



HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE HEART OF GROWTH

**Conference
Report
2012**

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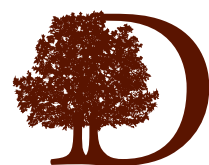
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INTRODUCTION

The eleventh annual Apeldoorn: British-Dutch Dialogue Conference was held at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester (UK) from Sunday 11 to Tuesday 13 March 2012. The theme of the 2012 conference was Higher Education at the Heart of Growth.

One hundred delegates came together for three days to share ideas on how higher education institutions in the UK and the Netherlands could work better with business, government and wider society to enable both countries to remain competitive, innovative and strategically agile during this period of immense economic uncertainty in Europe. The conference programme included plenary sessions with expert speakers (see page no 32 for a complete list), thematic group discussions, and a wide variety of opportunities for networking, including a fun experiment in speed-networking!

Delegates were also invited to participate in site visits to relevant projects in and around Manchester, which included the University of Salford's new campus based at MediaCityUK; the Centre for Enterprise at Manchester Metropolitan University; the Manchester Corridor Project, a unique partnership between Manchester City Council, Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan Universities, Manchester NHS Foundation Trust, Manchester Science Park and local businesses and cultural organisations; and the University of Manchester's International Office and Manchester Business School.

Why Manchester? There is surely no better city in the UK for a conference on the theme of higher education, given it is home to not one but several world-renowned universities and to the largest student community in the UK, of which a large proportion are made up of international students keen to discover what British higher education has to offer. We were also delighted to be able to host our conference at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry with its focus on innovation and knowledge exchange, and our two official dinners at the stunning neo-Gothic Manchester Town Hall and the ultra-modern MediaCityUK buildings in Salford.

This report aims to sketch the main strands of discussions during the conference and to summarise the conclusions of the four sub-themes: Education and Employability, Enterprise and Exploration, Engaging with the Regional Economy and The EU... and Elsewhere. It cannot hope to capture verbatim all of the exchanges which took place over the three days over the conference, but we hope it will serve as a catalyst to all those who took part to continue building on the friendships and partnerships which came about as a result of the 2012 Apeldoorn: British-Dutch Dialogue conference.

ABOUT APELDOORN

In 1999, Prime Ministers Wim Kok and Tony Blair decided to launch an annual bilateral conference series as part of the UK-Netherlands Framework For The Future. Their vision was to bring together a group of leading and promising thinkers from both countries on a regular basis to come up with creative solutions for issues of shared concern. The Apeldoorn: British-Dutch Dialogue Conference Series takes its name from the Dutch city of Apeldoorn, where the first ever conference took place in 2000.

Apeldoorn Conferences have become a forum where the most influential commentators, policymakers, politicians, business leaders, academics and civil society representatives from both sides of the North Sea come together to pool ideas, expertise and best practice, and create lasting relationships, alliances and networks.

Conferences take place on an annual basis, alternating between the UK and the Netherlands; they tackle a different contemporary theme each year. Attendance is strictly by invitation only.

The Conference Series is jointly organised by the British Council Netherlands, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is generously supported by our sponsors Abellio, AkzoNobel, BP, DoubleTree by Hilton Amsterdam Centraal Station, ING, Marsh Nederland, Royal Bank of Scotland, Royal Dutch Shell, Unilever and Urenco (UK) Ltd.



HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE HEART OF GROWTH

One conference,
Two education systems,
Four sub-themes



REPORT WRITER
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Paul Arkwright



Pim Waldeck



Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas

What skills will future graduates of European universities need to be employable in a demanding, increasingly globalised job market? How can we develop a culture in our universities in which enterprise, innovation, learning and research combine to create much-needed growth?

Are we making the most of the “anchor” role that higher education institutions can play within their regional economies? Will we be able to keep up with the rapid technological advances which will profoundly transform our working lives over the next few decades?

Should our higher education institutions seek to diversify and specialise, or cluster together and collaborate? To what extent should national governments seek to steer universities and their interaction with employers and society? How should they allocate resources at a time of dramatic public sector spending cuts? And how far can universities have an impact as a moral force for social good?

It is clear that these, and many of the other important questions raised during the 2012 Apeldoorn conference, have an increasingly global backdrop, with political and economic developments across the world exerting a profound impact on national governments and their strategies for growth. Universities, private sector actors and public institutions are currently exploring how best to work together in order to support economic recovery.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the theme of this year’s conference struck a timely chord with speakers and delegates. The lively exchange of views that took place during the conference, despite clear structural differences between the higher education landscape in the UK and the Netherlands, delivered a number of valuable observations which will feed into the national debates in both countries on the future of higher education and the contribution it can make to kick-starting economic growth.

