

**UK–Netherlands HE &
Research Partnerships**

**Terms of
Reference: UK–
Netherlands
Higher Education
Partnership
Mapping Research**

July 2026

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Commissioning Bodies	British Council and Nuffic, on behalf of the UK–NL Strategic Advisory Board
Project Type	Research consultancy — partnership landscape mapping
Team Required	Two consultants: one UK HE specialist; one Dutch HE specialist
Budget	€15,000 (inclusive of all fees and expenses)
Indicative Timeline	Commission: July 2026 Delivery: December 2026
Languages	English (primary); Dutch knowledge a strong asset
Enquiries to	culturalengagement@britishcouncil.nl

1. Background and Context

The UK–Netherlands Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) was established in early 2026 by the British Council and Nuffic to strengthen long-term collaboration between the higher education and research sectors of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Its mandate includes providing strategic advice, identifying barriers and enablers to cross-border partnership, and helping shape an environment in which durable, high-quality UK–Dutch cooperation can thrive. The SAB held its inaugural in-person meeting in Amsterdam on 26 March 2026, as part of the UK–Netherlands Higher Education Mission.

A priority identified at the inaugural meeting was the need to produce a rigorous mapping of the partnerships that currently exist between UK and Dutch higher education institutions. Board members noted that while individual institutions hold knowledge of their own bilateral relationships, there is no consolidated, publicly available picture of this landscape — its breadth, depth, or the models through which it operates. This gap limits the Board’s ability to set priorities, identify genuine gaps, or make the case for further investment.

This mapping exercise is the first piece of substantive commissioned work undertaken by the SAB. It will be followed by a second activity: a practical Guide to Effective UK–NL Higher Education Partnership Building. That guide will be a lessons-learned piece drawing on the knowledge and experience of those who have already built strategic partnerships across the two countries, with the aim of making the process easier and more navigable for institutions in the future. Outputs from this mapping commission may inform and feed into that subsequent work.

This Terms of Reference sets out the scope, approach, and requirements for a consultancy commission to carry out the mapping exercise.

2. Objectives

The mapping research has three primary objectives:

1. To identify and describe the main models of partnership that exist between UK and Dutch higher education institutions — including joint research, formal institutional partnerships,

student and staff mobility, strategic alliances and networks, and industry-linked collaboration.

2. To map, to the greatest extent possible, the actual partnerships that currently exist across these categories, providing as comprehensive a picture as the available evidence allows.
3. To identify initial observations of patterns, gaps, and areas of particular strength or opportunity within the current landscape, which the SAB can use to inform its strategic priorities.

The research should produce outputs that are both analytically robust and practically useful — capable of informing the SAB's work and, where appropriate, of being adapted for wider dissemination to sector stakeholders.

3. Scope of Work

3.1 Partnership typology

A central deliverable of this commission is a clear, evidence-based typology of the forms of UK–Dutch HE partnership that exist. Consultants are expected to propose their own typology as part of their methodology, but it is anticipated that this will include the following categories:

- Joint and collaborative research (co-authored outputs, shared infrastructure, joint grant applications including Horizon Europe)
- Formal institutional partnerships (MOUs, strategic alliances, framework agreements)
- Student mobility (joint degrees, Erasmus+ exchanges, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, Turing Scheme, other schemes)
- Staff mobility and academic exchange
- European University Alliances with UK and Dutch co-membership
- University–industry collaboration and innovation partnerships (including links to regional ecosystems such as Brainport Eindhoven)
- Policy and sector-body engagement (UUKi, Universities of the Netherlands, NWO, UKRI, Nuffic)

3.2 Mapping exercise

Drawing on the typology, consultant(s) will undertake systematic research to identify as many specific current UK–Dutch HE partnerships as the available evidence allows. This will require a combination of:

- Desk research drawing on publicly available sources — institutional websites, funding databases, published reports, Horizon Europe participation data, Erasmus+ data, and sector-body publications;
- Targeted engagement with key informants — including SAB members, British Council and Nuffic contacts, and sector representatives — to surface partnerships that are not publicly documented;
- Where appropriate, short survey or interview instruments to reach a wider set of institutions efficiently.

The mapping should cover both research-intensive universities and universities of applied sciences (HBO/hogeschole on the Dutch side) and should reflect the range of institutional types and sizes on both sides. The consultancy team is expected to propose the methodology for this exercise and to be transparent about the limitations of what the evidence base can support.

