



Open brief

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To the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, and
the members of the Standing Committee for Education,
Culture and Science in the House of Representatives

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Ons kenmerk
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Dear Ms van Engelshoven, dear members of the Standing Committee for Education, Culture and Science,

For years now, the structural underfunding of education and research has been combated by working harder and longer. We believe that it is time for a radical change.

Tomorrow you will be speaking about policy and funding for higher education. We feel that it is time politicians and cabinet ministers realised that the system is crumbling and has reached its limits, and that there is truly no more room for cuts. To fail to invest in education and research is to place a heavy burden on the future.

Last week it became clear that the ‘efficiency cut’ of €183 million is not going to be scrapped, and in addition to this there may be extra cuts to the tune of €135 million due to financial setbacks regarding the Ministry of Education’s budget.

Yet things cannot be done even more efficiently, even more effectively. For years now, the structural underfunding of education and research within our sector has been combated by working harder and longer. It did not help that regulatory and accountability pressure only increased over this same period.

This is out of step with the funding of students, and due to the shortage of resources for research, the university’s essence – namely the connection between education and research – is under threat.

To take the first point, studying has become increasingly expensive for students, but they are not seeing any returns on their investment. Due to cutbacks, in 2021 there will be just €7 million left from the student loan budget of €152 million. And despite the fact that students are studying faster, following more courses and thus more education is being provided, the government contribution per student has fallen by 25% in the last 15 years. The consequences manifest themselves each and every day: larger groups for the tutorials, mass lectures, student burnout on the rise, less time for individual supervision and the resulting frustration for both staff and students.

The second point is no less essential for excellent academic education. University degree programmes must teach students how to conduct research and work with academics, which is referred to as research-intensive education. Yet despite a sharp rise in the number of students, the research budget has remained the same. The gap is widening ever further as a result. For many years now, the government and business community in the Netherlands have been investing much too little in research and in this regard are lagging behind similar EU countries.

Instead of the European target of 3% of GDP, we are at 2%. Instead of the announced €400 million, an extra €1.9 billion is required each year to reach 2.5% of GDP, which is the ambition that the government itself announced.

In the recently signed sector agreement an additional €60 million is being invested in scientific and technical research. This is clearly needed for these sectors. Just €10 million is being earmarked for social sciences and the humanities. That is far too little. The challenges for the future do not just relate to technology, extending life or artificial intelligence – however important these things may be – but also to the use and effects of them on humanity and society: inequality, social relationships, legal security, food security, ethics, etc. The contribution of economic and legal studies, the humanities and social and behavioural sciences is indispensable. We need to broaden our horizons and allow more recognition and appreciation of the humanities to enable our society to flourish.

In summary: The system is crumbling and is reaching its limits in various places. There are increasing numbers of students, who are expecting smaller-scale education sooner, despite the fact that there is less money available per student.

As is the case for various other universities in the Netherlands, the University of Amsterdam (UvA) is a multidisciplinary university. The added value to the Netherlands of comprehensive universities is considerable and this is something that we must preserve. Society is asking that knowledge be shared and that the major issues of our times be considered from a variety of perspectives.

Again, like other Dutch universities, the UvA is an excellent university with world-class research and high-quality education. We are keen to maintain this situation as well, to the benefit of our 32,000 students and to the benefit of pioneering research. But there does need to be sufficient scope for this. Working harder is not a solution; allowing groups to grow in size is ill-advised. The pressure of work among academic staff is now excessive and is higher than it is in healthcare or professional services, as a study carried out by SoFoKleS revealed last year.

‘Academics and universities are right in complaining about underfunding for education and less scope for free, independent research’, was the recent conclusion of the Rathenau Institute after an extensive study. It is time for a radical change, a halt to the idea that things can be done even more effectively and efficiently. It is not time for even more cuts. It is time for more money, across the board in education and in research.

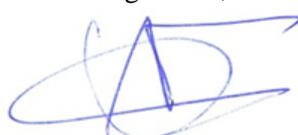
Yours sincerely,

Chair of the Executive Board,



Prof. Geert T.M. ten Dam

Rector Magnificus,



Prof. Karen I.J. Maex

Member of the Executive Board,



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