GLOBALLY ENGAGED, BUT NATIONALLY EMBEDDED?

Professor Rod Coombs, Deputy President and Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Manchester, set the conference off in a global direction by arguing that many of the established mechanisms that link universities to growth have become internationalised in recent years.



As **Pauline van der Meer Mohr**, President of the Executive Board of Erasmus University Rotterdam, put it, European universities are no longer competing with each other, but rather from new institutions from outside the EU altogether. Independent policy advisor Simon Anholt agreed that global challenges – whether economic or otherwise – were now borderless, calling for a global approach to finding solutions for global problems.

This development has created a policy trap, with governments continuing to use national mechanisms to shape a sector which increasingly responds to global, not local drivers. As national budgets for higher education shrink, it is likely that the dominance of these global drivers over national decision-making in higher education policy will only increase.

Sybrand van Haersma Buma, Chairman of the Dutch Christian Democrat Party, warned that it was important to get the balance right between international engagement and understanding of the local and national context. With this in mind, universities will need to continue to critically assess the most appropriate platform for different activities: what should be done on a local, regional, national, EU or international level?



This will mean institutions understanding and acting within different policy and funding structures, seeking partnership opportunities both at home and abroad, and fully realising the potential of their global reach.

But what about “brain drain” as European students elect to study or carry out their research outside of the EU? Minister for Universities and Science **David Willetts** did not consider it problematic that increasing numbers of British students were leaving the UK to study at overseas institutions; on the contrary, it was good for those students and good for Britain, and international exchanges should be welcomed and supported.

EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE?



Rt Hon David Willetts MP



Bernard Wientjes



Babs van den Bergh

There is no doubt that European economies will need increasing numbers of highly-skilled workers in growth sectors such as technology and science order to compete with the emerging economies. **Minister Willetts** underlined the importance of ensuring graduates gained practical business skills alongside academic qualifications, and **Bernard Wientjes**, President of the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers argued that it was essential to develop a spirit of entrepreneurship among the workforce of tomorrow.

Babs van den Bergh, Director of Science and Research Policy at the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, agreed that higher education policy in Europe was not yet sufficiently “future-oriented”, but pointed out that the Netherlands ranked 5th in the world for entrepreneurship, just behind the USA and highest-placed of all the EU member states.



CREATING ECONOMIC VALUE THROUGH INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Universities drive new growth areas within the economy. As part of a global knowledge network, universities generate, translate and diffuse research-led innovation. By exchanging knowledge with business and enterprise, universities can also support its adoption and commercial exploitation. Nor should we forget the role of staff, students and graduates as transfer agents of knowledge. This can be one of the greatest transmission vectors a university has.

Unlocking knowledge can be a powerful driver for growth, but institutions need to think creatively about how they do this. This means more than just technology and spin-outs. Different approaches are likely to be needed for different disciplines.

Partnership with business and industry is critical. By building up these relationships, universities can further their reach and enhance their role as knowledge hubs – applying academic knowledge to create innovation and economic impact, but also drawing knowledge in from external sources.

A number of speakers identified technology as the next growth sector, rather than services, as initially predicted. **Will Hutton**, Chair of the Big Innovation Centre and Principal of Hertford College, Oxford, described how science and technology have transformed the world over the past 250 years.

He was optimistic that many of the “General Purpose Technologies” to be developed in the 21st century (which in the past had included the printing press and the railroad), which he described as the “cornerstones of growth” would come out of the West.



Will Hutton



DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENTIATION OR CLUSTERING AND COLLABORATION?

Dr Alexander Rinnooy Kan, Chairman of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands, introduced the theme of diversity at the outset of the conference, comparing a clearly differentiated UK system with a relatively “flat” Dutch system – although the Dutch were “heading in the UK’s direction and ready to learn”. The contrast between the two systems, which he characterised as “interestingly different”, provided a useful angle from which to consider a variety of issues, such as how to support students and employers in navigating a diverse system; how national governments should respond to the fact that different institutions will react to different policy drivers in different ways; and how universities should adapt their strategies in order to develop a distinct identity, role and presence within a diverse sector.

