

25 years together as Saxion – “now some we time”

Also on behalf of my colleagues Jan Willem Meinsma and Timo Kos, I **welcome** you all to the opening of the academic year. This time during our 25th jubilee, which is why this opening has the theme of **25 years together as Saxion**.

First, of course, I would like to welcome all our students: our new students as well as those who have been studying with us for longer. I wish you all a fantastic year. And above all, I would like to thank the representatives of the student associations. Not only are they here today with their flags, but are committed throughout the year to making fellow students feel at home here, and I can't stress enough how important that is. Let's give them another round of applause.

Furthermore, a warm welcome to our lecturers, colleagues, partners, both here and online in Deventer and Apeldoorn. A special welcome to our Supervisory Board members, Twente Board chairman Ank Bijleveld and Director-General (DG) Arne van Hout from the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. He has made room in his schedule as a result of Minister Bruins Slot becoming outgoing foreign minister this week.

Then the former Saxion board members Cor Boom, Albertjan Peters, Maarten Koeman, Annamiek van Dalen and Ineke van Oldeniel who are all present today. And also Wim Boomkamp who would have liked to have been here, but unfortunately couldn't make it due to holiday arrangements. A warm welcome to you all too. We are very happy to have you here today during our 25th jubilee year. We will be reflecting on our amazing students and alumni and just how important their presence and contribution is to this region. You played a major role in that success too. Thank you for that. You should be proud of it.

I would like to mention a few examples from this year that you will be able to think back on later:

1. Student Jesse Rutgers, who won a national award from the Netherlands' Physical Society with a mass flow controller for the gas industry
2. A couple of wonderful Smart Solutions projects. For example, the winner of this year's jury prize: the Refugee Mental Health Project. Through a highly impressive 20 minute theatre performance, six students attempted to raise awareness of refugee mental health issues and in particular relating to sexual abuse. They worked together with creator and director of the performance Nachwan Alrajab Agha, and several actors who live in refugee accommodation on a boat on the IJssel quayside in Deventer.
3. Or the project Sens(H)oor, which won the public prize and is the result of a collaboration between CODA and Erfgoed Gelderland (Heritage Gelderland). During this project, more than 70 heritage objects were scanned in 3D. As a result, a digital archive of Gelderland's top finds has been created and made accessible to people with visual impairments. Visitors with a visual impairment can touch replicas of historical objects and with the help of an audio description, get a better impression of the object.
4. This year, our students, together with fellow students from Fontys and Windesheim, won the Applied University SDG Challenge 2023. That was with “Geldmattie” (Money-Mate), a solution to help people feel more financially adept in society.
5. Our researchers were once again very successful, winning numerous major projects. A good example is the 2 million euros to develop a soft-tissue artificial heart, a project from the Dutch Research Agenda (Nationale Wetenschapsagenda) led by the Erasmus Medical Centre in Rotterdam.
6. The new podcast series: Couleur Lokaal; seven personal, open and inspiring conversations featuring editor Anne Hurenkamp talking to students, alumni and staff about how they have added colour to Saxion and what they are taking with them into tomorrow's world.
7. And CMGT student Serena Ilie from Romania graduated with a 10.

Every year, I mention **climate change** during the Opening, as a consequence of the weather that summer. Unfortunately, there is always good reason to do this every year, as every summer there is severe weather. This summer Italy had temperatures above 40 degrees one week and hailstorms the next. Hundreds of Dutch tourists had to get their dented cars and smashed windscreens repaired. In nearby Slovenia there was huge flooding. In fact, the previous year in that same country, the harvest had failed due to drought. And you have seen it all: forest fires ravaged areas around the world, from Hawaii to Canada, from Greece to Portugal. The effects are severe. They go much further than just a holiday that went down the drain. We are dealing with crop failures, people losing their homes, hunger, streams of refugees, diminishing biodiversity.

And perhaps a few of you think that this picture is too gloomy: if you follow social media, then it is not so bad and there is still quite a lot of criticism of all these climate concerns. However, this climate criticism does not resonate with scientists. There is a large scientific consensus on climate change. And of course, as applied university, our education and research is based on science, not opinions. Through our teaching and research, we are trying to contribute to solving climate problems. A perfect example of this is the Climate Square, which we will be opening presently. Under the supervision of lecturer Kristoff Dervaux, around 50 students contributed, working in multidisciplinary project groups as part of the Smart Solution Semester. These included Civil Engineering students, like Dorien Irokromo, but also for example, Facility Management, like Stephan Terpstra.

