Collective pamphlet of the Dutch knowledge institutions for the 2014 European Parliament elections

European Parliament 2014 - 2019: Continue to invest in knowledge and science

Through constant innovation, the European Union is a competitive economic force at global level. Innovation, through research, education and industry, creates growth, jobs and solutions to societal challenges like sustainable health care for an increasingly ageing population and optimising mobility and transport. It is therefore essential that Europe remains one of the world’s leading knowledge economies. Europe has, for example, the ability to break down barriers which currently limit the mobility of researchers and businesses. Removing these barriers will enhance economic prosperity. In this pamphlet the Dutch knowledge institutions show how the EU can continue to commit itself to this objective in the coming period.

Europe and education
All residents of the European Union are entitled to an education which allows them to develop their talents to the best of their ability and which contributes to creativity and entrepreneurship. Investing in education and modernisation pays off. The quality of vocational and higher education in EU Member States can be further improved by promoting it at European level. In the coming period, the European Union should therefore focus on:

- increasing mobility in education. The presence of international students helps to raise the quality of education and encourage a more ambitious attitude to studying, while studying abroad helps students improve their skills and orient themselves better on an increasingly international labour market. This can be further supported through European programmes.

- aligning education and jobs. Internships and better cooperation between education and business ensure that students possess the knowledge and skills they need in the labour market immediately after completing their education. Partnerships, peer learning, research and international competitions can also contribute to this.
• **teacher quality.** By encouraging staff exchanges, learning from each other and cooperation outside Europe at all levels of education, the EU can help educational institutes to improve the quality of their teachers.

• **digitisation and OpenCourseWare.** Initiatives to make lectures and lessons available online must be facilitated. This will enable programmes in Member States to be scaled up and good practices to be exchanged.

• **removing barriers.** Visa applications should be simplified and mutual recognition of study results and diplomas should be promoted. This will increase the potential for exchange and raise the returns on knowledge and human capital.

**Europe and research & innovation**

It is essential that the European Union continues to invest in knowledge as a sector that promotes economic growth. With the emergence and consolidation of new countries in the international scientific arena, Europe will have to take resolute action to maintain its global position. Although European science is still a leading performer at international level, emerging economies are threatening to outperform us. It is therefore of great importance that the European Union commits itself to:

• **research.** Today’s research results are the consequence of investments made 10 years ago. Continuous investment is therefore important, especially given the Netherlands’ very successful participation in EU knowledge programmes. We, the Dutch knowledge institutions, believe that this calls for investment throughout the research chain, from fundamental to applied research. It also requires innovation and the improvement of profession-specific applied research.

• **innovation and knowledge valorisation.** Cooperation between institutes of higher education, businesses and / or government on research is important for innovation. Where possible, these joint efforts should also focus on the practical application of knowledge.

• **removing barriers.** Barriers to the mobility of researchers and cooperation between European institutions should be removed wherever possible. Examples include making pensions portable and facilitating visa applications.

**This pamphlet was drawn up by:**

- The European Platform
- The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)
- The Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad)
- The Dutch Federation of University Medical Centers (NFU)
- The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)
- The Dutch Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO)
- The Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic)
- The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen)
- The Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)
**Education in Europe**

An international dimension is essential for the quality of Dutch education. Europe plays an important role as a catalyst for new developments and as an organiser of international cooperation (e.g. the Lisbon, Bologna and Copenhagen processes, Europe 2020). The labour market is internationalising and education is responding: European programmes are encouraging multicultural elements in curricula and internships, while managers and staff are raising the quality of their institutes through international peer learning and collaboration.

**Framework conditions**

An effective European policy requires a number of framework conditions: strategic choices, removing barriers and cross-sectoral cooperation. Europe must choose strategically and invest in areas and sectors that also contribute to economic growth and innovation in the long term. Many benefits can also be achieved by removing barriers that hinder promising initiatives, for example, by making grants more accessible and promoting labour mobility. Finally, the obstacles must be removed between policy areas that share common goals, like improving the alignment between education and the labour market.

Europe can achieve more in the field of education if it takes these framework conditions as a starting point for concentrating its efforts on the focal points described below.

Education is a subsidiary subject, but Europe offers opportunities – and risks – for Dutch education and institutions. Europe and the Netherlands can achieve more if they take framework conditions as a starting point for concentrating their efforts on the focal points described below.

**Focal point 1: closer alignment between education and the labour market**

Demographic developments and changes in the labour market (from job security to employment security) call for education and the labour market to be even more closely aligned. Education and business together determine specific demand per sector and region. Good information about demand from the labour market and supply from the education sector is essential for students and employees to make choices that promote labour mobility, both regionally and throughout Europe. The economic crisis is increasing the need to continue to offer education and training that can move the economy to a higher level. At the same time we must ensure that we do not lose sight of the emancipatory function of education, for example, its influence on social inclusion and enhancing citizenship.

