

9. Netherlands: Stages of uncertainty: Brexit and the unknown future of UK – Dutch higher education cooperation. Marijk van der Wende and Jurgen Rienks

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9.1. Overview of research conducted

Consequent to the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum, the Centre for Global Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education launched in early 2017 a project entitled “Brexit and higher education in the UK and Europe: Towards a cross-country investigation”. This project aims to investigate the challenges faced by higher education institutions in the UK and Europe as the process known as Brexit unfolds.

In this context, a series of some 15 interviews were conducted in May 2017 among academic stakeholders in the Netherlands by Dr Marijk van der Wende, professor of higher education at Utrecht University, assisted by Mr Fabio Maggio, graduate student in the LLM programme on European Law at Utrecht University.

Interviewees included: presidents, deans, professors, recruiters, and senior-level policy officers from three Dutch research universities (Leiden, Maastricht and Utrecht) and from the Dutch Association of Research Universities (VSNU) and the Netherlands Organisation of International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic). Some involved are British nationals working in Dutch universities and one Dutch professor temporarily working in the UK.

Interviews were conducted on the basis of a set of questions related to: assessment of current relationships between UK/NL Universities, possible fall-out / damage-control strategies, policy-making proposals / advocacy, confidence in the negotiation process, foreseeable consequences on UK/EU/NL in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness in the global scenario, and the personal and employment situation of British nationals in the Netherlands.

Additional national-level data on higher education cooperation between the Netherlands and the UK were collected by VSNU’s international director Mr Jurgen Rienks (from WOPI, VINNOVA, and Cordis data bases), by Nuffic (Erasmus+) and from OECD data.

Further insights were gained from a meeting of vice-chancellors of Universities UK and VSNU (22 September 2017), which resulted in a Joint Declaration on the need for continued collaboration post-Brexit⁵², and from the Round Table “Nuffic Talks

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http://www.vsnu.nl/files/documenten/Nieuwsberichten/Joint_declaration_VSNU_Universities_UK.pdf

Brexit” with representatives of relevant ministries, embassies, councils and agencies (25 September 2017). In the intermediate period, both Dutch and international media were screened for relevant publications regarding Brexit and higher education.

9.2. Present situation: significance of cooperation with the UK

The significance of current cooperation between Dutch and UK higher education will be assessed in three areas: research, education (students) and staff.

Table 9-1 [Netherlands] Significance of UK-Dutch cooperation in research

RESEARCH		Rank for the NL	Rank for UK
Horizon 2020 (at end September 2017 ⁵³):	4,751 collaborative links 1,279 Joint projects Funding connected to joint NL-UK projects	#2 (after Germany) 57% (1,163 B€ out of 2,031 B€)	#5 (after Germany, Spain, Italy, France) 21% (844 M€ out of 3,943 B€)
General numbers for collaboration	Joint publications: 35,301 (2011-2015)	#2 (after USA)	

The significance of cooperation in research is in general quite high for the Dutch research universities. Collaboration with UK universities ranks second for joint publications and for the number of collaborative links under H2020, which connects to more than half of all funding received under that scheme.

Interviews revealed that research cooperation with the UK is generally perceived as very important indeed, although there may be exceptions. For instance, in informatics, top UK institutions may be less interested in EU funding (because of the availability of different funding sources and the bureaucratic burden of EU funding) and second-tier UK institutions are considered too weak by the Dutch leaders in the field.

The cooperation is clearly less significant for the UK, where the Netherlands ranks fifth in collaborative links and accounts for just over one fifth of all funding received from H2020. Such unevenness in European collaboration is generally to a large extent explained by the difference in size of countries, which is definitely a relevant factor here as well, although it should be noted that the Netherlands rates relatively high and directly after four much larger countries.

⁵³ h2020viz.vinnova.se Source: signed projects, eCORDA H2020 database, September 30, 2017.

This position may be explained by the high research performance of the Netherlands. Its citation impact score is 40 per cent above the world average, putting it in third place worldwide behind Switzerland and Denmark⁵⁴ and first in Europe in terms of its share of papers among the 10 per cent most cited (2008-2012)⁵⁵. Above average and above size performance is also demonstrated by the Dutch research universities in, for instance, the ERC^{56 57} and in global university rankings⁵⁸.

