

International Conference Hanze UAS 'Benchmarking and Ranking'

12 April 2018

Closing remarks Thom De Graaf, President of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Science

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel honored being invited to make a few closing remarks at the end of the conference of today on this special occasion where you celebrate the 220<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. Reaching this staggering age, the Hanze is the oldest multi-sectoral university of applied science in the Netherlands. I apologize that I have not been able to attend the whole program, but I am looking forward hearing today's outcomes from you.

The central theme for this 44<sup>th</sup> lustrum is *empowerment*. Using the talent you were given to develop your full potential, empowerment is a process of becoming more confident and stronger. But besides this personal development, empowerment also means to reach out, help one another, and share your talent. This theme very much resembles the genesis of our sector as a whole: the UAS now truly became an important breeding ground for the emancipation of its students, and a hotbed for innovation that is strongly linked up to local business in the region.

In that sense, in recent years we have seen a nationwide shift in how we as UAS, substantiate the results we book: a reversal from the rusted-up 'performance contract' to 'quality agreements' that stimulate cooperation *within* and *between* our institutions.

In any case, and at any given period, it remains of great importance that we can support the impact we have with actual data, facts and figures. But we need to take it even one step further: we can use that available data to measure our own successes and brilliant failures to the successes and brilliant failures of others around us.

To that end, instruments that measure and compare performance can and should provide our universities of applied sciences first and foremost with the tools that are required to do what we do best: empower our students. Multidimensional, user-driven rankings are interesting tools in this

perspective as they can serve as comparison platforms that ultimately benefit the quality of our education and effectiveness of policy-making.

However, we should not consider these ranking instruments as a panacea: the outcomes of national league tables like Elsevier and Keuzegids need to be treated carefully. Despite their relevance, they are not always capable of depicting a full overview of the reality on the ground. It can sometimes hamper certain plans that are still in the startup-phase. How can we measure 'impact', while not being limited by only counting the number of citations and publications in journals?

It remains the 'million dollar question' how impact in a more broader sense can be well measured by all our universities of applied sciences. I am curious what suggestions were given during this conference.

Especially in the international context benchmarking and ranking instruments such as the OECD's "Education at a Glance" indicators and U-Multirank are increasingly being used at our universities of applied sciences. It can enable institutions across borders to compare, share good practices but also see where we can do better by being transparent of our own downfalls and failures.

It is important to mention that we do not only celebrate the great results we book, but also examine what we can learn from those failed projects. Being transparent means opening up for both these successes and learning points. Therefore, the most important rationale for start using such benchmarking instruments should be the positive effect on quality assurance and the idea that genuine transparency will ultimately benefit the individual institution but also has a potential spillover effect on other Universities of Applied Sciences. Let me repeat what I said before: empowerment is not only the process of getting more confident and stronger through a trusted environment, but also reaching out, helping one another achieve what you have just achieved.

That joint learning process, not by 'naming and shaming' but by substantiating and comparing our impact in a relevant way, is very important to the next steps our UAS will take. Of course we will have to take into consideration the negative side effects ranking and benchmarking can have on the reputation of the universities. Methods and instruments for quality improvement can easily be misunderstood, or even, misused, if isolated and presented out of context.

I am glad to see that to that extent the discussions of today were not only focusing on the national level.

You also tried to uncover what and how UAS can learn from each other and find meaningful cooperation in the EU research and innovation-agenda, for example through the European networks we participate in, like: UAS4EUROPE. Especially in that European context, good quality data is of great importance for credible rankings.

Besides providing the right data for generating credible rankings, it is important to also examine the actual effect such ranking instruments have on finding suitable partners for collaboration in EU research and innovation projects. This becomes increasingly important now the European Commission in Brussels is preparing for the 9<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.

To come to a conclusion, I am convinced that the panel discussions and workshops of today gave all participants enough 'Food for Thought'. Speaking of 'Food for Thought', I hope you all know it is also the theme for our upcoming annual conference on Thursday April 19<sup>th</sup> in Den Bosch. I hope to see you all there, and besides more food for thought next Thursday I think it is now nearly time for Drinks for Thought. I wish you all a pleasant closing drinks, and thank you for coming here today at the Hanze UAS.