

Direction of the Fryske Akademy 2020-2023

Petition to the King's Commissioner and the Executive Council of Fryslân

16 September 2020

The Fryske Akademy was founded in 1938 with the aim of conducting research into Frisian language and culture in the broadest sense of the word. Since the year of its founding and the first decades of its existence, much has changed. In 1989, on the authority of the Minister of Education, the Fryske Akademy became affiliated with the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences and Arts in Amsterdam (KNAW) as an independent institute. At the time, that was a suitable means of embedding the Fryske Akademy in the whole of scientific practice in the Netherlands. However, the Fryske Akademy currently works together with the University Campus Fryslân; the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences; the Universities of Groningen, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Nijmegen and Maastricht; the Institute for the Dutch Language in Leiden; Tresoar; AFUK and the Frisian Social Planning Office. The one-sided administrative affiliation with the KNAW is therefore no longer in line with current practice.

In addition, the KNAW does not have the expertise to move an institute like the Fryske Akademy forward as well as possible. The KNAW is solely focused on conducting research and monitoring its quality. However, in addition to its scientific endeavors, the Fryske Akademy has an important social mission. During the 80 years of its existence, the academy has provided the basic facilities for knowledge, development and education in the Frisian language, history and culture. That is precisely why the Province of Fryslân invests a great deal of money and energy in the institute. This two-track scientific and social policy is also advantageous as there are no other institutes in Fryslân that have the expertise to carry out all that work. In Dutch studies and historiography, these tasks are assigned to separate, specialized institutes and universities while Fryslân actually has only one comprehensive institute for all of these tasks.

The management of such an institute requires a jack of all trades. By all means, this individual must have a substantial scientific stature, but he or she cannot function properly without broad, in-depth knowledge of the 'Fryske mienskip'. The Fryske Akademy has been dealing with an administrative crisis for some time. There has been no scientific leadership for nearly three years. Even worse, supervision in the field of its social mission has been lacking for more than ten years. That is why the Fryske Akademy now primarily needs a director who is cognizant of the institute's position in the 'Fryske mienskip'. To our mind, the search for a top scholar from abroad, as suggested in the media, does not seem to be a good priority. The institute is running a great risk by bringing in someone who still has to fully familiarize him- or herself with the specific character of the Fryske Akademy and who first has to gain insight into the academy's mission and how it should be realized. Conversely, someone with administrative qualities is needed, someone who can stimulate and motivate people scientifically, who already has a wide network in the province, and of course a clear vision concerning the position of a scientific institute in the community. In this manner a quite broad direction for the Fryske Akademy can be developed anew.

For this reason, we make an urgent appeal to the King's Commissioner and the Executive Council of Fryslân to intervene without delay. In 2023, the position of the Fryske Akademy will again be determined for a period of five years in the Administrative Agreement on Frisian Language and Culture. Before that takes place, there must be clarity concerning the position and the direction of the Fryske Akademy in the whole of the scientific community in and outside Fryslân, as well as about what Fryslân expects from its Akademy.

The Province of Fryslân should now take the lead and ensure that a board of directors is appointed who will address and elaborate these questions and thus enable the Fryske Akademy as an enterprise to get back on its feet before 2023. Top scholars will come of their own accord. For now, it would be better to keep in mind that in 1938, the Fryske Akademy was co-founded by Titus Brandsma, at that time professor at the University of Nijmegen. He wasn't from Harvard, he was from Hartwert.

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