Table 9-2 [Netherlands] Signed contracts amounts in Horizon 2020 related to UK-Dutch research cooperation⁵⁹

University ⁶⁰	H2020 grants contracted (M Euro)	Excl. ERC grants	Grants contracted to UK Partners (M Euro)	Ratio of UK / NL grant	Ratio of UK / NL grant Excl. ERC
Tilburg University	14	2	5	0.36	2.5
Radboud University	76	43	97	1.27	2.25
Erasmus University Rotterdam	16	8,9	20	1.25	2.25
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam VU	56	29	62	1.11	2.14
University of Twente	49	29	62	1.27	2.13
Eindhoven University of Technology	71	51	95	1.33	1.86
University of Amsterdam	88	27	48	0.55	1.78
Utrecht University	87	28	49	0.56	1.75
Maastricht University	41	28	46	1.12	1.74
University of Groningen	64	34	58	0.9	1.71
Leiden University	69	25	40	0.58	1.60
Delft University of Technology	134	78	113	0.84	1.45
Wageningen University and Research	45	37	49	1.09	1.32

⁵⁴ http://www.vsnu.nl/en_GB/f c onderzoekskwaliteit.html

⁵⁵ UNESCO (2015). Science Towards 2030, p. 261

⁵⁶ <https://www.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/bijlagen/ERC%20in%20the%20Spotlight%202011.pdf>

⁵⁷ UNESCO (2015). Science Towards 2030, p. 251

⁵⁸ http://www.vsnu.nl/en_GB/f c rankings.html

⁵⁹ h2020viz.vinnova.se

⁶⁰ Here English names are used. These may differ from the names used as legal entity for contract with the EC.

Table 9.2 gives further indication of the importance of cooperation between Dutch and UK universities under Horizon 2020. The interests at stake would appear to be higher, with a relative higher amount of grants. These figures are indicative of the size of the network on the UK side. However, they only show the proportion of UK grants related to individual Dutch universities.⁶¹ Another reason why this indication has to be taken as a proxy is because individual universities may present a different share of their research portfolio under Horizon 2020⁶². The importance of the collaborative streams of Horizon 2020 varies from one discipline to another. In particular, Social Sciences and Humanities may, according to the public debate, be less often considered as first-tier partners for projects under societal challenges. Given the strong presence of SSH disciplines in both the UK and Dutch system (as opposed to many other countries) and many different forms of collaboration, exclusively looking at Horizon 2020 would ignore the existence of cooperation not (or less) entitled to specific incentives. Brexit may affect such collaborations in a different way than the cooperation supported by Horizon 2020.

Table 9-3 [Netherlands] Significance of UK-Dutch cooperation in education

EDUCATION		UK → NL	NL → UK
		Rank	Rank
Data for research universities and universities of applied science (Nuffic statistics)	Erasmus+ exchange (2015):	986 # 5 (after Spain, France, Germany, Italy)	2179 #1
	Degree students (2014) (2,063 in WO and 715 in HBO)	2,778 #5 (after Germany, China, Italy, Belgium)	3,326 #2 (after Belgium)

UK-Dutch cooperation in higher education, as measured in terms of student mobility, indicates a more mixed picture. The UK is a top destination for outgoing students, both under the Erasmus exchange scheme (number one) and for degree mobility (second position). All students in the former category receive European grants for their stay in the UK and almost half (1,612 in 2014) of the latter category took a Dutch government grant to the UK.

The most striking aspect is the uneven flows in exchange, with a ratio of 2.2 Dutch students sent to the UK against every one UK student received. However, this is no

⁶¹ On the Dutch side also more partners can be involved.

⁶² E.g. not all universities as legal entity include medical research at their related hospital, and Wageningen University and Research performs most research activities under a different legal entity.

exception as the UK has always had very imbalanced student flows with relatively (very) low outgoing mobility of its own students to foreign destinations.