Maximising the potential of greater differentiation, could lead to institutions building their strategies around their strengths, ensuring they will not all be competing for the same opportunities; students with access to good information and guidance on finding the course that best fits their needs and aspirations able to clearly identify where they should study; and institutions that are comfortable with their differences and that understand the strengths of others learning to collaborate to fill gaps, creating stronger collective outputs.



Dr Alexander Rinnooy Kan

Minister Willetts praised current international research collaboration, which had led for example in Manchester to the discovery of the super-strong material graphene by the British-Dutch and British-Russian scientists André Geim and Konstantin Novoselov.

He wondered to what extent the UK should look to examples of successful “clusters” abroad, for example, the “strategic alliance” of the Dutch universities of Rotterdam, Delft and Leiden. **Pauline van der Meer Mohr** was clear that this was not a merger – it was important for universities to retain their local identities.

SPECIALISATION AND “TOP SECTORS”

The Dutch government's current economic strategy focuses on 10 “top sectors” which it is hoped will stimulate growth; these include water, energy, chemicals and agrifood.

Keen to encourage cooperation between universities and business, the government has ringfenced 50% of all research funding to these top sectors and introduced “performance agreements” for higher education institutions, aiming to improve course quality and research outputs, and better match students to study programmes.

Babs van den Bergh explained that each sector had also developed its own “human capital agenda” to identify what each sector needed in terms of skills and education. **Pauline van der Meer Mohr** feared that students might be discouraged from opting for courses without an immediate economic benefit. Non-“top” sectors, such as the humanities, could suffer dramatically from funding cuts.



AUTONOMY OR INTERVENTION?

Minister Willetts wholeheartedly supported the autonomy of universities but wondered how best to respect institutions' independence while also expecting them to make a measurable contribution to economic growth. **Pauline van der Meer Mohr** felt that the inconsistency of consecutive governments' different approaches to higher education had meant lack of stability in higher education policy in the Netherlands.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: “INNOVATIVE ECOSYSTEMS”?

Universities across Europe are being strongly encouraged by national government to align their offer with labour market needs, for instance by developing joint strategies and research projects with private sector partners.

Babs van den Bergh explained that the Dutch government hoped that business would support these initiatives by providing scholarships, internships and assignments for promising students.

Businesses in the Netherlands are also being encouraged to focus on the “top sectors” via a series of tax breaks, but **Pauline van der Meer Mohr** was not convinced that this approach would be enough to convince businesses to alter their strategies.

Will Hutton compared traditional industrial policy with an “ecosystem” policy whereby countries would build up a network of support systems designed to foster innovation and manage risk. Companies needed support from the public sector to mitigate risk.



GOVERNMENT IMPACT AND SOCIETAL VALUE

The above themes position the university very much at the centre of the action, responsible for adapting to change and opportunities. Indeed, the importance of autonomy was regularly referred to by both UK and Dutch delegates. However, another significant recurring theme was the impact of government policy and funding mechanisms, currently undergoing significant change in both countries. Within this context, it is vital to assert and protect the societal value of universities, and their role as a “public good”. This is central to securing continued public support for higher education.

Neither government has new money to invest, which means that changes in direction will have a disparate impact across the two sectors. In the Netherlands, this has meant refocusing research funding to concentrate on the country’s top sectors. In the UK, it has meant redirecting funding through the students and aiming to increase both numbers and types of HE providers, with no additional investment. In the Netherlands, it was felt that decreasing government support in some areas might force higher education institutions to consider new approaches and revenue streams - perhaps learning from the more entrepreneurial approach adopted in some UK universities.

This short piece can only give a flavour of the many and varied discussions that took place during Apeldoorn 2012. As with most academic endeavours, the issues explored may well have raised more questions than were resolved during the three days of the conference. However, one can hope that the exchanges and connections which began in Manchester will continue into the future, identifying new approaches and solutions and engaging and sharing perspectives from the UK and the Netherlands around these critical issues.



Workshop #1

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

Employability has become a growing focus within higher education policy and delivery over recent years, particularly in countries that have seen a boom in the number of graduates and a fiercer job market. It is a key factor for students when selecting a course and an institution. But it is also important to consider the skills that are in demand in our knowledge and innovation economies, now and in the near future. Balancing the two will be a critical test for higher education institutions and governments in both the UK and the Netherlands, if they are to remain leading world economies.

