



Dear colleagues, students,

In the hectic weeks that followed in the wake of the occupation of the Bungehuis and Maagdenhuis, we took a moment to pause and reflect. We also took the time to deal with the various forms of criticism that have been voiced and to hold numerous talks with students, staff and action groups.

In our search to get to the heart of the matter, we were faced with a diverse array of concerns. These differed in degrees of intensity, depending on the faculty, discipline and position of the staff and students with whom we spoke. Nevertheless, we believe that a common denominator exists: a feeling of concern that the university is gradually losing its way. Despite wide-ranging support for research-intensive education and an eye for improvements to educational quality, despite an international research agenda and a leading position in various academic disciplines, and despite approval for improvements in facilities, this concern nonetheless touches on the very essence of this institution. A portion of the concerns is directed at the internal organisation and the (transparency in) decision-making, while another is levelled at The Hague, especially as regards the issues of efficiency, responsibility and returns.

Our talks centred on the violation of professional pride and space, inadequate involvement, in some instances insufficient trust and a lack of solidarity from the Board against some of the measures imposed by The Hague. Some of the examples given include a loss of motivation as a result of excessive administrative burden, the lack of space for the academic development of students, a barrage of new changes which leaves students and staff feeling overwhelmed, uncertainty about collaboration within Amsterdam, the consequences of the housing plans for the university's finances and questions about the effectuation of the university's allocation model.

As the leadership of this university, we are by definition serving the university community. This has not, however, been experienced as such with respect to several issues. Also not by the staff and students who, alongside their regular duties, take an active part in the academic community by way of the representative advisory bodies. This is also the reason why we have held extensive talks with them in particular in recent weeks, and why several of the points outlined below came about on their initiative.

We have come to the conclusion that a new direction is essential with regard to the organisation and decision-making. A direction that is appropriate to a time of widely shared information, that meets the needs of a university in which debate always takes place openly and actively, and that befits an organisation comprised of engaged students and staff. In this respect, it is only fitting for the University of Amsterdam to lead the way and to chart a course that could potentially have an impact on the university landscape as a whole.

This means that we have to rethink and recast a number of traditional systems and structures. For us, the following guiding principles apply:

1. Investment in and strengthening of the representative advisory bodies by, among other things, (1) allocating more support and resources to members of the representative bodies; and (2) by giving the right of approval with regard to the allocation model (currently being discussed with the COR and CSR).
2. A focus on democratisation by (1) involving the academic community as a whole – in a different way – in crucial decisions that involve everyone; and (2) by forming a broadly assembled working group in accordance with forms of governance and direct democracy – the recommendation will be presented to the Central Works Council (COR) and Central Student Council (CSR) for approval.
3. A focus on greater decentralisation of teaching and research by investing authority in the lowest possible echelons of the institution; and by (2) introducing the principle of trust beforehand and accountability afterwards.
4. Provide total financial transparency by, inter alia, establishing a web-based platform in which all relevant information is available to the whole academic community.
5. Present the decision to build a new University Library to the whole academic community for approval, and give total transparency as regards housing.
6. Place primary emphasis on creativity and innovation in education and research: (1) the new evaluation protocol for research gives ample space to the disciplines to determine the criteria for this; and (2) the implementation of educational reforms will be fast-tracked on the basis of recommendations issued by the working group on educational innovation – students' teaching evaluations will be used for subsequent monitoring.
7. Reinforce the bond between education and research and value education just as much as research by, among other things, introducing a new career model.
8. Put a cap on part-time contracts by agreeing on a new percentage with the unions in consultation with the University Local Consultative Committee (UCLO) and COR.
9. Make available the hall of the Maagdenhuis as a place for debate (on condition that agreements are made about safety and security).
10. Explicitly point out to the political establishment its responsibility to (1) drastically reduce regulatory overload; (2) give more autonomy to universities; (3) introduce adequate funding on the basis of quality. We call on other universities to do the same and to make common cause with us.

We cannot do this on our own. As far as we are concerned, these points are just the start; it is our collective responsibility to shape them further. Some of the points are sizeable and not everything can be arranged immediately. For others there are differences of opinion about how to implement them. We realise that many things need to be fleshed out further in collaboration with the academic community. In short, for some points the way forward has not yet been finalised, but we are committed to all of them.

In recent days we, as the Executive Board, have discussed these points at length with the deans of the faculties, the representative advisory bodies and the Supervisory Board. We wish to continue with these discussions as from this week at different locations and with various representatives of the academic community. Some of the talks will primarily be conducted within the faculties, and will be initiated by the deans.

Finally, the University of Amsterdam has in recent years developed into a global intellectual hub. We - by which we mean the whole academic community - are closely linked to many researchers and institutions at home and abroad.

Our goal - to provide intensive academic education to tomorrow's vanguard, to carry out pioneering, fundamental research and translate it into relevant societal applications - is something we want to hold on to and build on further.

This requires a broad and balanced range of disciplines suited to a broad, classical university of international stature. It also requires space and facilities for innovative, leading and interdisciplinary research. And it requires modern and flexible educational facilities and efficient, central service provision.

The aforementioned points will strengthen this, and we hope to do it with you all.

Yours faithfully,
On behalf of the Executive Board,

Dr Louise Gunning-Schepers