The same has for a long time been the case in terms of degree mobility, and although the flows are still slightly unbalanced (ratio of 1.2), a significant rebalancing has occurred over the last decade. In fact, the number of incoming degree students from the UK increased almost six-fold (from 464 in 2006 to 2,778 in 2014). The strongest increase is observed from 2011 onwards, in anticipation and subsequent to the sharp rise in tuition fees in the UK in 2012. These high costs (up to £9,000 per annum) have surely been a push factor, considering the moderate fees (€2,000-4,000) in the Netherlands. The strong supply of English-taught programmes in Dutch higher education is another pull factor. The Netherlands is now the largest provider of English-taught study programmes in mainland Europe, with over 2,100 international study programmes available⁶³. This represents at research universities some 20 per cent of all bachelor and around 70 per cent of all master programmes.

The interviewees expressed that the gain in UK students studying for degrees is generally seen as having a positive impact, which is mostly illustrated by the fact that they are native speakers of English. Data on their actual academic performance as compared to domestic or other international groups are not yet easily available. Sporadic institutional research on German student performance suggests that they tend to outperform Dutch students. Some early (unpublished) evidence from one undergraduate college suggests that UK students may be weaker performers. Perhaps this could be explained by the stratified nature of UK higher education, where the top students might prefer to stay in the elite institutions in their own country, while in Germany with its much more egalitarian structure, top students may wish to seek opportunities abroad, even at higher costs than at home.

Table 9-4 [Netherlands] Significance of UK-Dutch cooperation in academic human resources

STAFF		UK → NL	NL → UK
		Rank	Rank
Data for research universities and universities of applied science (Nuffic statistics, 2014).	Erasmus+ staff exchange (2015):	203	183
		#5 (after Germany, Belgium, Spain Finland)	#3 (after Finland and Germany)
Data from WOPI for research universities and HESA for UK	Staff employed in universities (2015)	415 academics 84 admin staff	1,620 academics 365 admin staff

⁶³ <https://www.studyfinder.nl/>

UK-Dutch higher education cooperation in the area of staff mobility under Erasmus reflects the picture of student mobility, in terms of the relative importance (rank) of the UK as a destination compared to the relative importance of the Netherlands as a destination for UK staff; but with quite balanced flows in absolute numbers (likely due to the programme's mechanisms).

The situation for employed staff is more unbalanced, with ratios of around four Dutch staff members (mostly academics) employed in the UK, compared to one UK staff member in the Netherlands (also mostly academics and to a lesser extent administrative staff).⁶⁴

Across all interviews the benefits of international staff were underlined as positive, contributing to quality, openness and diversity in the academic context, UK staff included and without exception or exclusion.

Regarding the present situation, it can be concluded that the cooperation between UK and Dutch higher education intuitions is both quantitatively and qualitatively significant. However, it should be noted that:

- The situation is uneven: in absolute numbers, the flows of exchange students and employed staff from the Netherlands to the UK may have a bias of a factor two and four respectively compared to flows from the UK to the Netherlands. Relatively, that is when we take the size of the higher education system into account (the UK has 2.28 million students, almost three times the Dutch system with some 714,000 students), these ratios even rise to six for exchange students (i.e. six times more interest for exchange to the UK from Dutch students than the other way around) and 12 for staff!
- The increase in tuition fees in the UK has substantially increased the inflow of UK students in Dutch higher education. Besides, the role of language may explain both why the UK is so attractive for the Dutch as well as the strong interest of students from the UK for English-taught programmes in the Netherlands.
- Germany is more important for both the UK and the Netherlands within the EU; for the UK especially in research and for the Netherlands mostly in education. The number of German students in the Netherlands (22,189 in 2016) is almost tenfold the number of students from the UK!
- There may be important differences between disciplines and between professional fields, in particular related to the nature of collaboration or ways by which it receives incentives. According to the public debate, Horizon 2020 is less important for the social sciences and humanities. National funding schemes in such specific areas may take prevalence over European funding and therefore lead to less (visible) international collaboration.

⁶⁴ Data exclude *Hogescholen* (Universities of Applied Sciences).

9.3. Main concerns / opportunities

At the time the interviews were conducted (spring 2017), the main concern for all interviewees was the uncertainty about Brexit in terms of the process itself and its outcomes. This uncertainty was felt to make any planning or strategy development at individual, institutional, or sector level quite impossible. Opportunities were anticipated at that point by very few interviewees (see next section) and it seemed that no collective action or even scenario-building had started yet.

