
The Dutch Universities: Toward a *really* new Academic Year

1. FROM HIERARCHY TO PARTICIPATION
2. FROM CONTENT-LESS MANAGEMENT TO CONTENT-BASED POLICY
3. FROM WASTING MONEY TO FACILITATING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Many of our colleagues, students and even some university governors, policy makers and politicians acknowledge that there are structural problems in Dutch universities. Here and there some minor improvements have been suggested or implemented, but there is no sign of a much-needed fundamental change. The Platform for the Reform of Dutch Universities (H.NU) aims to identify and coordinate constructive ideas from the present state of discontent and from scattered alternatives in order to realise substantial change in the culture and structure of our universities.

Features of the current situation

- Widely shared discontent among both staff and students.
Tenured staff has been cowed by top-down change upon change over the past years. The pressing workload and poor perspectives are taking their toll, particularly among young staff members (many women among them) who have no voice because of their insecure positions and temporary contracts. Students experience further financial constraints and the demise of the quality of their education.
- These problems are the result of commodification, hierarchy and bureaucratization structurally imposed by the management.
Scientific research is being hijacked by external economic stakeholders, such as companies and industries. Universities themselves are being governed as if they were businesses, applying like criteria such as valorisation targets and sharp competition. Quantitative accounting and 'output'-oriented research and education have become the norm at the expense of qualitative criteria that can facilitate the diversity and richness of disciplines. Hierarchical management and short-sighted governors take counter-productive measures in a dogged attempt to get a grip on primary processes of which they are ignorant. These trends also affect the quality of teaching and the premise of education: to enable students to become knowledgeable, responsible and articulate citizens.

A really new academic year demands a change of course

1. FROM HIERARCHY TO PARTICIPATION

- An open management structure where academics, students and support staff participate in decision making about the things they know best. First: an elected Vice-President and Deans of the Faculties
- Recognition of fundamental differences between humanities, social sciences and natural sciences as well as their complementarity

2. FROM CONTENT-LESS MANAGEMENT TO CONTENT-BASED POLICY

- Content-based criteria for the assessment of research and education
- Research-based teaching
- Substantial reduction of excessive and stifling control mechanisms

3. FROM WASTING MONEY TO FACILITATING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

- An inventory of the cost of failed mergers and innovations
- Stop rising expenditure on top salaries for governors, expensive outsourcing, growing budgets for marketing and PR divisions, and reinvest this money in research and education

Platform Hervorming Nederlandse Universiteiten/ Platform for the Reform of Dutch Universities

H.NU was founded by academics from across the Dutch universities.

See <http://platform-hnu.nl/goals-of-platform-h-nu/> for further information, news, activities, petitions, and constructive alternatives. Contact: contact@platform-hnu.nl.