In higher education, we contribute to solving major societal problems from and for the region.

The region is at the heart of Saxion. Of course, we have Dutch *and* international students, staff and partners, we are a member of EUDRES - a prestigious European University Initiative - but our focus is on the region. SMEs, local authorities, healthcare institutions and, above all, students who want to pursue a study, the 'Smart Practitioners'. Providing education and training is our key societal duty. That training, by the way, is once again very important for the vitality of our region, as over 70% of our alumni stay here. They fill vacancies in healthcare, provide innovation for companies and without young people, the buzz and bustle disappears.

The region has also been getting more attention nationwide recently. That happened this year, for example, with the report "Every Region Counts" compiled by three planning agencies. Director-General Arne van Hout will be going into this further in a moment. Since it was under the leadership of former Interior Minister Bruins Slot that the cabinet's response to the report came about, and I hope he will say something about the follow-up.

As it is very important that there will be a follow-up, also for us in the Eastern Netherlands. The report in fact describes that regions on the flanks of the Netherlands - North, East and South - are under pressure and that facilities there are being eroded and shrinking: public transport, healthcare, education. This has serious implications for the vitality of a region. Since families prefer to settle in areas where there is healthcare and education; students will go and study somewhere where a particular course is available. In short, they settle in the Randstad. And so other regions deteriorate further.

Government policy, the report indicates, reinforces this impoverishment by investing more in the regions that are already doing well and by using the Randstad as a frame of reference. This increases pressure in the flanks of the Netherlands.

I recognise this at Saxion: because 83% of our funding is based on student numbers, so a minor demographic decrease quickly leads to programmes coming under pressure. Especially when you realise that of all education sectors - primary, secondary, vocational, university, and applied university - the latter is the worst funded according to research by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB). I recently wrote about this in the Volkskrant. For example, applied universities (HBO) get over 1,000 euros per student per year less than vocational education (MBO); 2,000 euros less than academic universities (WO). That is roughly speaking for the sector about half a billion a year less for applied university students than those in MBO; just under a billion euros less than WO. A similar point applies to applied university research which only gets the bare minimum of funding.

However I'm not making a plea against the rest of the Netherlands and in favour of the Eastern Netherlands. Or against vocational and academic education, and for applied universities. **My plea is precisely for the whole.** If current policy is maintained, some regions will be favoured and others disadvantaged. By making regions compete for extra money, you pit them against each other. And education, which is a public service, should not be funded on efficiency alone. No single student should be disadvantaged, wherever she or he lives, in whatever sector she or he studies. Students in the flanks of the Netherlands, such as the Eastern Netherlands, are also entitled to a full range of education. On a study programme that is kept up to date by research. Applied university students are entitled to adequate funding for their education, just as much as students in other sectors. My plea is that we need everyone: MBO, HBO and WO. That we need all regions. This is important for the Netherlands. My point is that it is bad for the Netherlands to let certain regions become impoverished and there is no reason to deprive applied university education. In short, my plea is for all of us!

I'm reaching the end.

You may be wondering why I am standing here in these extremely inelegant wellington boots. On the one hand, this is of course because I'm about to open the Climate Square. However, it is primarily to make a statement. My statement is that we live in a time when we take ourselves far too seriously. How do I look? How do I come across? A time of individualism. In it for yourself.

Look, I quite understand that I look a real sight in these boots. But what does that matter? My statement is that we should take our SELVES a little less seriously and take US more seriously. That we need to rethink the dominance of individualism in our society. A society where individual opinions count as much as scientific evidence because it "feels good". Where "me time" and "more me" take top spot.

I think we need to move from **"now some me time" to "now some we time"**.

And that "we" means all regions in the Netherlands. And also all educational sectors. Collaborating, as we do here with the UT, the ROCs, Artez, primary and secondary education. And of course that includes our partners, you: the companies and organisations we work with. Strengthening the region? We do this together.

Climate problems? These require a joint approach. We can never resolve them on our own. And finally, our jubilee. In those 25 years, Saxion has grown thanks to collaboration. It is therefore not **"25 years of me and Saxion"**, but rather **"25 years together as Saxion"**.

Thank you.