There are already many examples of employability practice to draw upon. This workshop, chaired by Dr David Docherty, Chief Executive of the Council for Industry and Higher Education heard from Yvonne Van Rooy, President of the Executive Board, Utrecht University and Libby Hackett, Director, University Alliance.

Both speakers highlighted the importance of recognising different backgrounds, expectations and drivers for students when selecting a university. Van Rooy identified innovative practices within both business and universities towards meeting the needs of students as well as those of employers, for example, the Kennis voor Kids (Knowledge for Kids) initiative, through which BP Nederland is intervening as early as primary education level.

The site visit to MediaCityUK at the University of Salford provided practical examples of curriculum innovation in response to employers' needs, such as the use of an employer panel to inform and help develop the university's offering.

Libby Hackett outlined key findings from University Alliance's latest report, "The way we'll work: Labour market trends and preparing for the hourglass".

Evidence on the future shape of the labour market highlighted some important considerations for employability and education, for example:

- **Nearly half of all jobs in the UK are in managerial, professional or associate professional and technical occupations.**
- These occupations accounted for three quarters of employment growth between 2000 and 2010
- **Technology is a major driver of this change**, supporting workers performing analytical and abstract tasks
- **Middle wage-occupations have seen the largest decline in employment share.**



Libby Hackett

Insights such as these, as well as the changing shape of graduate careers, mean that the proportion of a country's working population at graduate-level, trained to form a responsive and adaptive workforce, will influence its productivity, pattern of economic growth and ability to meet the needs of business, individuals and the wider society.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Responding to the diverse career expectations of students and graduates

We can use market data to identify different groups of students and their expectations, for example i-graduate research has identified a number of ‘student tribes’: those who are focussed on a particular career path, those who want to connect with their academic topic, and others who want to change the world. It is important to acknowledge differences in student groups and ensure systems are able to respond.

Differentiation of universities

Without more accessible and detailed information, students and employers can resort to judgements about institutions based on perhaps misguided perceptions of reputation and prestige. Better information about different institutions and their offer is needed in order to help students and employers identify where they should study and, later, aspire to work. From a social mobility perspective, it is also important to consider the impact of different levels of social capital on access to information about higher education. In the Netherlands, data on this is not (yet) reliable. Therefore, some employers still look at secondary-school achievement when recruiting graduates, despite research showing there is no direct relation between performance at this stage and those at the end of a higher education. In the UK, a top priority for Higher Education Minister David Willetts has been developing a “Key Information Set” about students’ backgrounds. However, raw information alone is not enough. Advice and clear explanation is critical for proper interpretation. Employers, graduates and students must be provided with better advice and clearer information institutions in order to better understand the higher education landscape.



Yvonne van Rooy



The wider university experience

This is where students can develop many capabilities beyond the academic content of their course that will improve their future employment prospects. This total package can make the difference between finding a job and making a career. Here again, social capital plays a role in terms of students understanding the impact of this element. Institutions must provide more clarity to students about the importance of wider university experience. Continuing communication and reinforcement is essential - beyond the first and last weeks. Alumni can potentially play a supporting role in making and highlighting the link between study and work.

Longer-term careers and continuous education

The focus on initial employment should not obscure the importance of longer-term graduate careers. It can often take longer than students realise for the benefits of their degree to really kick in. Universities should make clearer the difference between a job and a career and help students and graduates with strategies to manage this, for example through mentoring schemes and lifelong learning programmes for career development.





Workshop #2

ENTERPRISE AND EXPLORATION

University-business collaboration across a variety of activities has increased exponentially over recent years; there are numerous examples of successes in this area from both the UK and the Netherlands. Following the economic downturn, this issue has inevitably received increased focus from national governments as they seek to help their economies to grow out of the recession.

Knowledge exchange between higher education institutions and partners across society has great potential to generate new solutions to problems, create innovative programmes for our students and support the growth of new innovation-led business. These relationships are inevitably complex and there are many different approaches to achieving these goals.

This workshop heard perspectives from universities in both the UK and the Netherlands thanks to speakers **Professor Wendy Purcell**, Vice Chancellor, University of Plymouth and **Professor Dr Jan Cobbenhagen**, School of Business and Economics, Maastricht University, as well as perspectives from business and industry through participants around the table. **Paul Milliken**, Vice President Human Resources UK, Ireland and Nordics, Shell, and **Wim Mijs**, Managing Director of the Dutch Banking Federation, shared the chair.

