

## SPEECH

I would like to begin by thanking Carel for his sterling work for the University, in a multitude of roles over a period of more than 40 years, the last eight of which as Rector Magnificus and President. Carel, thank you for being such a fantastic colleague, for your focus on the individual, the harmony you have brought to the University achieved and your good humour. You stood for the University community and academic freedom. I will miss you, particularly as a strong connecting force between the city and the University. Thank you.

Having had a combined Rector and President for over 15 years, as of today Leiden University once again has a pure Rector Magnificus in its purest form. Having served as Vice-Rector for four years, I consider it a great honour to be able to take up this wonderful post at this equally wonderful university, a university with an eye to tradition and an eye to the future, with a broad spectrum of academic disciplines and teaching programmes, and with amazingly driven

students and staff from home and abroad. Even as a young child I was fascinated by knowledge. While friends were reading *Popfoto* magazine, I had a subscription to *Natuur en Techniek*. Although my parents didn't go to university themselves, they gave me every encouragement, nonetheless. At school I dreamt of lifelong study, and learning as much as possible across as broad a spectrum of subjects as possible. It is fabulous to be able to channel my efforts into this university, into our university community, and into our teaching AND our research.

Good teaching and research at a university rely on freedom of speech and thought. Hence our motto of *Praesidium Libertatis*. Maintaining such freedom goes further than words alone; it calls for an active mindset and sense of responsibility.

It demands careful efforts to ensure that different currents of thought are to be found within our walls, currents of thought that come into respectful contact with one another, also on social media, and readily engage in dialogue with one

another. That is nothing new. Back in the 17th century the University's curators also sought to strike a balance.

Whenever they appointed a moderate, they looked for a more precise, dogmatic thinker alongside him, William Otterspeer, Professor Professor of University History, who spoke earlier today, writes. In our teaching too, it is crucial that our students learn critical thinking and are exposed to different perspectives.

The forthcoming publication of a report on academic freedom by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) Committee for the Freedom of Scientific Pursuit chaired by our former Rector/President Paul van der Heijden is a good opportunity to further address this matter in our University community.

But it is not only in the interests of freedom that we need one another: we also need one another for our well-being. Well-being is crucial and is something we as a university are focusing our efforts on. When receiving an honorary doctorate from Leiden University in 1999, Nelson Mandela

remarked that one of a university's responsibilities is for people's well-being. That is why I'm so pleased with EUniWell, our European alliance on this very important theme. We and six other universities have joined forces in our teaching and research to focus on themes such as population health, and individual and social well-being. EUniWell aims to improve the well-being AND welfare of students, staff and the public. Well-being has become an even more pressing issue for our own students and staff over the past year.

What has become clear to me from this crisis is the importance of contact with one another, without the barrier of a screen. Large groups of students are struggling with their mental health. They are missing out on an essential part of their development, one that comes through social interaction. And staff are feeling tired and listless having worked flat out during the transition to online teaching or while combining caring duties at home with their work - even those who were raring to go at the start of the crisis.

But there is a great feeling of solidarity. ‘People are group animals,’ says our Professor of Social and Organisational Psychology, Carsten de Dreu. If you ask him, the coronavirus crisis may even lead to new connections and contact with one another, which is encouraging. We feel good if we feel connected with others. The importance of a sense of belonging was also emphasised recently by Kerstin Perez, an associate professor at MIT, at our diversity symposium. Let us make sure we continue to keep an eye on one another and do not exclude people. As Rector, I stand firmly for of an inclusive and diverse university community: a place where everyone is welcome.

Another consequence of the coronavirus crisis is the revival of science and scientists in the public and political awareness. Marion Koopmans, Frits Rosendaal (LUMC), Diederik Gommers and many more along with them have become famous faces in the Netherlands. What we have also seen during this crisis is how we need the insights of *multiple* disciplines, together and individually. Many complex issues require a multidisciplinary approach from researchers who

are willing to look beyond the boundaries of their own discipline to establish links with their fellow researchers. A year ago in Leiden, we started eight interdisciplinary programmes, in which strong disciplines are unhindered by the boundaries of faculties but rather work together on highly relevant topics. I can see a great deal of enthusiasm and inspiration in the conversations and presentations on this.

Interdisciplinarity is also the topic of the latest position paper by Young Academy Leiden. Like them, I am convinced that this is where there are huge opportunities for more intensive collaboration within our university and the LUMC, as well as with other universities, such as Delft University of Technology and Erasmus University Rotterdam, and other parties at the Leiden Bio Science Park. We want to further stimulate collaboration and make it easier for different disciplines to find one another and start something new. One of the key things this calls for is the harmonisation of systems, good support and a different way of recognising and rewarding our efforts, including collaboration in our

research, teaching and impact. That is why I am so pleased with the publication of *Academia in Motion: Recognition and Rewards* at Leiden University, by a steering group chaired by our academic directors Manon van der Heijden and Sarah de Rijcke, and the ensuing steps that will be taken shortly in this area.

We will do justice to all these topics if we work together. From today, we will begin work on a new strategy with and for the whole organisation, building on what we have achieved over the past few years. Fortunately, I will not be doing this alone: we have a new Executive Board, with new roles and portfolios.

But before I briefly introduce the Executive Board, I would like to draw your attention to the following:

in line with tradition, this year too we sent a message to His Majesty the King, informing him that the University community would come together online today to celebrate this our 446th Dies Natalis with speeches from the

Pieterskerk by, among others, Leiden Professors Ineke Sluijter and Carel Stolker and an honorary doctorate for Mozambican politician Graça Machel. We also informed him that at this Dies Natalis Carel Stolker would be transferring his role as Rector Magnificus to Hester Bijl, and that Annetje Ottow would be installed as President of the Executive Board. We ended this heartfelt message with the following words:

It is a privilege for Leiden University to be linked to the House of Orange in the person of its founder, Prince William of Orange. His wish that the university that was to be founded would serve as ‘a firm support upholding freedom’ is to this very day its guiding principle, which is expressed in its motto *Praesidium libertatis*.

Signed by: the three members of the Executive Board:  
Bijl, Ridderbos and Stolker.

And then... as always the question... whether we have received an answer...

Ah, Carel, yes, thank you!

I would now like to ask my colleagues from the Executive Board, Annetje Ottow, President, and Martijn Ridderbos, Vice-Chairman, to come to the stage and introduce themselves.

Annetje, perhaps you could tell us a few things about yourself and your Leiden roots.

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These times of coronavirus make it more difficult to get to know people, but we will find an original, digital way to meet you all soon. You will hear from us!

We have now come to an end of a very special DIES. But there is one person that I would like to hand over to before we close this ceremony. And that is... Mayor of Leiden: Henri Lenferink!

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For the conclusion:

This may not be the ideal time for a departure nor for a celebratory start. But as I looked around me, I still felt that DIES feeling. You did too, I hope! Thus ends an historic DIES with no audience here in person in this beautiful Pieterskerk, but with a large audience online nonetheless. We would like to thank you for your digital attendance. I wish you all the very best for the year ahead!