4. Deliverables

- **Mapping dataset** — a structured, searchable record of identified UK–NL HE partnerships, organised according to the agreed typology and including institutional names, partnership type, duration (where known), thematic focus, and data source. The dataset should be delivered in a format that the British Council and Nuffic can maintain and update after the commission ends.
- **Summary report** — presenting the typology, key mapping findings, methodology, data sources, and initial observations on patterns and gaps. The report should be clearly written and accessible, with data visualisations where these aid understanding.
- **Summary presentation** — suitable for presentation to the SAB board meeting.

All deliverables should be produced in English.

5. Consultancy Team Requirements

5.1 Composition

This commission may be delivered by a team of two consultants with complementary expertise, or by a single consultant with adequate experience, knowledge, and networks spanning both sectors. The required expertise is:

- Excellent knowledge of the UK higher education sector — its institutional landscape, funding systems, policy environment, and international engagement;
- Equivalent depth of knowledge of the Dutch higher education sector — including both research universities and universities of applied sciences, and familiarity with Nuffic, NWO, and the broader Dutch research policy landscape.

Our preference is for applicants to present a complete, pre-formed team, or for a single applicant to demonstrate credible coverage of both sectors. We recognise that suitably qualified individuals may wish to apply alone without dual-country coverage: in such cases, applicants may indicate their availability and preferred pairing, and we will use our best efforts to connect them with a qualified counterpart from the other country. Any such matching will be agreed with both individuals before a contract is issued.

5.2 Essential criteria

- Demonstrable expertise in the higher education sector of either the UK or the Netherlands (or both);
- Experience of conducting research or mapping exercises in a higher education or research policy context;

- Familiarity with bilateral or international partnership frameworks, including Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, or comparable programmes;
- Strong analytical and written communication skills in English;
- Capacity to deliver within the proposed timeline.

5.3 Desirable criteria

- Prior experience of UK–Netherlands or other bilateral HE partnership research;
- Professional networks within both the UK and Dutch HE sectors;
- Experience of data visualisation relevant to partnership landscapes;
- Dutch language proficiency.

6. Governance and Management

The commission will be jointly managed by the British Council and Nuffic, with day-to-day coordination led by the British Council Netherlands. The commissioning team will provide:

- Access to SAB members and British Council / Nuffic networks as key informants;
- Review and sign-off of the final report;
- Feedback on draft outputs within two weeks of submission;
- An opportunity to present findings to the SAB at its November 2026 meeting.

The consultancy team will be expected to maintain regular communication with the commissioning team throughout the project, including a brief fortnightly check-in during the research phase.

Consultants will be expected to comply fully with all British Council and Nuffic policies and procedures relevant to this commission, including those relating to data management, safeguarding, equality and diversity, and professional conduct. All relevant policies will be shared with the team as part of the contract documentation and will be discussed and confirmed at a kick-off meeting held at the outset of the commission.

7. Indicative Timeline

Milestone	Target Date	Notes
Expressions of interest / proposals due	14 August 2026	
Shortlisting and interviews (if required)	17 August 2026	
Contract award	20 August 2026	
Online kick-off meeting	20 August 2026	
Research and data collection	August-October 2026	

Milestone	Target Date	Notes
Draft summary report	November 2026	
Presentation to SAB	November/December 2026 (date TBC)	Travel expenses to Salford, UK covered by the British Council
Final report and dataset	Mid December 2026	

8. How to Apply

Interested individuals or teams should submit an expression of interest comprising:

- **A short cover letter (maximum one page)** introducing the team and their relevant experience;
- **A methodology proposal briefly** setting out how the team would approach the typology, data collection, mapping, and analysis — including proposed data sources, research instruments, and how they would address the limitations of the evidence base;
- **CVs for each proposed team member** (maximum two pages each).

Individual applicants without a pre-formed team should also indicate in their cover letter their preferred pairing and any relevant contacts in the other country's sector.

Submissions should be sent to culturalengagement@britishcouncil.nl with the subject line: UK–NL HE Mapping Consultancy — Expression of Interest, by 14 August 2026.

Shortlisted applicants may be invited to a brief interview. We welcome applications from independent consultants, academic researchers, and small consultancy firms equally.

9. Ethical and Practical Considerations

The consultancy team will be expected to handle all data in accordance with applicable data protection legislation (UK GDPR / AVG), to obtain appropriate consent for any primary data collection, and to manage conflicts of interest transparently. The British Council and Nuffic will provide standard contractual terms including confidentiality provisions.

The findings of this research are intended to be shared, in whole or in adapted form, with the SAB, with British Council and Nuffic stakeholders, and with the broader UK and Dutch HE sectors and public. Applicants should note this public-benefit intent and the expectation that outputs will be accessible and clearly written.

This Terms of Reference has been prepared by the British Council Netherlands on behalf of the UK–Netherlands Strategic Advisory Board. Enquiries may be directed to culturalengagement@britishcouncil.nl