

27 September 2024

Open letter in support of Sector Plan colleagues

Dear TSHD Faculty Board

cc. Prof. dr. Marjolijn Antheunis - Dean of TSHD

As faculty members of the Department of Culture Studies, we write to express our deepest concern that two of our colleagues hired under the Sector Plan have been informed they may not be given permanent contracts due to budget cuts. Dr. Irem Bezciöglu-Göktolga and Dr. Kate Huber joined our department in August and September 2023 as Universitair Docent and are now integral to DCU's education and research agendas. They have each exceeded the expectations for a UD to be offered a permanent contract. However, they have been informed that they cannot expect such an offer before November 15th, due to the likelihood of national budget cuts. We know that several colleagues from other departments in our school are in the same position. On September 10, it was announced that the government had decided not to go through with their announced plan to terminate the sector plan funding. To our surprise, the Faculty Board still decided to postpone the decision about these staff members' contracts until November and December.

At a time when universities across the Netherlands are facing austerity, we must stand together to preserve our educational institutions. Our university delivers excellent teaching and research because of the people who work here, and we strongly affirm that our colleagues are our greatest priority as we collectively face the challenges of the coming budget cuts.

Since 4 September, Dr. Bezciöglu-Göktolga and Dr. Huber have come to work not knowing if they will have a job in the new year, an extremely taxing condition that we were led to believe Tilburg University stands against with the 2024-25 Opening of the Academic Year theme of "mental health and wellbeing". As our colleagues face a degree of job insecurity unprecedented for their position, they are also being treated unequally: all other UDs in DCU hired under the sector plan have received permanent contracts, and one of those hired externally received his within only 12 months rather than the customary 18 months. Moreover, as we are not currently in an official restructuring process, there is no administrative basis for which permanent contracts can be withheld.

Furthermore, it troubles us to learn that Tilburg University is perhaps the only university where sector plan UDs may not be given a permanent contract following the customary probation period and fulfillment of expectations. We have consulted with sector plan representatives from the University of Amsterdam, Erasmus University Rotterdam, University of Groningen, Radboud University, and Utrecht University, and in all cases, we were informed that their newly hired UDs are just as likely to receive permanent contracts as they were before the new government plan was announced. With the recent announcement that sector plan funding is not to be cut from the national budget, we are perplexed as to why Tilburg University would take a different approach.

We acknowledge that these are financially uncertain times, and we recognize the serious challenges the university will face as a result of the government's plans. However, we strongly urge you to treat the sector plans as a distinct issue. Challenges no doubt lie ahead, but as it stands, the Faculty Board is currently making a deliberate decision to jeopardize the future of talented and hardworking staff members in exchange for only minimal relief from anticipated financial strain. As DCU colleagues and also Tilburg University faculty committed to preserving the excellence of our institution, we urge that Dr. Bezciöglu-Göktolga and Dr. Huber, and other staff members who are currently in similar precarious circumstances, not face different treatment on account of the national budget cuts and that they are offered permanent contracts following the customary hiring process.

Sincerely,

The undersigned faculty members of the Department of Culture Studies:

Rian Aarts, Associate Professor
Ad Backus, Professor
Suzanne van der Beek, Assistant Professor
İrem Bezciöglu-Göktolga, Assistant Professor
Marjolein de Boer, Assistant Professor
Rosalynd Borst, PhD Candidate
Sara Van den Bossche, Assistant Professor
Lois Burke, Assistant Professor
Hans-Georg Eilenberger, PhD Candidate
Irene Groenevelt, Postdoctoral Fellow
Julian Hanna, Associate Professor
Odile Heynders, Professor
Martin Hoondert, Associate Professor
Femke van Hout, PhD Researcher

Kate Huber, Assistant Professor
Mieke Kusters, Managing Coordinator
Chen Li, PhD Candidate
Élodie Malanda, Assistant Professor
Ico Maly, Associate Professor
Mirjam van Reisen, Professor
Jan Jaap de Rooter, Associate Professor
Eleonora Sciubba, Senior Researcher
Saif Shahin, Assistant Professor
Jenny Slatman, Professor
Sean Smith, Assistant Professor
Camilla Spadavecchia, Assistant Professor
Massimiliano Spotti, Associate Professor
Jos Swanenberg, Professor
Inge van de Ven, Associate Professor
Kutlay Yagmur, Professor