

Speech Opening Academic Year 2019 – 2020

Drs. Kristel Baele, President of the Board

Your Excellencies, mayor Aboutaleb, dear members of the supervisory board, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pride and pleasure that I welcome you all to the opening of the Academic Year 2019 – 2020.

But first, please join me in the tradition of honouring the memory of colleagues and fellow students from within our community who sadly have passed away this past year. May I please invite you to stand up, if possible.

We deeply regret the tragic loss of the following students:

- Julie Hoofwijk
- Sarah Papenheim
- Antonios Chionis
- Laura Erlings
- Amber Bulkman
- Rose Li

We also mourn the loss of colleagues and former colleagues:

- Willem Schudel
- Rob Kampman
- Frans Rutten
- Gerda Albers-Landzaat
- Ton Rimmelzwaan
- Johan Willem Mouton
- Erwin van der Laan
- Marijk Huijsman
- Piet Bruijn
- Irma de Doelder-Brons

We will always consider them to be part of our community. Our thoughts are with their loved ones, we will remember them with deep appreciation for their contribution to our Erasmus community. Please, let's take a moment of silence.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

Today we, as a community, come together to celebrate the opening of the new Academic Year and the launch of the new Erasmus University strategy 2024. The new strategy embodies our intrinsic motivation, our drive, our enthusiasm and ability. It is my great pleasure to share it with you and explain the kind of thinking we all so

desperately need today.

Later on I will share with you our new vision regarding the role of our university and how that led us to our new mission – Creating Positive Societal Impact. I will also tell you about the implications for our profile. You will learn about the co-creative process leading up to the strategy and the Erasmian values that emerged as a result of this.

But first, let me take you through the new strategy in a nutshell. One university, one community, one goal – what does this mean?

Our contribution to society has traditionally been to provide training, education and research and proudly witness alumni taking up leading roles in society.

It is true that the Erasmus University has always been a university that harbours a strong sense of societal commitment and responsibility. A university strongly connected to the city and citizens of Rotterdam and the region. But in this changing world we find ourselves further away from society than society wants us to be.

In the course of the strategic process our own students, alumni, our partners, faculty and support staff have asked us, - urged us - to look at how we can adapt ourselves to these new times.

I listened.

I heard.

Together with others I recognized how society's challenges are highly complex, and sometimes even appear overwhelming and unresolvable.

Society increasingly expects engagement from universities, seeking their involvement in tackling challenges together. This requires a new vision on the position and role of universities. Which is why I say to you all today: ... universities can no longer choose to stand apart from society. And our university doesn't want to.

We want to actively change things for the better. We want to create a positive societal impact. We want to address - head on - challenges such as climate change, demographic shifts, economic exclusion, digitalization and future employment needs. In order to answer these worldwide challenges we have examined all aspects of the existing profile – enhancing and refining the different elements as necessary. Making the logical choices for our new role.

The increased importance of technology and digitalization and the opportunities this presents in every field are bound to have an impact on research and education at the university. This led to the strategic question 'should we build a science department at the University? Or better, find an excellent partner to co-operate with?'

Health and health care, important elements in our profile, will become the fastest growing field in coming decades, with technology as a major driving force. At the same time, the science and technical disciplines need the knowledge of the social sciences and humanities for the successful implementation of their research results and innovations.

Delft University of Technology, Erasmus Medical Center and Erasmus University Rotterdam, three outstanding institutions, offer the complementary disciplines that are essential for these developments. We chose to intensify and strengthen our collaboration in education, research and impact activities and we are currently exploring the topics for cooperation in the field of health and health care, data science and artificial intelligence. We will also be looking at how we can work together on solutions for societal challenges in the delta of Rotterdam. Challenges such as energy transition, social inequalities and mobility.

Understanding societal challenges, and deciding how to deal with them, requires profound knowledge of the social, behavioural, cultural and historical context in which they become manifest. Furthermore, successful and ethical implementation of new technologies requires contributions from the social sciences and humanities, as our distinguished guest speaker prof. Dickinson will talk about later.

In light of these two considerations, we aim to strengthen the profile and positioning of this domain within the university's context by creating a fourth strong academic pillar for social sciences & humanities. In doing so we complement the existing pillars of health, business & economics, and law.

