

New Year's Gathering 2024

Intro/Opening

Welcome dear students, staff and friends of Radboud University. Welcome also to the members of the Supervisory Board, the deans, our colleagues from the Executive Board of Radboud university medical center, and the former rectors of our University. I would also like to a moment to remember our former rector Jan Giesbers, a familiar face at our New Year's Gatherings, who unfortunately passed away last year.

For many of us, 2023 was a special year in many ways. Here are a few examples. Street doctor Michelle van Tongerloo was voted Radboud alumnus of the year. Together with seven partners, researchers at the Donders Institute were awarded a €19 million Roadmap grant to build the world's strongest research MRI scanner. Radboud researcher Marlee Tucker studied animal behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic, and attracted the attention of the international press with her research. Sharon Unsworth's Kletsoppen team was awarded a Dutch Research Council (NWO) grant to develop a teaching programme to introduce newcomer children to the Dutch language. And that is only a fraction of the many Radboud University initiatives we are proud of.

2023 was also the year in which we celebrated our centenary as a university. 17 October marked exactly 100 years since Radboud University first opened its doors. At the Dies Natalis at De Vereeniging, we celebrated this special anniversary in the presence of King Willem-Alexander. We awarded honorary doctorates to six researchers – a seventh honorary doctorate had already been awarded in May – and every faculty was represented. José Sanders accepted the role of Rector Magnificus, succeeding Han van Krieken, and made a plea for an inclusive Radboud University in her acceptance speech. And Radboud University received the Silver Medal of Honour from the municipality of Nijmegen.

With 100 Radboud Gestures, many staff members and students were inspired by our university's centenary to do something for their community. We also organised Radboud Kids at Stadseiland Veur-Lent, the Radboud Festival on campus, Radboud Sounds at Doornroosje, and the Radboud Art & Science festival at various venues. These are just some of the wonderful moments that were made possible by many of our students and staff!

But it was not all fun and celebration. Wars, armed conflicts, and natural disasters claimed many victims worldwide and also had and continue to have an impact on our campus. We believe it is important to be there for each other as an academic community and offer support where needed. We also want to facilitate dialogue when groups are in conflict with each other. Freedom of expression is a great good, but it also has its limits. Discrimination, racism or inciting hatred and violence are not tolerated on our campus.

This year has also made it clear that we have more work to do to make sure that Radboud University is a place where everyone feels at home and safe. There were alarming reports in the media that showed that this is not or has not been the case for everyone in recent years due to various forms of undesirable, transgressive behaviour. We want a university community where you can study or work in an environment that helps you to bring out the

best in yourself and others. The recently published plan of action for working towards a socially safe climate for all is going to help us in this regard: *Prevention* through a healthy culture of accountability, *care* with a central campus-wide hotline for undesirable behaviour that ensures adequate and thorough handling of complaints, and *cure* by responding proportionately and fairly with suitable care and after-care for all concerned.

Finally, there was the news of Han van Krieken's early retirement as Rector, that hit us hard at the end of September. It led to intense conversations about how we interact with each other at all levels of the organisation, both informally and more formally and procedurally. We are grateful to Han van Krieken for his commitment and many contributions to our University. We will remember the advice he gave in his response to the events: *"We must continue to engage in dialogue about undesirable behaviour, also at our University."*

As you came in, you saw lots of facts presented about our University in 2023. You will find these on the website after this gathering. Shortly, our Rector Magnificus, José Sanders will reflect on her first months as Rector and look ahead to 2024. But first, we will review the past year. We will engage with some extraordinary colleagues and students in two rounds of interviews. Our Rector, José Sanders, will facilitate one interview round and I will facilitate the other.

Vice President Agnes Muskens will present the Hermesdorf Prizes and engage in conversation with the laureates. And finally, we will have a sneak peek at 2024, the new year ahead. But first, let us look at a year review of 2023 in words and pictures. A slide show created by our photography editor Dick van Aalst, with music by our colleague Thomas Dessing – Head of Student Information & Processes at Academic Affairs (Also known by his stage name: Dezzinski). The words are from our campus poet, Thijs Kersten.

