

To: Mrs von der Leyen  
European Commission  
Wetstraat 200, 1049 Brussels

Brussels, 17 July 2019

**Concerning: Knowledge first! How to make Europe prosper**

Dear President-elect von der Leyen,

On behalf of the Netherlands knowledge community, I would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the European Commission.

European prosperity depends on knowledge. Our global competitive advantage is strongly connected to the availability, use and continuing pursuit of knowledge. Europe does not compete on cheap labour or poor use of resources, because we value our social and environmental standards. Instead, the sustainability of the European economy and the well-being of its citizens fully depend on investing in knowledge as a core European value. The return on such investment is large, as knowledge is the only resource that grows with use.

Europe is at a crossroads. For centuries we have been able to sustain and improve our way of life by leading in science and education. Today, however, powerful nations like the US, China, and Japan, spend more on R&D than we do. This raises the question whether Europe can maintain its competitive advantage and guarantee our well-being. The answer is 'yes,' provided we expand our excellent knowledge base through education, research, and innovation. Hence our motto: Knowledge first!

That is why the Dutch knowledge community urges you to strengthen the European knowledge base during your mandate by adopting **three policy principles** to advance our social, commercial, and environmental interests. We need a smart Europe to benefit all Europeans and to create the jobs that make our social systems sustainable. Ultimately, this is about sustaining the European way of life.

1. Knowledge should prevail in all policies. The principle of 'knowledge in all policies' should be enshrined in policymaking, meaning all new policy proposals should consider how they might affect – and could contribute to – Europe's excellent knowledge base. Vice versa, science and education are not stand-alone fields but an integral part of our economic and social systems. For instance, policy proposals based on scientific evidence are shown to be more effective at achieving results. By pooling resources at the European level, we can achieve more, addressing global challenges and ensuring that Europe can contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Excellent science with impact on society is key. Excellent science generates new knowledge and forms the solid base of the European knowledge economy. Because excellent science by definition equals the best possible science, it is inherently transnational. That makes European cooperation on science – and the European Research Area and Horizon Europe with 160 billion Euro – crucial to the strong position of European competitiveness.
  
3. Continuous education and training. Education and training prepare young generations for the future and equip them with the skills and expertise that are vital in the modern world. Student mobility provides true added value and turns participants into European citizens. That makes European cooperation on education & training – and the European Education Area and Erasmus Programme with 40 billion Euro – crucial to the well-being and prosperity of our citizens.

Attached you will find seven concrete policy recommendations ('Knowledge first! 7 ways to make Europe prosper'), as well as our position papers on Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.

I wish to extend to you my most sincere wishes for a successful term as President.

Yours sincerely,



Sander P. van den Eijnden  
President of Neth-ER



*Neth-ER is the Brussels-based association representing the entire Netherlands knowledge community*

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## Knowledge first! 7 ways to make Europe prosper

1. Key European policy initiatives like the **EU Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024** and the successor to **Europe 2020** include education and science as two key targets that underpin sustainable growth. The **EU Industrial Vision 2030** stimulates research throughout the value chain, from fundamental, curiosity-driven research to applied research.

### Research

2. **Horizon Europe** continues to drive Europe's most excellent research. The added value of the Framework Programme is that it brings together the best researchers to work on the questions that matter. That is why excellence and impact remain the leading criteria. Open Science and Open Access to the results from publicly financed research improve the circulation of knowledge, ensuring impact and engagement with society, following the principle 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary'.
  - Horizon Europe receives the **funding required** – at least 15% of the MFF or 160 billion Euro – to maintain our world-class level of research, to meet grand challenges and to strengthen Europe's innovative power.
3. The post-2020 roadmap implements the **European Research Area**. Europe builds a level playing field for researchers and research infrastructures to share excellence and ensure the circulation of scientific knowledge. The **European Semester** process delivers on the identified reforms of national research systems, and the Reform Support Programme will support key reforms in this area, thus supporting convergence and cohesion.
4. Member states meet the **Lisbon objective** to raise overall R&D investment to 3% of GDP, as agreed in the 2000 Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020 Strategy, and as is already the case for our main global competitors.

### Education

5. **Erasmus** ensures that students at all levels of education – from vocational to academic – can pursue (part of their) education abroad. European youth, as well as adults, are equipped with the skills they need, ensuring their swift employment. The programme identifies underrepresented groups on a country-to-country basis, to ensure maximum participation and social inclusiveness.
  - Erasmus receives the **funding required** – at least 3% of the MFF or 40 billion Euro – to meet its ambitions and ensure real impact.
6. Erasmus acts as a true catalyst for strengthening the **European Education Area**, which improves the quality of education systems across Europe. The **Bologna** and **Copenhagen Processes** support this by establishing European standards for quality control and mutual recognition of diplomas.

### Synergies

7. The European education and research programmes, in synergy with the **European Structural and Investment Funds**, ensure regional and international cooperation between education, research and business. **Cohesion policy** mobilises investments in research and industrial competitiveness based on smart specialisation strategies. European digital policies, including **Digital Europe**, further embed knowledge institutions in society.