

Universities UK &
Association of Universities in the Netherlands
(VSNU)

22 september 2017

Joint declaration

on the need for continued
collaboration post-Brexit

Introduction

The higher education and research landscapes of both the UK and the Netherlands are characterised by an open culture with high levels of international collaboration and mobility. These characteristics are essential for the success that the scientific communities in both countries have enjoyed. Moreover, they are pivotal when it comes to stimulating scientific excellence and innovation in the direct interest of our societies, both now and in the future. This is why universities in the Netherlands and the UK have established strong mutual partnerships and are contributing to the creation and intensifying of European cooperation in the European Research Area (ERA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Maintaining open international research and education systems, requires the support of both a favourable regulatory framework and a political climate which favours an active exchange of knowledge, researchers and students. Therefore, a collective effort from higher education institutions and national governments is needed to maintain the successful collaboration between British and Dutch universities at both the institutional and system level post-Brexit.

VSNU and UUK emphasise their commitment to these efforts and call on their respective governments to take action to:

- Put in place a simple and attractive immigration regime for international staff and students with the flexibility needed to accommodate all forms of academic and research mobility.
- Ensure that existing research projects and programmes in which UK and European universities work together will be allowed to continue as planned and that UK universities continue to have full access to Horizon 2020 and its successor programme, Framework Programme 9 (FP9), under similar conditions¹ as before.
- Ensure that, as part of the common aspiration of spending 3% of GDP on research and development, efforts are made to substantially increase the amount of national and European investments in Science Programmes.
- Ensure the UK's continued access to Erasmus+ and its successor programme, under similar conditions¹ as before.
- Increase levels of staff and student mobility between the UK and the Netherlands.

In order to contribute to the achievement of these goals, UUK and VSNU will undertake the following actions together:

- Organise a 'universities meet universities' day in which universities and funding councils from the Netherlands, Germany, France and the UK meet to explore potential research partnerships, mobility partnerships and joint programmes.
- Facilitate contact and networking between UK and Dutch universities as and where appropriate.

Research and innovation

Scientific problems and grand societal and economic challenges are in essence not bound by national borders. Indeed, climate change, diseases such as Zika or Ebola and food poverty are cross-border concerns that affect the entire planet. International collaboration between

¹ Regarding both regulations and financial contributions to the programmes.

researchers is crucial when it comes to identifying the most important questions, finding ways to address these and disseminating the results of scientific work. Over the past decades, the growing collaboration between universities and research organisations in the various EU member states has made a vital contribution towards tackling grand societal and economic challenges as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals by multiplying scientific progress.

When it comes to bilateral partnerships, collaboration between researchers from the Netherlands and the UK stands out. Scientists from both our countries have co-authored more than 35,000 papers in the period between 2011 and 2015. Moreover, organisations from the Netherlands and the UK work together on 1,085 projects financed by the Horizon 2020 research programme, as of 11 September 2017. These projects have received €789m in EU funding and are directly contributing to the creation of jobs and economic growth across Europe, as well as the resolution of major societal challenges.

UUK and the VSNU consider it of utmost importance to preserve and strengthen partnerships in the fields of research and innovation between the Netherlands and the UK. UUK and the VSNU encourage their members to continue the advancement of research and innovation partnerships and call for arrangements that facilitate scientific collaboration between institutions from both countries. Most urgently, this means ensuring that existing research projects will be allowed to continue as planned for the full duration they were originally given and ensuring that UK researchers continue to have full access to the Horizon 2020 and its successor programme, due to start in 2021. Moreover, as part of the common aspiration of spending 3% of GDP on research and development, efforts should be made to substantially increase the amount of national and European investments in Science Programmes.

Staff mobility

Staff mobility is the lifeblood of international collaboration. Currently, 415 British academics are employed by Dutch HEIs, while 84 British nationals are part of the support and management staff². More than 1,620 Dutch academics are currently working at UK HEIs alongside 365 non-academic staff³. The networks these scientists create, are crucial for current and future research collaboration.

The VSNU and UUK call for arrangements that allow institutions to maintain the current level of staff and researcher mobility between the Netherlands and the UK. This includes ensuring the UK continues to be able to access the Marie-Sklodowska Curie action in Horizon 2020.

Student mobility

Since the launch of the Erasmus programme in 1987, it has offered more than 4 million higher education students a chance to enrich their learning experience by following education or work in another country. The UK is the number one destination for Dutch students, with over 2,000 students studying or working in the UK on Erasmus+ in the academic year 2014/15. Additionally, the Netherlands is one of the top five destinations for UK students studying or working on the Erasmus+ scheme with 875 UK students in the Netherlands on an

² WOPI, 2015.

³ Higher Education Statistical Authority (HESA) data

Erasmus+ period in the academic year 2014/15⁴. In addition to Erasmus+ students, Dutch universities currently welcome over 2,000 UK students that come to the Netherlands to complete a full bachelor's or master's programme⁵. Whilst, the UK welcomed just under 3,500 Dutch students in 2015/16 to complete a full bachelor's or master's programme⁶. The VSNU and UUK recognise that to meet their ambitions for boosting student-mobility, the framework of a completed European Higher Education Area is essential, and the Erasmus+ programme and its successor are key in accomplishing this.

UUK and the VSNU wish to increase the level of student mobility between the UK and the Netherlands. UUK and the VSNU call for the UK's continued access to the Erasmus+ programme as well as favourable arrangements that allow students from the UK to study in the Netherlands and vice versa.

Joint programmes

Student mobility is further stimulated by the development of successful international joint programmes, including joint degrees, stimulating multilateral and bilateral relations. The Erasmus+ programme provides opportunities for institutions across Europe to form joint master's degree programmes through Erasmus Mundus. In 2016, there were six Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees awarded to projects in which there were UK and Dutch participants and/or coordinators. These projects are a valuable complement to the successful bilateral joint programmes.

The VSNU and UUK calls for further cooperation between institutions on both sides, to develop long-term international degree partnership programmes between the Netherlands and the UK.

Next steps

The VSNU and UUK are keen to promote further collaboration between the two higher education and research systems: advancing research and innovation partnerships, increasing levels of student and staff mobility and continuing to develop joint programmes.

For the purpose of executing this joint declaration, the executives of the VSNU and UUK meet twice a year to discuss the progress. In addition, UUK would like to invite a VSNU delegation to the UK in one year's time (September 2018) to evaluate the progress of these objectives.

The Hague, 22 September 2017

Professor Sir Steve Smith
Chair of Universities UK International

Karl Dittrich
President of VSNU

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/erasmus-plus-annual-report-2015-annex-1_en.pdf (p.22-23)

⁵ 1CijferHO, 2016-2017

⁶ HESA data