Outro/Looking ahead

At Radboud University, we want to contribute to a healthy, free world with equal opportunities for all. Now is the time to harness the power of science and education to understand and solve pressing sustainability issues.

For several years now, we have recognised that we are facing a climate crisis and we have started to integrate sustainability issues in all our study programmes.* As a university, we echo the call in the most recent IPCC report stating that drastic measures are needed worldwide to secure the future of life on this planet. *“Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health (very high confidence). There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence).”***

What does this mean for us as Radboud University? In 2023, we started conversations around this with various parties on campus. We will proceed with these conversations in 2024, and we will take concrete steps. How can we ensure that our teaching and research contribute to transitions in the field of climate, ecosystem conservation, and justice? What does this mean for cooperation with external companies and organisations that we expect to endorse our goals? We want to be transparent about who we work with and on what terms. We will set up a work group to help us test this. Next quarter, we will further work out how to put this into practice together with experts, our faculties and services.

It goes without saying that we will also look at our own behaviour as a university and academic community. We have already connected 87% of our floor area to the campus' Heat-Cold Storage system, we have been saving more than 4% energy per year for years, we are well on our way to becoming natural gas-free, and we purchase sustainable products and services.

In addition to our lunches and appetisers, which are already meatless as standard, we aim for **vegetarian and vegan food** to be the norm in all our restaurants and canteens from this year onwards. We plan to greatly expand our range, with attractive pricing, default promotions, and an expansion of our vegan offerings. In this way, we are taking extra steps to encourage healthy and sustainable*** choices. In 2023, far more meat croquettes were sold on campus than vegetarian ones. Let us aim to turn this around in 2024.

And if I may give another example of initiatives on our campus: Together, Radboud University and Radboud university medical center have one of the most beautiful campuses, if not THE most beautiful campus in the Netherlands. We have almost as many trees as employees at our University. Many unusual species such as rhinoceros beetles, tawny owls, and swallow tails have now found their way to our campus grounds. Last spring, there was even a fox with five cubs filmed! We have almost as many trees as employees at our University. Unfortunately, nature is also struggling on our campus due to biodiversity loss, an excess of nitrogen, buildings, cars, climate change, and the accompanying more extreme weather conditions. Radboud University and Radboud university medical center are therefore implementing policies that create favourable conditions for restoring biodiversity on our campus. In an Honours lab**** students and researchers from different disciplines will critically examine whether we are doing the right thing and whether we are doing enough.

We humans all too easily place ourselves outside nature. As if nature is there for us and we are not part of it ourselves. In doing so, we are increasingly endangering our very existence. Together, we are working on a new sustainable balance. A future where we ourselves are once again an integral part of nature. In which we not only take, but also give.

The fundamental changes required for this ask for a sound and broad scientific basis involving all disciplines. And also for education that will equip a new generation with the critical, reflective intellectual skills needed to face the great challenges ahead. The brand-new Radboud Magazine that will be handed out to you when you leave this meeting shows how our researchers and students are already contributing to these changes.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. Let these words by Nelson Mandela motivate us to contribute to a healthy, free world with equal opportunities for all in 2024.

*See for example: [Radboud University makes sustainability a standard part of curriculum of all study programmes | Radboud University \(ru.nl\)](#)

** From [the latest IPCC report](#): “Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health (very high confidence). There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence).”

***See recent reports: [Health Council: more plant-based food is healthier and more sustainable than meat \(nos.nl\)](#) and [Livestock farming responsible for 12 per cent greenhouse gas emissions, FAO report shows | Gazet van Antwerpen \(gva.be\)](#)

****<https://www.ru.nl/honoursacademy_english/honours-labs/vm/honours-labs-spring-2024/biodiversiteit-campus/>