What will the university’s mission be in the year 2040? How will the university be funded, and what kind of teaching and research will be needed? Will campus universities still exist? These are all issues on which universities will have to make fundamental choices in the coming years. A new university will emerge that, like the one of today, will need constant legitimation in society: certainly, we should not take its continued existence for granted. Although some fundamental values will remain unchanged, we need to reflect on new core values, in view also of rapidly changing societal circumstances. In order to maintain a strong system, the university will also need to engage in ongoing debate with the government, for there will be a high level of differentiation among universities in the system, varying from what will sometimes be narrow teaching universities to comprehensive research universities. In the ideal case, connected ecosystems will emerge that encompass other knowledge institutions, in which the university will be able to play a central role. Distance learning will increase as a result of advancing digitization, and, with this, the need for tailored education. In addition, less value will be attached to the final degree certificate, and lifelong learning will become more important. As part of all these changes, it is crucial that the university focus on more than knowledge transfer alone: it is about making a meaningful contribution to society,
striving for wisdom rather than for knowledge. Hopefully the university will achieve a completely different role from that which is portrayed in the classical image of the ivory tower: at the heart of society, as a guide that leads the debate, speaking with authority on major questions in a world ruled by the wisdom of the crowd – in what, since Brexit and the US elections, has been called the ‘post-fact society’.