Wendy Purcell described the approach at Plymouth University, which had placed enterprise at the centre of all its activities – meaning that engagement, exchange and enabling has become a constant focus.

- **Engagement:** HE, business and industry need to understand each other's language in order to create dialogue and collaboration. Like with any new language to learn, it's important to listen, test understanding, clarity, and create communication and shared priorities. For example, Plymouth has been actively focussed on visibility, creating Enterprise Solutions as a gateway to direct and respond to all business enquiries - 5,000 businesses are now using this service.



Professor Wendy Purcell



Paul Milliken

- **Exchange:** creating ways in which knowledge can flow between universities and other organisations via partnerships. Staff and students are knowledge transfer agents; for example, the University has placed a strong emphasis on building links with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through its students and graduates to ensure that talent is fully absorbed.



Prof Dr Jan Cobbenhagen

Jan Cobbenhagen described a fully engaged approach to partnership at Maastricht University, labelling knowledge exchange as a “full contact sport”.

He highlighted the importance of creating an appropriate entrepreneurial climate, focussed on opportunities, accepting risks, uncertainties and inconsistencies as inevitable, providing clear incentives for inventors and research groups in order to join scientific background with business experience.

For example, the Maastricht Centre for Entrepreneurship has specifically focussed on this issue using research as a catalyst to inspire, educate, create and grow business.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultivating an entrepreneurial culture can create multiple new opportunities for universities to develop partnerships across the economy and society.

For example, at University College London there has been a massive promotion of entrepreneurial spirit. The catalyst for this was the idea that the university had to more actively engage and demonstrate its impact. There will be different models to suit different higher education institutions. At Aberystwyth University, the realisation that a strategy in this area doesn't have to be about technology and spin-outs has been critical. If we genuinely want to create knowledge exchange, universities need to think about what they can learn from business. For example, Unilever has been working with universities to get more students into their laboratories working on problems that the company is seeking to resolve.

Being entrepreneurial and developing new approaches and partnerships is even more critical in times of economic cutbacks; it was noted that Dutch universities may have had fewer incentives for this in the past due to different funding mechanisms.

Finding a common language and common interests around which to engage

It is vital to generate dialogue. Listening is important in order to identify shared priorities. We need to be creative about how we connect, e.g. professionalising stakeholder relation management and actively using scientific and non-scientific ambassadors to promote the university as an open space for creativity.

This "hinge" role is important in a number of areas, to make links within the regional economy, to tie in with the alumni network and to support communication between the higher education and a variety of partners.



Actively engaging, exploring and explaining the role of universities in society

We need to think about how we characterise the university, realising how much it needs to explain in changing society as a place of learning and knowledge. Universities have many routes for engagement: providing skills and knowledge for local businesses, as large employers in their regions, building a relationship with schools and contributing to social / cultural life.

Engagement is essential, but it will only work if university actively explores and explains its role.



Workshop #3

ENGAGING WITH THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Universities are a vital element of the regional economy they inhabit. As anchor institutions, embedded in their cities and regions, they drive economic growth as a major local employer, act as a hub for inward investment and engage with local communities and businesses. They also play a critical role in supporting social mobility by widening participation, extending lifelong learning opportunities to residents, creating knowledge-based jobs in the local economy and inspiring their graduates to settle and work in the region after completion of their studies.

With regional funding undergoing change in both the UK and the Netherlands, universities can undoubtedly play a central role in rethinking regional strategies. As anchor institutions, many may actively engage in order to fill the void left as regional structures disappear.

This workshop, which was chaired by **Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas DBE**, Chair, London and Partners, heard from speakers **Dr Lodewijk Asscher**, Deputy Mayor and Alderman for Finance, Economic Affairs, Youth Affairs and Education, Amsterdam City Council and **Dr Neil Lee**, Head of Cities Programme, The Work Foundation.

The perspectives provided by the two speakers enabled the group to compare and contrast the structures, opportunities and challenges in the UK and the Netherlands. The group outlined different elements of a university's engagement within the region: providing skills and knowledge for business and students; developing a long-term relationship with and commitment to the area; providing employment for residents; building relationships with schools and contributing to local social and cultural life.