This is contradictory to the Van Rijn report, which unfortunately did not acknowledge the importance of this domain and advocates an outdated dichotomy between the technical domain and social sciences and humanities. We therefore fully support WO in Actie in their call for more government funding, their rightful concern for the increasing work pressure and their wish for the government to see and fully appreciate the importance of social sciences and humanities for the future of society.

Entrepreneurship and creating societal impact through entrepreneurship, is already a key element in our profile. We see this as a driver for impact, creating jobs and welfare in the region and the reason why we will take this element further than ever before. By building an entrepreneurial eco-system, primarily based on knowledge coming directly from the university, together with industry and governmental partners.

We will offer students, faculty and staff the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills that will benefit their future careers and lives. And we will establish incubator programmes, financially support start-ups and set up an investment fund and a Knowledge Transfer Office.

During the design process for the strategy, it became apparent that we all were driven by the same foundational values. Values that, as it turned out, were held in high esteem by Erasmus himself. Let me explain them.

Our intrinsic societal engagement led to our new mission. We are world citizens. In the spirit of Erasmus we embrace a cosmopolitan worldview, reaching beyond the boundaries of countries and disciplines. Societal impact implies connection, building bridges between scientific disciplines and between science and society, as we did during our lustrum celebrations last year with a number of successful events in the city. Entrepreneurship is part of our DNA. Following in the footsteps of our founding fathers, our university is defined by an entrepreneurial mindset, experimentation and innovation. Erasmus was an open minded, adamant advocate of freedom and tolerance. As a community we embrace a wide-ranging perspective on societal, political and ethical dilemmas and mutual understanding across social and cultural divides.

These values are all part of our legacy and of our future. They are, what we now call in our strategy - The Erasmian Way.

So - during the last 2 years and in a spirit of co-creation – over a 100 members of the Erasmus community, alumni and external stakeholders, worked together in strategic design labs to define and carve out our ambitions and goals for the future.

This all came together in these 7 strategic priorities:

- Fostering our societal impact identity
- Ensuring our education is future-oriented
- Embedding excellent academic research in society
- Taking responsibility on sustainable development
- Investing in our people for the future
- Stepping up our professional services
- Making the most of our interdisciplinary potential

Many of the talented people who took part in the design labs now have leading roles in the implementation.

Together we came to an innovative and inspiring strategy, all because of the contribution and dedication of the people who have participated.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who was part of the strategic process for your inspiration and commitment. Without you this would have been impossible.

Before I close I'd like to share some of the things I have learned over the years. Inspiring organisations, great places to work, they all share a common purpose and vision. That purpose and vision needs to be developed as a community, involving diverse opinions, and a variety of knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Which is exactly how Strategy 2024 came into being.

Another thing I have learned, is that the best people get things done. At the start of my presidency, I decided to create space for young, innovative and sometimes unconventional Erasmian talent. Unleashing potential Erasmian leaders as we did in the Design Labs, or attracting them.

Yet another goal, and a challenging one - yes, I'm ambitious - was to foster co-operation between the faculties and between the faculties and the professional services. So we could truly become one university.

Not because it is fashionable, but because the challenges of the world require it.

Now that I'm leaving the Erasmus University at the end of this year, it is with the full knowledge and confidence that you - have the collective vision, the depth of talent and are the force that will make our Strategy 2024 happen. What I most want to impress upon you today is that the power to achieve the strategy is within your own areas of influence.

And by coming together with others, using your ability to respond appropriately, the strategy ultimately becomes reality. We face reality guided by our foundational values and principles - The Erasmian Way.

As Erasmus was defined by his academic scholarship, his critical engagement, open dialogue and cosmopolitan, independent mind-set; so are we. These qualities are the touchstones of who we are, who we strive to be.

Perhaps that is why it is best summed up by our own Erasmus. There are some people who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality; and then there are those who turn one into the other.

I invite you all to imagine how working together, can be rewarding, productive and inspirational. We have the intrinsic motivation, drive, enthusiasm and the ability to bring it all together. Turning a dream into reality is in your hands.

Creating Positive Societal Impact - is in your hands. Those hands are better than good, they are the best. Thank you.