Concerns were fuelled by dismay, even disbelief “*How could this happen?*” and strong hopes that it could still be resolved or halted completely: “*Too stupid to happen all together*”. Various respondents feared in particular a “no deal” as an outcome, or at least a very chaotic period if the negotiations failed to produce a deal or at least an orderly transition period.

Any hopes for swift resolutions were frustrated by the speech of EU Brexit negotiator at the launch of the EU Brexit negotiation guidelines at the end of April 2017⁶⁵ where he made very clear that:

I understand that universities are keen to have clarity as soon as possible with regard to the future relationship that they will find themselves in. Planning takes time.

And

One option is that the UK could decide to continue to support university networking and joint projects as a third country after Brexit. But this would require a different legal and financial framework. I do not expect negotiations to bring clarity on these and a plethora of other issues in the immediate future.

Unfortunately, the uncertainty has not been reduced since. On the contrary, further speeches by UK leaders considerably added to this feeling of insecurity about the Brexit process as a whole. Even if UK leadership keeps hinting it is willing to pay for access to the EU-knowledge programmes, uncertainty will still prevail in the short term:

If the United Kingdom withdraws from the EU during the grant period without concluding an agreement with the EU ensuring in particular that British applicants continue to be eligible, you will cease to be eligible to receive EU funding or be required to leave the project on the basis of Article 50 of the grant agreement.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-1236_en.htm

⁶⁶ The European Commission’s Note to UK Researchers (6 October 2017).
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/support/about.html>

9.4. Plans and strategies

As stated above, interviewees mostly expressed in the spring of 2017 that it was too early to consider particular strategies to anticipate a post-Brexit situation. However, informal talks about possibilities to allow UK institutions to establish administrative footholds or even branches at their partners' campuses in the EU were being held in some circles. Indeed, King's College London announced such a deal with TU Dresden in the summer of 2017.

And although also not formally or publicly, some interviewees indicated that recruitment of qualified staff from the UK was being considered or actually already going on – for instance in areas where shortages exist in the Netherlands (e.g. informatics). In other disciplines, interviewees were mostly very sorry for their partners in the UK, some of whom had expressed they were really very distracted by the effect of Brexit on their career perspectives (e.g. in European law), but had not taken action to recruit or invite staff.

Not much strategic planning was really underway at that point. There seemed to be only a minority of universities anticipating a possible loss in students from the UK or preparing to enhance their position in other international student markets. Exceptionally, one very internationalised Dutch university was doing so and actively explored opportunities for recruiting students from countries and regions that would hitherto typically choose to study in the UK (e.g. from the Middle East). Few were aware of other EU countries, such as Spain, that were already actively campaigning to attract more international students.

But in the months that followed, the sector became more aware of the opportunity to position the Netherlands globally as the number two destination (or as the best alternative to the UK) in the EU for study abroad. The leading position in supply on international English-taught programmes (see section 2), was more generally underlined by comments on the strong position of Dutch universities when new rankings came out and the Netherlands was identified as one of the main “powers behind the throne”.

Figures reveal the UK to be less of a pacesetter than generally thought and the Netherlands to be a real knockout.

What stands out is the exceptional performance of the Netherlands' 13 main research-intensive universiteiten – every single one of which makes the top 100 of the Europe ranking. On research reputation, citation impact and research productivity (papers to academic staff), the Netherlands has a clear advantage over the European pack⁶⁷

⁶⁷ THE (21 June 2017). *Europe University Rankings 2017: powers behind the throne*
<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/europe-university-rankings-2017-powers-behind-throne>

However, apart from perhaps some steps by individual institutions, no concerted action was taken by the sector as a whole, as more uncertainties than Brexit alone kept it from defining new policies or grand international strategies.

9.5. Brexit in relation to concurrent changes and trends

These uncertainties were, among others, related to ongoing critical debates about the (dis)advantages of recruiting international students and teaching in English that arose around the start of the 2017-18 academic year and the then still incomplete formation of a new government (since elections mid-March).