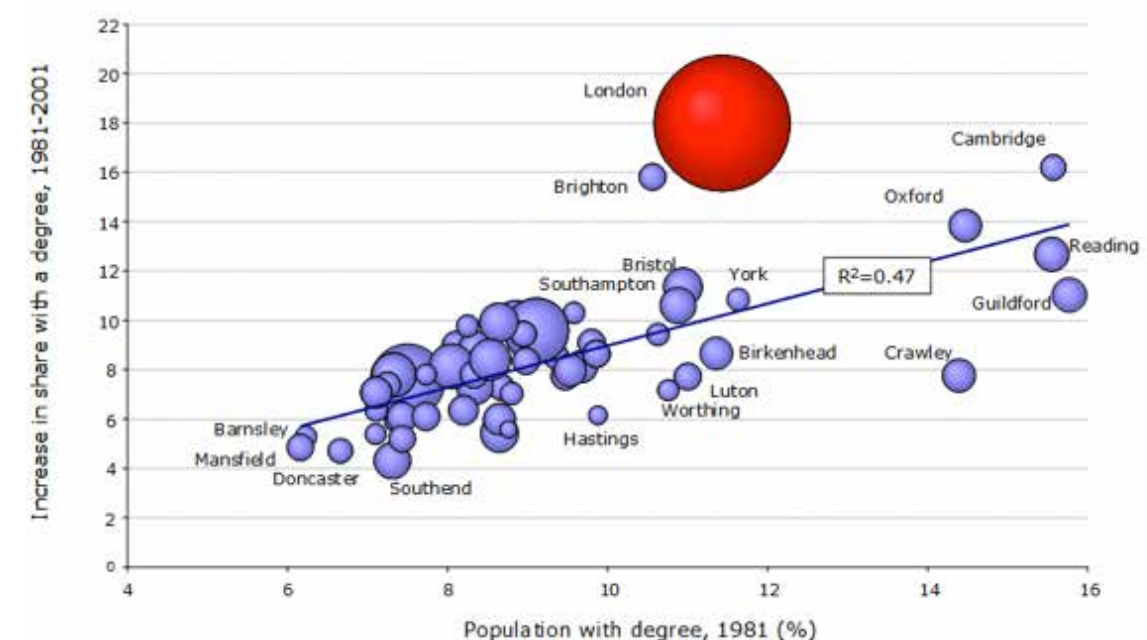
There are particular challenges at a regional level, but universities are in a strong position to be part of the solution. Dr Lee demonstrated for example an uneven "geography of skills" across the UK, based on evidence from The Work Foundation's State of the English Cities Database. [See figure below]

Universities are without a doubt integrated within the fabric of society and the economy. The most obvious way in which universities might help with this issue is by producing more graduates, but the challenge is then to retain them in the regions in which they studied – how can these be made more attractive?

The opportunities available within the local economy are critical and, here too, universities can play a role. They might help by promoting opportunities for local employment to graduates such as jobs in knowledge- and innovation-based SMEs, supporting the creation and development of local businesses through enterprise centres and incubators, or by equipping students to become ambassadors for graduate skills so that local companies learn how best to make use of the local talent available.



Dr Neil Lee



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Recognising the value of a diverse higher education system in meeting varied societal and economic needs

The “dual” nature of the Dutch higher education system (academic universities vs. technical/vocational universities of applied sciences or “HBOs”) was seen to have a particular impact here, with HBOs appearing to be much more cemented in their region or city, gearing their offering towards the needs of local industry. It was noted that similar differences could be found across the UK system, with delegates commenting on the differences in approach they had noticed between the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. The recent Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration in the UK identified this diversity as strength of the UK system, and concluded that:

Universities operate in specific domains, meeting the needs of a range of businesses; no one university can operate in all domains. Similarly, the needs of business align with different domains and it is not unusual for a business to collaborate with several universities in meeting those needs. To achieve world leadership in business–university collaboration, all domains must attain excellence.

Policies based on a view of a homogenous higher education sector, in which all universities will respond to drivers and policy interventions in the same way, will miss opportunities. Diversity of offer must be taken into account.



Dr Lodewijk Asscher

Overcoming barriers

There are many often-quoted potential barriers to university-business collaboration, such as time, lack of mutual understanding, leakage due to lack of absorption capacity or lack of appropriate innovation or government eco-systems. Nevertheless, there are many opportunities to making the relationship work, while avoiding largely useless “one size fits all”, off the shelf models.

The group’s concluding message was:

Get on with it!; acknowledge that working together can really work; be clear about and understand specific context of each individual business and university’s needs and offer; never waste a good crisis; and seek opportunities to play a leading role!



