

Opening Academic Year, September 4 2017

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Dear all, a warm welcome to the Opening of the 2017-2018 Academic Year. It's a very special opening because this year we celebrate our 18th lustrum; we are 90 years young. The theme we have chosen for the occasion is: "90 Years of Connecting People & Knowledge". It reflects the long standing purpose of this university not only in the past ... it is still quite valid in the years to come.

Ours truly is a splendid university, wouldn't you say so?, ... there's so much going on here. Let me just highlight a few elements from a personal perspective.

Right before the university was preparing for the summer break, the students of University Forum presented me with their vision for Tilburg University, entitled 'Understanding Students, Advancing Society.' They made a strong plea for *student centrality*. In their opinion, the position of students should be the point of departure in policy- and decision-making, and in the resulting actions.

This heart-warming initiative reflects that students are taking up responsibility through their engagement and commitment...

Connecting People and Knowledge, in the true sense of the word. I therefore promised them that we will incorporate parts of their vision in our Strategic Plan for the years to come.

Another example of Connecting People and Knowledge to Advance Society comes from our alumni. They tell us how proud they are of our university and how they want to contribute to promote Tilburg University in the field of the Social Sciences and Humanities. They however also want us to connect even further to society in order to demonstrate the relevance of our work and to increase our societal impact.

A true landmark achievement in relation to Connecting People and Knowledge is our *Jheronimus Academy of Data Science*. In Den Bosch, we are connecting citizens, companies, knowledge institutes, and local authorities in a unique collaboration centered on the subject of data science which is at the heart of the digital revolution. This is really a major development with a lot of impact! More than 300 enterprises and organizations have connected to JADS and the pace at which the developments in Den Bosch take place are exceeding expectations.

These examples indicate how we want to move forward as a university in the future. They reflect our mission, our vision, and our aspirations. During Speech 2025, we have heard the ideas of our staff, and more broadly during the first half of the year we have listened to our external stakeholders who were willing to share their views with us on the future of our university. The result is unique and broadly supported Strategic Plan; a plan that builds on our great traditions but also secures our future relevance.

The concept of the plan is there! We will strengthen our connection with society to grow our impact and our prestige. We will do this

through our innovation themes: Empowering the Resilient Society, Enhancing Health and Well-Being, and Creating Value from Data.

Our profile is clear: we continue to specialize in humanities and social sciences *to advance society*. Now some of you might say: don't these new objectives restrict us in the way we work as scientists. Isn't there too little room left for fundamental research? Let me assure you, dear colleagues, scientific research will remain at the heart of our activities and there is nothing more important than high-quality scientific output as this determines our reputation as an academic institution.

Let me quote one of our alumni in this respect: "Our university needs to stick to quality as a fundamental guiding principle. In-depth knowledge and research are the most important assets that will educate and build future generations." We will continue our pursuit of excellence by forging even more ties with science institutes and academic consortiums both nationally and internationally. This will offer us new opportunities, new ties and connections, and it will increase our visibility. As an example we will continue to endorse and drive the national Digital Society initiative launched by the VSNU, the association of Dutch universities, as a joint effort to turn the Netherlands into a leading country in digital science by connecting digital technology and people.

I would like to finish this speech by underscoring the importance of the human dimension in the realization of our plans; there is no way we can get this done without the commitment of all our staff.

We fully recognize that you have been invariably dedicated to Tilburg University in the past year and that you often went beyond the course of duty in your efforts. We acknowledge the many wonderful achievements realized in the past year which are made possible through the efforts by so many of you. Together with you, we are about to explore new avenues as we enter the final decade on our way to our hundredth anniversary.

Dear colleagues ... in order to achieve our ambitions in the years to come we need each other... Let's connect to create growth... growth in every possible dimension that will make us stronger!