**What does this require from Europe?**

Europe must give education a permanent place in policies and programmes relating to employment, entrepreneurship and innovation. Brussels can encourage the crucial collaboration between education and business by providing financial support for research, the exchange of good practices and the development of international partnerships. It is also important to strengthen awareness of the importance of internships and apprenticeships (work-based learning) through, for example campaigns and international skills competitions. Not only European education and research programmes, but also the European Structural and Investment Funds (ERDF, ESF, ETC), should be responsive to this and focus on regional and international cooperation between education, research and business.

**Focal point 2: international mobility**

Mobility and internationalisation yield important economic benefits for our knowledge economy in terms of productivity, trade and innovation. In an open economy like that of the Netherlands, international competences are of great importance to the business sector. By studying or following internships abroad students get to know other cultures and languages and gain valuable transversal skills like showing initiative, solving problems and thinking out-of-the-box. Studying and working abroad not only makes students much more employable at all levels, but also makes the labour market more international. This calls for employees with multicultural competences and sufficient transparency for
foreign companies and training institutions to understand which competences an employee or student has acquired.

**What does this require from Europe?**  
Europe has been promoting international mobility for many years, but must remove the many practical obstacles to real growth. These include the recognition of diplomas and study results, the barriers between rules that limit the flexible use of resources, and unnecessary bureaucracy. Europe should promote transparency and recognition (e.g. EQF), strengthen structural partnerships between educational institutes and financially support the growth of mobility within and outside Europe.

**Focal point 3: quality of teaching**  
Good education depends on the quality of its teachers. International mobility helps teachers to acquire intercultural skills and become multilingual, and to continue to develop new insights in their respective fields. It is also essential that they stay up to date on the latest developments in business and didactics; they can do this by acquiring knowledge of excellent education and business practices within – and outside – Europe.

**What does this require from Europe?**  
Europe can encourage teachers to do some of their initial or career training at companies or educational institutions abroad by providing financial and organizational support. It is also important to remove barriers to the international mobility of teaching staff, for example in the field of social security.

**Research in Europe**  
Research and innovation are of crucial importance if Europe is to remain competitive in the global arena. This justifies the place of research as one of the pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy. The most concrete expressions of this in practice are the new European research and innovation programme Horizon2020 and the major societal challenges formulated within the programme. Dutch researchers have traditionally been very successful in these programmes and will continue to use their creativity to work together with businesses on the great questions of the future. It is also important that efforts are maintained to further develop the European Research Area (ERA). This means optimising the European research landscape by increasing the mobility of European researchers, making national research systems more effective and embedding them more solidly in the ERA.

**European cooperation to tackle societal challenges**  
Europe is increasingly facing a number of major societal challenges, including an ageing population, climate change, energy issues, et cetera. We cannot tackle these challenges on our own. They need to be addressed jointly, with research institutions, businesses and government working closely together. It is important that we invest in the entire research chain, as fundamental research and the applied research that is so important for innovation complement each other. Applied and practical research can convert scientific knowledge into new products, technologies and services, as well as strengthen the innovative power of SMEs.

Excellent researchers with innovative ideas have a central role to play in addressing these issues. Rising pension and health-care costs, for example, can only be curbed by research on ‘healthy ageing’ to allow people to stay healthy and continue to work for longer. Research - often conducted together with private parties - is also crucial in making the European energy market sustainable, for example by exploring the possibilities offered by solar, wind and hydropower. The humanities and social sciences also make a significant contribution to solving these major social issues.
To solve the complex problems presented by the Grand Challenges, radical innovations are needed. Radical innovation stems from fundamental scientific research. Within ‘Grand Challenges-driven research’, a lot of space should therefore be created for basic scientific research. The European Research Council (ERC) has already played an outstanding role in selecting and directing curiosity-driven research in the past. Proposals for fundamental research in the context of the Grand Challenges should also be assessed on the basis of similar internationally recognised standards of scientific excellence. This means that proposals and results must be subject to international peer review. Quality remains a sine qua non in thematic research.

**Removing legal and bureaucratic obstacles**
Legal and bureaucratic obstacles that may arise from European and national legislation and regulations should be removed to give research and innovation more space.

**Excellence and capacity building**
Seeking cooperation focused on excellence is crucial for European research programmes. Only then can we make a difference in the world. That does not mean that we should ignore differences in knowledge development in the various European regions. It is of great importance to Europe’s position as a centre of knowledge that highly developed knowledge regions emerge everywhere on the continent. This requires targeted capacity building to develop talent in the new Member States. The best way to achieve this is to build knowledge using the Structural Funds.

To build and maintain a large knowledge infrastructure is costly, but is also crucial for our global competitiveness. We urgently need to use European funds more efficiently to build this knowledge infrastructure.

A Twinning and Teaming for Excellence concept can be used to combine Horizon 2020 funds and parts of the Structural Funds to make small and large-scale investments in funding research infrastructure and centres of excellence possible, on a regional basis also in those parts of Europe where investments in research lag behind.

**Open access**
Open access, the broad public access to publicly funded research, is critical to speeding up innovation. This requires solutions that cannot be addressed solely on a national level. Europe-wide cooperation and agreements are therefore essential.