

## **Diversity & Inclusivity Day Maastricht University 8 November 2018**

Dear colleagues,

In the corridor on the ground floor of our office building, there are nine older gentlemen with genial expressions on their faces who peer down at me as I pass by. Each of them wears the collar that I too now wear from time to time, and each has an array of wrinkles suggestive of wisdom and experience. I sometimes stand in front of the mirror practising my most genial gaze, because one day my portrait, too, will hang in that gallery. And then you'll see something like this. Like those men, I'm starting to get my own wrinkles. But there is a clear difference between us.

One after the other, nine men, all of a rather advanced age, served as rector magnificus of this university. Then something different happened – but it didn't happen of its own accord. If the members of the Supervisory Board and the Appointment Advisory Committee hadn't specifically gone looking for capable female candidates, perhaps not much would have changed. It was a woman who

nominated me. Does the term 'positive discrimination' immediately spring to mind? In fact, it's not all that different to how male leaders find and select candidates every day. They just do it less consciously.

After all, a great deal of academic research has shown that people – all people – subconsciously include and exclude others because they do or don't fit into the same box. By the same token, we also automatically ascribe women lesser leadership qualities than men – and women are equally guilty of this. We all suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from implicit bias. Me too. Having the courage to recognise this will bring us a step closer to becoming a more diverse and inclusive university. But more about that in a moment.

Today, diversity is high on many agendas. An interim evaluation of the Horizon 2020 programme showed that gender equality has improved in recent years. But also that we need to take special measures to promote gender equality in research teams, to raise awareness of gender issues in research and innovation, and to improve decision-making to this end.

We've all seen the media coverage of the new Rutte 3 cabinet, which some people feel is a let-down in terms of the number of women. I take it as a positive sign that this was being discussed in the media at all. In terms of age and ethnicity, too, the new cabinet has very little diversity. In a TV debate on whether or not to set quotas, I heard a top entrepreneur, a woman, say she doesn't believe in them because it means compromising on quality. I'm not a huge fan of quotas myself, except in the fishing industry, but it does make me think: we've spent decades settling for lesser quality in top positions.

Because, to quote my colleague from The Young Academy, Willem Schinkel: "If talent is evenly distributed – and not to assume that is sexism – then talent is wasted if positions are not evenly distributed. If you're not recruiting the best women, positions will be filled with less talented men. So if we're only choosing men, we're simply not choosing the best people." End quote.

To this I would like to add: if we're only choosing Dutch, white, able-bodied people over the age of 50, or others who fit with our implicit

norms. Our vision of diversity is reflected in the new logo, which is designed to draw attention to the policy and the activities revolving around diversity and inclusivity at Maastricht University. Starting today, you'll be seeing this more often.

I still think that selecting people on the basis of quality without mandatory quotas should lead us to a more balanced, diverse group of employees. But for that to happen in practice, we'd need a small revolution in the coming years.

Here you can see how the number of female academics at Maastricht has developed in recent years. Just as it is at national level, the number of female academics is increasing, but the percentage of female professors stands in strong contrast to the percentage of female PhD candidates and postdocs. At the end of last year around 60% of our PhD candidates were women, yet only 19% of UM professors are women, and our goal for 2020 is to increase that percentage to 22%. Just think about that figure for a moment. Twenty-two percent – are we really going to settle for

that? It's a bizarrely low percentage, especially if we accept that talent is evenly distributed between men and women. It's great that we've agreed on 22% with the ministry of education, but I for one certainly won't be satisfied if in three years' time we've improved by a measly 3%. In fact, I don't mind telling you, I'll be seriously peeved.

What I am very pleased with is the policy memo 'Diversity at the CORE', because it addresses not only specific target groups and HR policy, but also the importance of linking diversity and inclusivity to the strategic objectives of the university. The memo makes some initial suggestions, but I invite you to think along with us: how can we benefit as a university from being more diverse and inclusive? Which strategic objectives can this help us achieve? In the business world, a diverse team can result in profit growth. What can it give UM, do you think? How can paying explicit attention to diversity and inclusivity enhance our performance when it comes to providing innovative education, helping students to develop into global citizens, contributing to a better world? How does that apply to your

department, your research group, your project or your study programme?

The memo provides a point of departure for concrete action. In the coming years we need to become diverse and inclusive to our very core. For me, diversity policy is not a paper tiger. Nor is it a box just there to be ticked: we have a policy, check, we have a programme manager for diversity, check, and we're done. Given that diversity only has a positive effect in the workplace if some 30% of employees meet a certain profile, it's clear that UM has work to do. And given that groups are often formed here, as they are everywhere, on the basis of ethnicity, inclusivity is by no means a foregone conclusion. We need to strengthen under-represented groups – but we also need to do much more than that.

I don't want to discourage you today. On the contrary, I mean to inspire you and challenge you. Because everybody can make a contribution to a more diverse and inclusive organisation. During the last Dies Natalis I invited two Syrian refugees onto the stage to talk

about their experiences in the Netherlands. I still speak to them occasionally; coaching someone from outside your own circle is not only inspiring for both parties, but is also a way of putting the cat among the pigeons. So I challenge you: seek out someone from outside your own frame of reference, have a coffee or a beer with them some time, and see if you can mean something for one another.

Dear colleagues,

All change starts with awareness-raising. So for starters, I hope that after today we all realise that we too suffer from implicit bias towards others. As for what happens then: well, we are all in charge of our own actions. We can only move towards a more diverse and inclusive organisation if responsible professionals – and that means all of us – recognise their biases for what they are, and take steps to correct them. And after today, I remain open to your opinions, your hopes, your irritations and above all your concrete contributions.

Because it won't happen of its own accord.