

## 2. FROM A BUSINESS TO A COMMUNAL SCIENTIFIC PROJECT

### ANALYSIS

The Democratic Academy Groningen observes that the 21<sup>st</sup> century university has turned into a commercial institute, rather than the emancipatory scientific project it is supposed to be. The university has become a business, her rector a top manager with concomitant salary, scientists are producers and students simply consumers. This development can be seen throughout the entire organizational structure within the university. The board is made up out of managers who mainly focus on keeping the budget in order and achieving a higher spot on largely meaningless international rankings. Scientists have to produce as many publications as possible, with many harmful consequences. The enormous pressure, competition for research financing and managerial measures have led to job insecurity, mental health issues and excesses such as research fraud.

Students, for their part, are treated as consumers who merely come to shop for a diploma. They have no real voice and are only there to be processed along the educational assembly line as soon as possible. Students are not taken seriously and are therefore not taught to take themselves seriously. The financial interest of selling as many diploma's as possible has destructive consequences. Contact hours decrease in order to house larger numbers of students. A rushed Anglicization of a lot of major programs is supposed to bring in more tuition-payers from outside the EU. The quality of education suffers from the translation issues and bigger lecture audiences, but that is taken for granted. A business always strives for maximization of profit, but a university should maintain quality. These two things are sometimes mutually exclusive and at the University of Groningen they definitely are. Research is increasingly evaluated based on economic utility, or her practical applicability on the short term. There is less and less room for the creation of a scientific framework for the long term, for qualitative social-scientific research, or for maintaining pluralism within the arts and humanities.

As a consequence of corporate management, all criticism is nipped in the bud. Real decisions are made long before participatory councils hear about them. Policy documents are confidential and criticism in the media is all but forbidden. Above all, the reputation of the university must be protected, carefully construed as it is with the help of expensive PR-agencies. Because God forbid that a consumer doesn't believe that the UG is the place where 'Born leaders reach for infinity'; they might buy their degree somewhere else. If the money that went into PR had gone to the English department, perhaps the grammatically incorrect slogan 'Think Bold' could have been prevented.

### OUR VISION

DAG pleads for a university that is not organized like a business, but as a communal project with a social responsibility. A university should treat its students as critical thinkers who have something to say. A university should be a safe haven for the flourishing of scientific research. A beacon of

knowledge for the common good. When a university is swayed by perverse financial incentives and empty management rhetoric, its purpose is undermined. Bigger is not always better. A larger scale is not always more efficient. That is why DAG believes that the purposes and goals of an academic community are fundamentally incompatible with businesslike organization and policies.