These conditions may correspond to some extent to the forces that led to Brexit in the UK. As early as 2005, Euroscepticism led to a “devastating no” from the consultative Dutch referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (followed not much later by the French “non”). Since the global financial and Euro crises, concerns have grown also in the Netherlands over issues such as globalisation, inequality, immigration, and further European integration. Like in other European countries (e.g. France, Germany, Austria), populist parties benefit from these concerns and increasingly influence the public debate and political scene. In the Netherlands, these parties are positioned both at the right and the left extremes of the political spectrum and the traditionally large centre-stage parties (social and Christian democrats) have lost considerable support from the electorate to these parties (which gathered almost a third of the votes in the last parliamentary elections). Dutch populist parties tend to spread moderate to strong anti-European views (a 2016 Dutch referendum on the EU association Treaty on trade and security with Ukraine also resulted in another “no”) and fuel anti-globalisation critique. Sometimes through connections with student activist groups, this extends occasionally to the anti-internationalisation debates concerning higher education, a phenomenon which is observed in a wider range of European countries.⁶⁸

To many, the election of Donald Trump as the new president of the United States in 2016 was the result of a popular response to similar symptoms, i.e. concerns over globalisation, immigration, growing inequality, loss of jobs, etc. One interviewee noted that Canadian universities have benefited from this as an attractive alternative for work or study in the US.

For the Netherlands, which has developed a strong trans-Atlantic orientation since WWII and indeed was one of the main driving forces to make the UK join the EC in 1973 (confirmed in UK referendum in 1975), both events combined are having a very serious impact at national level and in all relevant sectors. This certainly includes

⁶⁸ Wende, M.C. van der (2017). Internationalisation futures in light of anti-globalisation sentiments. In: *A mosaic of cultures*. EAIE Conference Conversation Starter. EAIE. Pp 29-37.

<http://www.eaie.org/eaie-resources/library/publication/Conference-Conversation-Starter/conference-conversation-starter-2017>

Wende, M.C. van der (2017). How do globalisation forces affect higher education systems? University World News, Issue No:465.

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170620114312877>

higher education, for which both the UK and the US figure among the major partners for Dutch research and higher education (as demonstrated with the data in section 1).

In combination with momentary uncertainties about the composition of a new government, the conditions in spring – summer 2017 made it difficult for Dutch universities to define new strategies for internationalisation in general and as a response to Brexit in particular. A new government was eventually installed on 26 October, including four parties (VVD, CDA, D66, CU), with a range of moderately different views on Europe (none of them anti-EU), with the Minister of Education representing the most pro-European party (D66). The new government's initial declaration addressed Brexit, stating it will fight for the Dutch fishing industry in the negotiations, maintain solidarity with the EU in the talks with the UK, and legislate to allow its citizens living in Britain the chance to have dual citizenship (see 9.7). Higher education, like many other sectors that may have lobbied the government (e.g. banking and financial services, aviation, transportation, multinationals), was not mentioned in particular at that stage.

9.6. Future perspectives

For such an Anglo-Saxon-oriented country like the Netherlands, Brexit is perceived as a real threat. Having the UK in the EU was considered the best guarantee against the risks of a dominant German-French axis as perceived by all smaller countries, and of becoming economically a province of Germany for the Netherlands in particular.

No country is more unhappy with Brexit than the Netherlands. We lose at Brussels meeting tables another major liberal mind, a major counterbalance against the legalist Germans and étatist French.⁶⁹

This might also be the perspective that seems to inspire some interviewees' comments on questions regarding the possible impact of Brexit on competition in the EU. They fear that it will decrease as the UK is seen as the strongest driver of competitive research funding (with often the Dutch on their side). Some expect that Germany will take a more leading role and regain a position in the EU's higher education and research policies, but fear it would be too weak without the UK to compensate for "*the draw for less competition but more cooperation from the south/east*". Also, others indicate that they expect that when the relative roles of Germany and France become stronger, a North-South divide over competition versus cooperation may indeed rise. Some expect none or a neutral effect: the EU will simply continue to build competitiveness.

With respect to the attractiveness of EU research, all see this as being generally weakened by Brexit from a global perspective and are thus hoping for a Switzerland

⁶⁹ *Aan dood gewicht heeft niemand iets*. Caroline de Gruyter, NRC, 22 September 2017

or Norway type of post-Brexit arrangement for the UK in order to retain the networking for research. But this would imply some continuation of freedom of movement of individuals, one of the key issues at stake in the negotiations.

