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Betreft	Negative Advice Strategic Narrative Humanities in Context		

Dear dean, dear Fred,

On 19 February 2021 the FSR FGw received the advice request for the *strategisch narratief Humanities in Context* (HiC). In this letter the FSR FGw will reply to this advice request, considering the arguments made in the strategic narrative and the FSR FGw's opinion on these arguments. Although the document's scope is limited to informing the OR and FSR, we still feel that the argument made in the strategic narrative is based on fundamental ideas and it is thus necessary to review it critically. After discussing the document extensively, we have decided to **advise negatively** on the *strategisch narratief Humanities in Context*. This letter is meant to clearly address the specific points behind our negative stance, as well as our vision on the problems HiC is supposed to tackle.

The strategic narrative can be broken down into a few main arguments in favour of HiC:

1. Because the faculty is doing well financially and is expected to keep developing in this direction, there is space to invest again. This year's Faculty Strategic Plan can be used to present and explain these investments.
2. Funding for research from *tweede en derde geldstromen* often goes to research that centres around societal themes (*maatschappelijke thema's*). This 'society-focused' research is often **thought**—by investment sources as well as researchers themselves—not to align adequately with the humanities. Moreover, inter- and multidisciplinary research is also not seen as a strength of the field of humanities.

3. While there is some growth in the humanities faculty in terms of students, this increase is limited to rather few programmes [mostly the larger English-taught BA programmes have seen an increase in student numbers]. Usually, sharing the money that students bring in between larger and smaller programmes (termed 'solidarity' in the document) is enough to make sure the faculty does not run at a loss. However, because the funding per student is decreasing, according to the strategic narrative the larger programmes, whose 'profit' is used to fund the less cost-effective (*rendabele*) programmes, are 'running into the limits of efficiency' meaning that the limit of this money-moving scheme either already has or will be reached soon. However, the document does not explain how the HiC programme would circumvent this problem: there is no explanation about what would happen when the BA HiC runs into the 'limit of efficiency'. In our opinion however, this system of basing the funding for programmes on student population is not sustainable long-term in the first place.
4. **The strategic narrative, in conclusion, argues that the core of the 'humanities problem', i.e.: a lack of interest from both students and stakeholders in the humanities which consequently manifests in both research and education, is due to a lack of relation to society.**
5. Moreover, the strategic narrative also argues that the humanities need to be a starting point for interdisciplinary research instead of being merely an overtone ("*sausje achteraf*").

The conviction of the strategic narrative is that the solution to the aforementioned problems is Humanities in Context. By "providing impetus to our orientation to society in education and research" while at the same time "making sure that the mark of the humanities [on this education and research] is clear, so keeping the initiative in our own hands" ("*We willen ... een impuls geven aan onze omgevingsgerichtheid in onderwijs en onderzoek met het oogmerk dat het eigene van de humanities er een stempel op zet en dat we daarmee het initiatief in eigen hand houden*"). The document notes that HiC is a broad, overarching idea that applies to research, BA education, and MA education. In a sense, it is a type of infrastructure.

Our main criticism of the strategic narrative is that the justification of the HiC programme lies in the fact that the problem of the humanities is a lack of connection to society, but that does no justice to the complexity of the 'problem(s) of the humanities'. There are a host of societal themes that the humanities interact with in research and education, and it is thus unclear to us why exactly the impulse to societal orientation (*omgevingsgerichtheid*) is necessary. That is not to say that we do not

acknowledge that to outsiders *omgevingsgerichtheid* within the humanities may seem lacking, however in our analysis this is a problem regarding the reputation – not the reality of the humanities. The themes that are implied in this strategic narrative as well as the other documents (sustainability, digital transformation and cultural studies) are present in the faculty already. For example, *Digital media and transformations* are covered in the Media bachelors' programmes, there is an entire bachelor programme on *Cultuurwetenschappen* and *Environmental Humanities* is a course within the BA LCA. To the FSR it is entirely unclear why it is necessary to construct an entirely new programme to implement these themes and/or more *omgevingsgerichtheid*. Moreover, the strategic narrative **does not clarify** this either.

Another point of criticism is that the document is too abstract: it does not explain how the BA HiC will enter the faculty (i.e., by taking the CROHO label of *Cultuurwetenschappen*), where the funding for this BA will come from, and whether any research has been done on the arguments for HiC proposed in the strategic narrative which are noted earlier in the letter. The belief that HiC will solve all the issues presented in the strategic narrative is misguided, this way of thinking disregards any and all other possible solutions or perspectives. HiC as a whole is a large project: it is extensive, in terms of budget, and it has far-reaching consequences for the faculty's educational and research infrastructure. The arguments presented in this document are insufficient to convince us of the necessity of HiC.

Our last point of criticism is the other primary motivation to develop HiC, namely, the faculty's unstable financial situation. HiC is deemed to solve this instability by bringing in more students and thus more money with which other programmes or research fields can be supported. There are two problems with this supposed financial solution. First, it is too unpredictable right now how many students will actually sign up for the HiC (bachelors') programme, especially potential students who would not have otherwise chosen a humanities programme, because no decent market research has been done and it is thus unclear whether the BA HiC will actually be able to fulfill the faculty's need for a financial stronghold (*sterke schouders*). In other words, right now it is uncertain whether the planned investments will actually be offset by an increase in students later. Second, the FSR FGw is not enthusiastic about having financial gain as a main motivation to introduce such profound changes to multiple branches of the faculty. While we are aware that the current financial situation is unsustainable in the long term, we do not believe that this plan (in its current form) will create a healthier financial situation. Moreover, since the development of HiC is funded by a fairly large budget post coming from the CvB, which is meant for interdisciplinary education and research, the money designated under HiC could also be used to strengthen other programmes or research fields, or to set up interdisciplinary courses within existing programmes. **The FSR FGw does not support the decision to use this money for HiC in its current form nor do we agree with the arguments that are presented to support these plans.**

The strategic narrative as a whole and its reasoning for Humanities in Context would be more convincing if the following questions were answered in the document:

1. What is the target group of the BA (and MA) programmes that will exist under the name HiC and how do we know this target group is interested? In other words, will the proposed changes yield the desired results? Will there be specific market research and will that/can that influence the structure of HiC?
2. Which scientific and/or academic issues and questions form the foundation of the educational infrastructure? Why is it necessary to create an entirely new programme(s) to strengthen the faculty's interdisciplinary education?
3. What perspective does HiC offer in terms of connection [*aansluiting*] to master's programmes and the labour market, taking into account the entry requirements for Humanities master's programs at the faculty?

Because of the vagueness and simplicity of the arguments presented in this document the FSR FGw advises negatively on the *strategisch narratief*. The document does not provide a solid enough reasoning for Humanities in Context nor the associated investments and changes to the BA Cultuurwetenschappen. Moreover, it does simply not convince the FSR FGw of the necessity and attraction of the Humanities in Context programme, especially the BA. We recommend that the faculty strengthen existing structures instead of experimenting with students and staff. In our opinion, Humanities in Context is, in its current form and time-path, an unwarranted and unsustainable plan to secure the faculty's future.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the FSR FGw,



Zazie van Dorp

Chair FSR FGw