



Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, dear students –especially our *newly arrived* students. A warm welcome!

It is good to see so many friends and well-wishers of Campus Fryslân here today at the magnificent Beursgebouw.

I note our Mayor Mr Sybrand Buma is here, alderman Abel Reitsma,

We are particularly pleased to welcome our keynote speaker and Member of Parliament Mr Rob Jetten, whose continued efforts, particularly as the Netherlands' first minister for climate and energy, align so well with the core interests and themes of this Faculty.

- and for our students and others here today: following Mr Jetten's keynote address there will be an opportunity for students to raise questions with Mr. Jetten.

Welcome to our partner institutions here in Leeuwarden –to our advisory board members –Van Hall Larenstein, Fryske Akademie, Arjen Tresoar, representatives NHL Stenden and Wetsus.

It is also good to see so many of the our partners from the private sector here today.

A warm welcome also to our 3 very-own-former-deans - including our founding dean, now president of the university Mr Jouke de Vries and of course my immediate predecessor – Caspar van den Berg, now Chair of the Universities of the Netherlands, UNL. We will hear more about UNL in a moment.

Last but not least – a warm welcome back to our own staff, and students, after a well-deserved summer break. Staff and students that make up that special academic community of Campus Fryslan –

I have only very recently joined this Faculty but if there is one thing I noticed – it is that this building is brimming with that rare and energizing sense of optimism and opportunity about what has been accomplished at our faculty and what is yet to come.

The opening of a new academic year is of course, in the first place a moment to look ahead, and share and explore some of our ambitions and aspirations for the new year ahead of us.

But before doing so, I trust you will allow me, to look back on some of the highlights of the previous academic year. And there are many: successful grant applications, international media appearances, research breakthroughs and prestigious honors and prizes that have been awarded in the previous twelve months.

One of these awards I would like to bring also to your attention – and that is the Enter-prize awarded for the best idea of a student entrepreneur here in Fryslân - awarded to our student Alice Haywood in June of this year.

And I am pleased to say that all of you do know Alice – there she is - she is our moderator here today.

Alice was awarded the prize for developing her App "Auti-melody" - an application that supports communication with people who face difficulties understanding words and language because of their disabilities, while they often do understand and respond to music.

For Alice Haywood, developing the app Autimelody was an answer to enabling communication with her very own sister. This personal quest, resulted in a solution that will undoubtedly aid many others who face similar challenges. As such it also provides much meaning to our Faculty's motto - the inspirational motto of "Connecting global challenges to local solutions in excellent research and education with positive societal impact."

But it also serves as an inspiration, especially today – in a time of bitter conflict, bitter politics and much polarization - to undertake a genuine effort to connect with each other; and to seek to understand what it is that the other needs to *make* that connection, to develop a truly inclusive communication based on acknowledging other perspectives and interests. Autimelody is also an inspirational example of how technology can contribute to that essential quality of human contact and connection.

And, how fitting, developed by a student at a university with a strategic plan titled – Making Connections! At a faculty that serves as a faculty of connections. So, once again, many congratulations to Alice!

Which brings me back to the ambitions and aspirations we have for Campus Fryslân in the coming year.

Campus Fryslân is in a very fortunate position – to be the latest and youngest faculty at such an established and long standing institution that the University of Groningen is. We can draw upon four centuries of experience, ideas and achievements of the excellent university that we are part of. We stand, to paraphrase that well known metaphor of Isaac Newton, "on the shoulders of giants".

In return, we have also much to offer and contribute to our university as a whole: as a faculty that is truly inter-disciplinary and truly trans-disciplinary; as the only faculty that is not based in Groningen, but in the land of much opportunity that Fryslân is for us. As a faculty that connects this region with the entire University of Groningen and vice versa.

And being in Leeuwarden has brought us much. Since our opening, Campus Fryslân's programmes have been awarded labels of excellence and its research has been recognized through partnerships, sponsorships and awards – and I hasten to say, not in the least thanks to our many supporters and the partner institutions here in the Frisian region.

But this, of course, you already know,

This seventh academic year of our Faculty is also a year to take stock – to take stock of where we are and what we have grown into. And, as important, where we would like to go in the coming years.

As a new Dean, I am most fortunate that these opportunities, responsibilities and challenges have been articulated by the Faculty in the previous academic year in a Development Agenda - fittingly titled "Towards a future proof Campus Fryslân".

An Agenda that positions Campus Fryslân as the University's Platform and Gateway to the region.

And if you read this Development Agenda carefully – we come back to that essential key word and action: to connect.

To connect internally - within our own Faculty; to connect to the other 10 faculties at our university, to the four societal Schools – and of course to the University of the North that we are part of.

To connect externally - with our valued partners in the region that we are based in: knowledge institutions here in Leeuwarden, to our regional government that has supported the first phase of the faculty so generously, to the society at large, to the private sector - also present here today.

This is not new for us of course – we do so already in, for instance, our Living Labs where real world challenges are addressed, in our interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary educational and research – but there is much to gain in increasing our engagement with external partners.

So what brings us together? Where can we connect?

We share of course a common interest in sustainable transitions – or in the words of our Agenda:

All of our activities have a link to broad sustainability studies, to the quality of life of people in their economic, social and ecological context. Where for us, the digital world, data, politics, positive health, healthy aging, language, culture and knowledge connect and need to be studied– to better understand the dynamics of broad prosperity and, ultimately, to improve it.

Our education and research have demonstrated that the Faculty can make a valuable contribution regarding these challenges – and this is well known among those who know the faculty already.

But one of our continued challenges is to get that message further out.

Especially today, when our contribution to society is much questioned – be it in shortsighted policies and proposed budget cuts formulated by politicians who on the one hand campaign on regional interests, but on the other hand have not yet taken fully on board how important universities are for those very same regions – and vice versa.

There is, in this new academic year under this new government, much at stake and much to lose.

Following these welcome words we will therefore take a moment to view a short video regarding the proposed budget costs of our new government. A video – presented this week at all the universities in the Netherlands and prepared by UNL, Universities of the Netherlands.

And UNL is of course now headed by my predecessor and former dean of this faculty Caspar van den Berg.

And I am sure that those who were here on this occasion last year, remember Caspar's closing remarks.

At the opening of the previous academic year our former dean, expressed the wish

“to make that academic year the *best* year ever to date”.

And, judging from that long list of highlights and achievements, it *was* our best year to date

- but this year might *just* turn out *even* better. So, let's make that happen – together!

Thank you.