The continued uncertainty around Brexit means that these statements all remain speculative for at least some time. Thus, it is difficult to predict the changes in the EU landscape – in terms of partnerships and mobility, for instance. What they make clear, however, is the extent to which the Anglo-Saxon orientation of the Dutch is at stake and how deeply it is ingrained into its political, economic, cultural and indeed academic routines, including a broad-spread and strong proficiency in the English language.

Nevertheless, the quantitative data presented in section 9.1 revealed that within the European context, Germany is the more important partner for cooperation in higher education and research for the Netherlands (as well as for the UK). Germany is also the most important trade partner for the Netherlands within the EU (for both import and export, the UK is in position three). Given the sheer size of the relations with the UK it will take time to resettle under new conditions. Brexit may imply a pivot to the continent for the Netherlands, and in particular a reorientation towards Germany, a country with which it shares important parts of its history (including the darkest periods, which eventually led to the establishment of European cooperation and integration) and the deeper academic traditions derived from the Humboldtian origins of the model of the comprehensive European university. Current political relations with Germany are strong and cultural ties, for instance in literature, theatre and visual media, have grown over the last decades. But the learning and mastering of German as a second language was minimised in competition with the more and more common use of English as the lingua franca (also in conversation with Germans).

9.7. Academic labour/mobility – staff perspectives

As said, uncertainty is a widely shared feeling, but it seemed not to have affected employment relationships in the Netherlands at that point. Interviewees indicated that any consequences of Brexit on the position of UK passport-holders employed in Dutch higher education had not been communicated to them yet by the institutions as their employers. Temporary contracts that expired were renewed as under existing conditions.

UK staff may have concerns over residency, but steps to secure residency would be very different in individual cases, ranging from feeling secure because of the Dutch nationality of the spouse, to the sudden decision (after living for decades in the Netherlands) to apply for Dutch citizenship “*because I lost trust in British Government*”.

Interviewees representing Dutch universities as employers were neutral or not yet clear about whether Brexit would lead to a loss or a gain in UK staff. As indicated in

section 9.4, formal or public recruitment was not evident, but advantages may be explored more informally.

The situation that the roughly 100,000 Dutch nationals living in the UK would face after Brexit was very uncertain, since the UK and EU were yet to reconcile their differences on the citizens' rights issue and Dutch nationals who take British citizenship to avoid having to leave the UK after Brexit would have been stripped of their Netherlands passports due to limits on dual nationality.

However, in October 2017, the new Dutch government announced that:

The cabinet will prepare proposals for the modernisation of nationality law. It concerns an extension of the possibility of possession of multiple nationalities for prospective first generation emigrants and immigrants.⁷⁰

9.8. Transversal questions

Interviews indicated that in the spring of 2017, lobbying and advocacy was still in a very early stage and not very public. Only very few interviewees were aware or involved at that point. More generally, they thought that this should be undertaken at national level and through European university networks such as LERU or EUA.

As a start for establishing their joint position, a delegation of Universities UK was invited to visit the VSNU on 22 September. At the occasion of this visit a joint declaration on the need for continued collaboration post-Brexit was agreed.⁷¹ The text of this declaration does not simply seek to maintain the status quo, but stresses that:

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.

This declaration underlines that the situation not only requires new regulations, but also criticises (albeit mildly) a situation in which the system of higher education and research is put at risk.

Interviewees generally expressed a low level of confidence in the negotiations, which had hardly started to take off in the spring of 2017. They expected that R&D would probably be taken into account – most likely at a very late stage, and that higher education and student mobility would be topics lower on the list, with the risk of falling off completely in case of a hard Brexit.

⁷⁰ The Guardian (10 October 2017). *Brexit: Dutch nationals living in Britain will be allowed dual citizenship*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/10/dutch-nationals-living-britain-allowed-dual-citizenship-brexit>. Referring to: *Vertrouwen in de toekomst*. Regeerakkoord 2017 – 2021 (VVD, CDA, D66 en ChristenUnie), p. 6.

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http://www.vsnu.nl/files/documenten/Nieuwsberichten/Joint_declaration_VSNU_Universities_UK.pdf.

And indeed the European Council Summit concluded on 20 October 2017 that not enough progress had been made to start the second phase of Brexit negotiations – a second phase that should also entail cooperation and mobility in higher education and research. As a response, leaders of 25 European higher education bodies signed a statement later that month calling on governments across Europe to speed up Brexit negotiations.⁷² This may be taken as a lack of confidence, as it states that “Universities must know which, if any, measures they need to undertake in the future”.