Workshop #4

THE EU AND ELSEWHERE

The push for the harmonisation of higher education across the European Higher Education Area has made it easier to build consortia of like-minded higher education institutions, sharing best practice, swapping researchers and pooling resources and equipment. However, while international students continue to flock to the EU for a world-class education, universities in emerging economies such as China and India are fast catching up, producing bright new graduates of their own at a rapid rate. European universities must think strategically about how to adapt to the changing playing field of global higher education, in order to stay ahead of the game.

Given the rapid scale of recent change, it is perhaps unsurprising that discussions during this workshop were wide-ranging, touching on higher education at national, European and international level. It was understood that universities are nationally embedded but internationally engaged, meaning they must deliver strategies that can cross these borders. The workshop was chaired by Lord Andrew Adonis, Member of the House of Lords, on the first day, and Dr Alexander Rinnooy Kan, Chairman of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands, on the second.

Delegates were aided by presentations from Professor Dr Marijk Van Der Wende, Professor in Higher Education, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Dr Jo Beall, Director, Education and Society, British Council. Discussions were further informed by a visit to the University of Manchester's International Office to learn about their successful internationalisation strategy.



Key issues for discussion centred on how European universities could best cooperate in order to avoid duplication and maximise the EU's competitive advantage, despite cuts to national public funding; how to encourage students to gain valuable overseas experience, and how to make the most of opportunities created by the European agenda for higher education.



There was consensus within the group that the higher education sector in Europe is under massive pressure, with universities in danger of losing their competitive edge as emerging powers strategically increase investment in this area in a drive to attract and grow talent.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The “public good” role of Higher Education

Inspired by the theme of the conference and discussions around global competition, delegates were keen to reassert the importance of universities not losing their moral authority and contact with society as a whole. Several questions were raised in light of this issue, e.g. whether the use of English as the language of instruction within international higher education is a good thing (in the Netherlands the impact on the Dutch language should be considered) and balancing these moral obligations against international strategies.

Despite other pressures, it is important not to lose sight of the “public good” role of universities, that is to say, the responsibility for universities to actively reach out across all sections of society.

Competition, diversity and entrepreneurialism

European universities will need to take an increasingly entrepreneurial approach in order to continue to compete globally. The first step is for universities to get out of the habit of looking to government as the sole source of funding; alternatives could be charitable contributions, increased fees for undergraduate, postgraduate, executive and part-time education, or considering international partnerships. This issue was particularly important for Dutch institutions to consider as they adjust to changing public policy that will require them to develop individual strategies within a diversifying system. If universities are to become more entrepreneurial, then it will be increasingly important to have clear separation between public and private funding.

There is more that can be done to develop partnerships between Dutch and UK universities offering education abroad (including in international “branch campuses”), building on existing networks. However, it is important to be realistic about the potential financial and reputational risks of transnational education.

Outward mobility: EU to the world

It is interesting to note that while the number of international students is rising as a whole, fewer students participate in the EU’s exchange programme ERASMUS today than ten years ago. Delegates wondered why this was: was it a question of dwindling financial support, or perhaps pressure for students to finish degrees as quickly as possible? One suggestion was that intra-EU exchanges were perhaps no longer the most useful, given increased patterns of globalisation and pressure for graduates to build their international credentials; students now see their careers in global terms. In the Netherlands, the number of Dutch students travelling abroad for a complete degree has increased, and small numbers of British students are now considering the Netherlands as a potential new destination for their undergraduate studies.

A useful development would be a stronger push for our students to participate in ERASMUS MUNDUS programmes in BRIC countries. Another key focus should be providing opportunities for work experience abroad.

Role of the EU

There is an ever-increasing European role for the higher education sector as the EU grows “from milk union to knowledge union”. In light of global competition, particularly from the US, it was agreed that cooperation at EU level would be the most sensible path to follow. However, we also need to consider the sustainability of European students moving between countries and student finance systems, without money following them across borders.

There are many opportunities created by engagement at EU level, for example through the “Empowering Universities” initiative, but European universities should also consider how they can do more together on a bilateral or cluster basis.

Learning from each other

There are a number of areas where Dutch and UK universities can benefit from each other’s experiences.

UK universities can, for example, learn from the quality assurance of private institutions developed in the Netherlands. Dutch universities can learn from the risk-based approach to quality assurance being developed in the UK and can learn to take a more entrepreneurial approach, especially with scarce resources. Partnership should be focussed on the strengths of each country and individual institutions.

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Design: www.curatedplace.com

