

‘There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle – or the mirror that reflects it.’

These are fine words. They come from a text by American author Edith Wharton. And they fit well with today's theme. As this is: ‘In a different light’. Something I will come back to in a moment.

But first... Welcome everyone, to this exceptional location. On behalf of the three of us - Karin & Richard - How nice that you are here: students, staff, partners of our university of applied sciences - our knowledge institution. Today we are opening the Saxion academic year here, in the *Grote* or *Lebuïnus* church in the heart of Deventer. And I may stand here behind a lectern specially made for the occasion by Allard Braakhuis and Jesse Haaksman, on behalf of our Professor Ferrie van Hattum of the Lightweight Structures Research Group. And this lectern is entirely made of bio-based plastic. What a work of craftsmanship, Allard and Jesse. Thank you.

But now back to this Lebuïnus church.... Maybe you've already looked around you. At all the windows letting the light shine in. The most beautiful play of light in the city, according to our organist today, Kirstin Gramlich. You heard Kirstin's splendid organ playing when you came in.

At the start of a new academic year, we naturally look ahead to the time that lies before us. However, it is also very impressive to realise how this part of Deventer, around the Grote Kerkhof, is linked to Saxion's oldest roots. As here, this very place, is an important foundation of our education and research as we know it today. Everything that has made Deventer into what it is today, comes together in this square: a city of books, knowledge and higher education. A place with significant regional impact.

Knowledge starts with thinking and the mutual exchange of ideas. In being curious, researching, recording and disseminating insights. With the aim of moving forward together. This happened in abundance in past centuries here, in this city and around this square. From thinkers like Geert Grote to Erasmus. They also once walked through these streets, full of anticipation and energy. They also came here to acquire and share knowledge, as we still do today.

In those days this happened at the Latin School, which you have just passed, on your way here. Or at the Atheneum Illustre, a school of higher education, right next to this church. You can consider them as precursors of secondary and higher education as we know them today, in our city and region. And let's not forget the book printers. They also established themselves here. Printers such as Richard Paffraet and Jacob van Breda. In their printing works, around this square, they helped record and disseminate all that knowledge.

Writers. Philosophers. Scientists. Book printers. Publishers. They all came to Deventer. A place of inspiration and craftsmanship. Of knowledge and progress. How wonderful it is that we are also gathered here today, at the beginning of a new academic year; aware of the rich history that ultimately led to the creation of Saxion. We are in awe of the past, but of course we also look ahead to the future.

And that's what I would like to talk about. That future is both near and far at the same time. Perhaps very tangible and close to the many students who started at Saxion last week. First with a valuable and fun INTRO in our three Saxion cities. Here in Deventer, as well as in Enschede and Apeldoorn. To get to know each other, the university of applied sciences and the surroundings where they are now going to study. And it all gets underway this week: in the classrooms, lecture halls and labs of our university of applied sciences. But also as much as possible in the world around us. As at Saxion, we believe in education and research with and for the region.

It is great that we can shape education, research and entrepreneurship with so much mutual appreciation. As also here at our Saxion, applied university graduates work on a Stronger Netherlands! It is great that we exchange knowledge and gain new insights. With SMEs, technical companies, police and fire service, with municipalities and provinces, healthcare institutions, and of course with all our education partners. We need each other: on our way to the future. A future in which care and security, digitalisation and sustainability all require our full attention. As Saxion, we enjoy being the knowledge accelerator in an impressive network that we are shaping together with all these partners. One that our students, lecturers, researchers and staff work very hard on, on a daily basis, contributing all their talents. Because unique, is something you can only truly become....together.

In order to remain a strong university of applied sciences for the region in the future, Saxion is currently undergoing a restructuring process. We see that fewer students are enrolling, less budget is coming from the government and that costs are rising. Like many other higher education institutions, Saxion is also being forced to make cuts. We are setting up the organisation in a future-oriented way - ensuring that we can continue to provide education and research in a good and affordable manner. Such a process is not easy. It also creates uncertainty. In schools and services. In teams and for individual colleagues. I see that only too well. And I have great respect for the enormous commitment and resilience I have seen from our staff recently. Even in these challenging times, everyone continues to contribute. Continuing to focus on students, our partners - our education and research. This is what we do it for together. Thank you, for all your commitment, in this period of change.

Sometimes you wish you could fast-forward the clock. What will things be like in a year's time? In ten, twenty-five or maybe even fifty years? What will our world look like then? What will it mean then to be a student at a university of applied sciences? Or a lecturer, researcher, or employee? I'm so curious to know that. Also to know how we can get the best out of people and technology working together– Living Technology – in a meaningful way, without losing the human dimension and the connection with each other. These are exciting new horizons, ones that we are already working towards today.

It makes me think about our Professor Abeje Mersha, who won the Delta Prize last academic year, for his research in the field of Smart Electronics and Robotics. But also our Professor Attila Németh, who won an international award; for his research group's many years of research into the value of rehabilitation. I would also like to mention Sara Ros, our first Professional Doctorate candidate.

She is conducting key research into lifestyle interventions together with Deventer Hospital. Very close to applied practice. Meanwhile, the number of applied PhD programmes at Saxion is growing. Nationally, we are at the forefront of this new development in higher professional education.

Remco Spithoven, our Professor of Digital Resilience, will soon be telling us more about his collaboration with KPN in the field of online bullying and exclusion. It is extremely important research, in close cooperation with our education. And is very close to applied practice. It is research we want to use to make the world a better place. As.... everything can suddenly look very different, if we shine a positive light on it. Or, as our organist today, Kirstin Gramlich, told me: "Science is the hope for the future." Yes Kirstin, you may be hiding behind that big organ, but I'm still quoting you for the second time today.

There is still more to consider and be proud of. At the end of March, we received a visit from Minister Rianne Letschert of Education, Culture and Science. We appreciate and find it important that she recognises and supports the value of applied research at universities of applied sciences. In May there was also our 25th anniversary in Apeldoorn. We celebrated our successful completion of quality audits for both education and research, such as the Institutional Audit (ITK): processes that demand so much hard work on a daily basis at our university of applied sciences.

These are fantastic and promising results enabling us to look to the future with confidence. No matter how uncertain that future may seem at times. As all such things can coexist side by side. Sometimes it just depends on how the light falls and how you look at it yourself.

I was reminded of that too when six of our students won the national HBO Law Debate Tournament just before the summer. An impressive performance. Debating is: exchanging points of view, listening to one another and sharing knowledge. Just as this has been done in this city square for centuries. It is important to respect differences and similarities. That you can explore what connects you to others, in order to move forward together – This also includes diversity and inclusion. That you can be your true self, without fear or discussion. That everyone belongs and brings their own unique talents. It is this human dimension that we desperately need in a polarised world. Let's look for new light and connection. To how we can share and reproduce knowledge. By doing so, we will put the future in a new, hopeful light.

I began with the words of Edith Wharton: 'There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle – or the mirror that reflects it.' Above all, do what you do best.

Also on behalf of Karin and Richard, I wish everyone a wonderful, new academic year.

Thank you very much.