



Open letter

Maastricht, 23 March 2015

Dear Members of the Executive Board of Maastricht University,

The *New University Maastricht* (NUM) is an open platform for discussion and action with the aim to improve the quality and conditions of education and research and improve democracy within universities. At Maastricht University there is a widely shared discontent among students and staff with regard to the quality of education and research. Therefore we support the demands of the New University Movement in other cities: a move away from the excessive focus on output, a reduction of temporary contracts, maximal (financial) transparency and accountability, sustainability, democratization and the reduction of the workload. These demands are recognized and partly supported by De Jonge Akademie, the VSNU, the VAWO, the FNV, CNV, different research groups and the Executive Board and faculties of the University of Amsterdam. In this open letter we want to elaborate a bit more on these demands and relate them to the case of Maastricht University, being aware that some of the issues need to be tackled at the national or even European level

The first concern of the NUM is *the excessive focus on output* with the negative consequences of thinking in terms of quantity instead of quality, control instead of trust, and uniformity instead of plurality. For example, the output-model of FHML measures scientific quality in terms of “the amount of promotions”, “the amount of WI-1 publications”, “the amount of citations” and valorisation in terms of “patents” and “media coverage”, and the acquisition of 225.000 Euro by each 1.0 fte (source: ‘Beoordeling output onderzoeksgroepen FHML: van criteria naar ambities’, 14.1573/IV, 3 december 2014). It is difficult to understand the ratio of the translation of scientific quality in quantitative criteria. NUM demands a financing model that is not exclusively focused on output.

The second concern of the NUM is *the great amount of temporary contracts*. Temporary contracts affect the quality of education and research, because it undermines their continuity. At Dutch universities 40% of the scientific employees has a temporary contract. Adding PhD candidates to the figures this is even 60%. (source: VAWO). Maastricht University doesn't diverge from these numbers. NUM demands the guarantee that the planned reduction of temporary contracts among the academic staff will be reduced to a maximum of 22%, as agreed in the Central Labour Agreement (CAO), and that this reduction benefits employees of all faculties and function groups fairly.

The third concern of the NUM is the trend of *rising tuition fees and increasing debt*. This undermines the accessibility of the university. NUM demands to make sure that tuition fees don't rise and that there are more grants for students from developing countries.

The fourth concern of the NUM is the *lack of (financial) transparency and accountability*. Transparency and accountability are only demanded from the lower levels, and problems are decentralised, but the information is not accessible on all levels. The NUM demands maximal financial transparency and accountability.

The fifth concern is the *democratic deficit of universities*. The Modernisation of University Governance (MUB) law has strongly centralised decision-making at Dutch universities. Whereas deans owe accountability to the Executive Board and the Executive Board to its own Supervisory Board, accountability towards staff and students has largely disappeared. The NUM demands the decentralization of decision-making (decisions should be taken in a democratic way at the lowest possible level, i.e. the departments or the faculties, rather than the central administration) and elections (all positions with the authority to make binding decisions should be elected).

The sixth concern of the NUM is *the increase of the workload*. Take for instance the University of Maastricht. Between 2010 and 2013 the amount of students increased from 14.497 to 15.571. During this period the amount of PhD defences increased from 205 to 246. However, the academic staff was reduced from 1873 to 1831. This implies an enormous increase of workload. Another indicator for the increase of the workload is the reduction of so-called norm-hours. At some faculties the norm-hours for the supervision of a master thesis were reduced from 45 hours (1995) to 12 hours (2014) and for giving a lecture from 10 hours (1995) to 6 hours (2014). This reduction has consequences for the quality of teaching. The NUM demands to reduce the gap between the norm-hours and the real time staff-members spend for their teaching.

The seventh concern of the NUM is a *lack of information*. A good therapy starts with a good diagnosis. When it comes to the diagnosis of the problems at Maastricht University a lot of information is not available. For instance, there are not enough figures about the reduction of norm-hours. It would be also good to do independent scientific research on the gap between the norm-hours and the time staff-members spend on teaching. The NUM demands especially more information to indicate what is precisely the workload.

The eighth concern of the NUM is the *environmental policy* at Dutch universities. A substantial amount of students and staff is concerned with the current level of sustainability at Maastricht University. The NUM demands to do the best you can to create a sustainable university.

It's a pleasure that there is already a commitment from the Executive Board side to address our concerns. We acknowledge that a lot of the mentioned problems cannot be solved in Maastricht, because they are inherent to the (inter-)national system of higher education. However, we ask you to address them within the VSNU and to try the best you can to exert together with other executive boards some political pressure on Minister Bussemaker to change her policy on higher education. We think it is in the interest of the whole academic community.

It would be in our interest to co-operate in a constructive way with you and the university council. Therefore the New University Maastricht suggests to establish working groups that focus on the

discussed issues. After a specified period of internal deliberation the working groups could present their outcomes to the whole academic community.

The New University Maastricht welcomes the fact that you take our concerns about the quality of education and research seriously. To make this also clear to the outside world, we kindly ask you to react publicly to these concerns.

Yours faithfully,

On behalf of the New University Maastricht,

René Gabriëls