversation I have with people. I read in the annual reports that the output is increasing. Colleagues are already talking of an improvement in the quality of education. The general feeling is: these are our agreements, we have to meet them! Everyone is aware of that."

# Work in progress

Within the faculty there are a number of projects that directly or indirectly relate to the performance agreements. This page offers a selection of five of these projects. Because it is interesting to find out what others are doing. And even more importantly: because we can learn a lot from one another, especially if we dare to share our 'evolving insights'. These colleagues are giving us a glimpse of what they are working on.



## Job market prospects

**Who:** Loes Nordlohne, Careers Adviser

**Experiences:** "Because of factors such as the pressure on the job market, an increasing number of students were coming to me asking: 'What can I do once I graduate?' In response, in September 2012, we launched the 'Your prospects for work' campaign (Jouw vooruitzicht op werk). This campaign is based on the results of regular job market surveys: we know exactly in which professional sectors our students find work, how quickly they do so, and what kind of study preparation most impacts their prospects. We know that it pays off to follow a master's programme and do an internship; students who do, tend to find a job more quickly. Using film clips, brochures, workshops and initiatives such as the Humanities Career Event we make our students aware of their options. This motivates them to complete their study programme. Job market prospects have also become an important factor in the study choice of prospective students. We therefore also focus on high school students. They are sometimes amazed to find out that their prospects remain positive, despite the crisis! By helping them make a more conscious choice of study programme, we hope to reduce the chances of students dropping out or switching to another programme after a year. We notice that teachers and study coordinators are also increasingly involved in preparing students for the job market. Many programmes independently organise alumni or company days. On [hum.leidenuniv.nl/loopbaanservice](http://hum.leidenuniv.nl/loopbaanservice) you can see what the Student Career Service has to offer students. We also have a website for high school students: [jouwvooruitzichtopwerk.nl](http://jouwvooruitzichtopwerk.nl)."

**Tip:** "If you want to organise a career day or labour market information event at your department, please contact me. You can also request a set of guidelines via [loopbaanservice@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:loopbaanservice@hum.leidenuniv.nl)."



## Brushing up on your knowledge via Blackboard

**Who:** Jenny Doetjies, Senior Lecturer in French Linguistics

**Experiences:** "The French department has a long tradition of using computer-based education to teach grammar. Grammar tends to be a challenge, and the more students can focus and practise the materials, the better. We now have a Project for Renewing Computer-based Grammar Learning. This programme is offered on Blackboard, and opens up a multitude of additional possibilities. Thanks to these additional options, we can use the programme in a more focused way to improve output and prevent drop out. We can, for example, use the new programme to keep a record of who does which exercises and how well students perform, so that we know the level of individual students, and we can focus on potentially problematic areas. We are dealing with so many different types of students: beginners, but also students who follow supplementary courses and students who are writing their thesis. We can now offer customised support to all of them. Thesis supervisors can stimulate their students to repeat a number of exercises if they feel that certain aspects of grammar have not been entirely assimilated. For students following supplementary courses, we offer lower-level exercises, which can also be used as 'brushing up' materials for first-year students with less of a background in French. The programme can also easily be used for diagnostic testing."

**Tip:** "If you also want to use Blackboard to assign additional exercises to your students, you can ask Maarten Hijzelen-doorn for advice via [blackboard@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:blackboard@hum.leidenuniv.nl)."



## Using social media to bring students closer

**Who:** Kim Beerden, Lecturer in Ancient History

**Experiences:** "At the History department, we use social media to try to increase output and reduce the rate of drop-out and switching by involving our students in the 'Youth in Antiquity' workgroup outside contact hours. With our Facebook page we try on the one hand to stimulate students and make them more enthusiastic. On the other hand we hope that students remain on board thanks to the social cohesion created on Facebook. The first phase of the project is now coming to an end. We are currently doing an evaluation, so that we can apply what we have learnt when we start again in September. My personal impression is that the glass is half-full: it is difficult to say whether the project meets our expectations. We cannot yet make any hard claims about whether the use of social media reduces the drop-out rate: on the basis of our findings of this semester, it does not seem to. One of the questions that keeps us occupied is how and when to post something on Facebook so as to best reach and stimulate the students. A related question is: how do you integrate what has happened during the week on Facebook into the regular contact hours? Another issue is the fact that on Facebook, the private and the professional overlap. All this requires an investment of time and energy on the part of the lecturers and student assistant. Nevertheless, the students are very enthusiastic!"

**Tip:** "Don't become Facebook friends with your students: you will find out too much about their private lives."



## Honours College FGW: Humanities Lab

**Who:** Arie Verhagen, Professor of Dutch Linguistics

**Experiences:** "Our aim with the new faculty honours programme is to extend our range of excellence education and substantially increase the inflow of students. Since the start of the programme in April of this year, I have noticed that the enthusiasm of my colleagues is growing by the day. Among students too, there is a lot of interest in the Humanities Lab, although not yet as much as we would wish for, and this might be a potential cause for worry. In the current orientation phase, we see that students sometimes drop out as a result of timetable clashes (this will be solved next year by providing a fixed slot within the regular timetable), or because, despite the information we provide, their experience of the programme fails to meet their expectations. This has also led to the introduction of a number of improvements. The Humanities Lab is still a new concept and it is not yet fully embedded in the faculty. For me, this forms the greatest challenge. Not all the teachers are able to tell students what the Humanities Lab is. In the next two years, we will be working on further implementing the programme. This is always an exciting phase, but we now know more or less how we want to do it. I hope that as a result, teachers will increasingly stimulate their excellent students to participate in the Humanities Lab."

**Tip:** "Are there any excellent students in your programme? If so, please refer them to the Humanities Lab programme. For more information, see [humanitieslab.nl](http://humanitieslab.nl) and if you have any questions, contact us at [honours@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:honours@hum.leidenuniv.nl)."



## BKO certificates for experienced teachers

**Who:** Ingrid Janssen, P&O Adviser, Secretary of the BKO Committee

**Experiences:** "BKO certificates have a double goal: to monitor and to guarantee teacher quality. I understand that teachers with years and years of experience and good student evaluations may be taken aback at first. But it has become a self-evident practice in similar organisations for people to keep developing in their field, and to formally secure this development by means of certification. At our university, this begins with BKO certification. The great majority of our lecturers are much more accomplished than this basic qualification. So the quality is already there, but not the monitoring, and this is what we are currently working on. Only a few lecturers struggle with this new policy. The majority understand the need for these measures, and they recognise that it is part of the current developments in education."

**Tip:** "In addition to agreements about completing your BKO, make sure that you use your Performance and Development Interview to make a timely appointment with the Secretary of the BKO Committee to define the steps to follow towards certification."

## More information

See [www.hum.leidenuniv.nl/medewerkers/prestatieafspraken](http://www.hum.leidenuniv.nl/medewerkers/prestatieafspraken) for more information and background on the performance agreements. If you have any questions or ideas, or if you require information on a specific project, please contact Henk Kok, Performance Agreements Programme Manager. Email: [h.b.kok@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:h.b.kok@hum.leidenuniv.nl) Telephone: 071 - 527 2153 Or drop by in Lipsius, Room 1.37