The city of Amsterdam has been particularly active in lobbying in the context of Brexit, for instance to attract the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to transfer from London to Amsterdam and for financial and other service industries as well. The Amsterdam metropolitan region has some 16,000 economically active British nationals of whom many work in the higher education sector. The Amsterdam Centre for European Law and Governance (University of Amsterdam) argued in a statement to the City Council, that in case of a hard Brexit, the Amsterdam higher education sector should lobby the Dutch government to arrange for a bilateral agreement so as to avoid British students having to pay the much higher non-EU international fees to study at Dutch universities.⁷³ This may seem an attractive condition for expat settlement in the capital city, but would seem a strange proposition in the light of the already much higher fees that Dutch students pay in the UK and that may rise even more after Brexit.

9.9. Questions that emerged / country-specific questions or areas of interest

The data presented in section 9.1 demonstrate the popularity of the UK as a study destination for Dutch students. This concerns mostly the graduate phase, i.e. master programmes. Dutch students already face high tuition fees in England, which some expect to rise even more as a result of Brexit in which case Dutch students would have to pay the much higher (non-EU) international fees. If this was combined with strict visa regulations, interest in study in the UK may decline.

Various Dutch institutions, aware of these risks, chose to advise their students to consider alternative destinations after their bachelor, such as on the European continent, where high quality tuition is combined with low or no fees like in Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, Sweden, and some top institutions in Germany and France. Or to consider opportunities in South-East Asia with top institutions in, among others, Singapore and emerging notably in China.

When focusing on future participation in the European programmes, some disciplines are more affected and at risk than others, as was set out in section 9.2. These risks may be addressed in further and more focused negotiations, including

⁷² Statement of 25 October 2017. Signatories include a.o.: UUK, VSNU, HRK, CPU and EUA.

⁷³ <http://www.scienceguide.nl/201707/amsterdam-wil-niet-volle-pond-voor-britse-studenten.aspx>

tailored solutions so as to minimise these. However, the disciplines less dependent on the EU programmes may be even more at risk for their cooperation, as they depend to a large extent on overarching generic conditions for cooperation, a favourable political climate, and the free movement of persons. This would seem less likely in view of the position of the UK government so far.

The consequences of Brexit in terms of a pivot to continental Europe and more towards Germany in particular were discussed in section 9.6. As seen from a broader global perspective, it seems that recent geopolitical events such as Brexit and the US turning its back on multilateral trade and cooperation create waves of uncertainty in higher education, in the Netherlands, in Europe and beyond, regarding international cooperation, the free movement of students, academics, scientific knowledge, and ideas.

Meanwhile China stands to gain as its universities advance in global visibility. The growing uncertainties in the West may make it only more successful in its aim to attract talent (back) and to enhance its impact on the global higher education landscape. Its New Silk Road (or One Belt One Road) project could potentially span and integrate major parts of the world across the Euro-Asian continents. But likely on new and different conditions, also for higher education.

From its historical connections to the ancient Silk Roads and well into the seventeenth century, when the Dutch took the lead in trade between Europe and Asia, the Netherlands has benefitted from China in trade and cultural-intellectual exchange. The New Silk Road will also carry more than consumer goods alone. As in previous periods, people, ideas, and knowledge will travel along with mutual influence. The Dutch trading mentality will surely be open to new opportunities. In academic circles ideas about China as a follower will gradually shift, as the size of China's higher education and R&D system and the speed at which it develops both to global standards will affect that of its regional partners as well as that of its global competitors.⁷⁴

Cooperation in higher education and R&D are major components of the new relations between Europe and China, the EU and ASEAN, and will affect the global higher education landscape. Yet questions remain about how this can be brought in line with the role of universities towards an open society as viewed in the West. The Netherlands can play an active role in exploring and building understanding of these new co-operations and horizons.

⁷⁴ Wende, M.C. van der & J. Zhu (2016). *China a Follower or Leader in Global Higher Education?* Research and Occasional Papers Series CSHE 3.16. University of California Berkeley: Centre for Studies in Higher Education. <https://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/china-follower-or-leader-global-higher-education>