

To the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science

To the Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation

Your reference	Subject
	Presentation of Review Committee recommendations
Our reference	Date
RC.12.1321/BB	24 September 2012

Dear Mr Zijlstra,  
Dear Mr Verhagen,

On behalf of the Higher Education and Research Review Committee I herewith present the recommendations regarding the proposals for performance agreements which the universities submitted to you in May 2012. The Committee has assessed the proposals in accordance with the assessment framework you have set down (letter to the House of Representatives dated 7 March 2012) and communicated to the universities involved in the outline agreements (December 2011) by letter dated 5 March 2012<sup>1</sup>. The Committee assessed the proposal based on the three criteria laid down in this assessment framework: level of ambition and degree of realism; alignment with desired developments at the system level (development of focus areas and differentiation); feasibility.

For each institution, the Committee has formulated recommendations relating to the following two questions:

- Are the level of ambition, degree of realism and alignment with the desired system developments laid down in the proposal sufficient to warrant conditional funding?
- Given the assessments based on the three criteria pertaining to teaching, research and valorisation, should the institution qualify for additional financial resources from the selective budget?

This letter successively considers:

1. the procedure adopted by the Committee;
2. a provisional outline of the results of the first round of performance agreements;
3. the outcomes of the recommendations and the overall picture of the judgements passed by the Committee;
4. the follow-up to the process in the years ahead;
5. some closing remarks.

## **1. Procedure adopted by the Committee**

The Committee based its assessments on the principle that an individual institution's own perspective of its character and development are essential elements in its profiling. In order to do justice to the diversity of institutional profiles, the Committee first of all assessed the plans of the

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture & Innovation to the green institutions, dated 7 March.

institutions in the light of their previous history and in the specific context of a university of applied sciences or research university. Supplementary to this attention paid to context and history, the Committee reviewed how the ambitions and plans of the institutions correspond to the intentions formulated by comparable institutions. For example, the differences between teacher-training colleges, arts & cultural education programmes, green and multi-sectoral universities of applied sciences were taken into account. With respect to the research universities, for example, a comparison was made between the three technical universities and Wageningen University; the same goes for the institutions set up on a religious or ideological basis.

For each criterion, the Committee considered and assessed several sub-topics such as quality of teaching and study success, programme offerings, differentiation, development of focus areas, research and valorisation. To that end, all the information relevant to a sub-topic (both quantitative and qualitative data) from a proposal was listed, thoroughly examined and discussed in relation to activities, intentions and performance of comparable institutions. On the basis of this tentative assessment, the Committee conducted interviews with the institutions. Based on the interviews, the additional information subsequently forwarded by the institutions and thorough deliberations, the Committee subsequently, and taking everything into consideration, passed a full judgement on each criterion. Thereupon, the Committee checked whether the judgements were consistent across the institutions. Background information was also taken into account in this respect, for example the composition of the student population in the assessment of study success. Finally, the Committee discussed all the responses of the institutions to the draft recommendations. Wherever the Committee was of the opinion that an institution was justified in its correction of the facts, the recommendations were adjusted and subsequently finalised.

The Committee made every effort to avoid imposing an additional bureaucratic burden. Each institution was free to decide on the manner in which it wished to present its proposal for the performance agreement. There was no mandatory format for drawing up the proposal. Each institution could use existing documents or plans at its own discretion. This also expresses what the Committee envisaged with this process: performance agreements must be conducive to focusing, and wherever necessary accelerating and intensifying an institution's chosen strategy and current policy.

## **2. Added value already visible**

Across the board, the Committee is impressed with the quality and thoroughness of the proposals. It appreciates the efforts expended by the institutions and the constructive discussions it had conducted with all the universities in May and June 2012.

In the opinion of the Committee, the added value of the performance agreements is already obvious. The Committee is pleased by the quality and the level of ambition demonstrated in the proposals. Building on recent strategic plans or otherwise, the institutions have expressly considered their profile and related strategic choices. These considerations are reflected in the performance envisaged for 2015 and, in many cases, for the period of time beyond 2015. The Committee observes that many institutions have sharpened up their ambitions in the course of the process. Thus, the performance agreements are more than a consolidation of existing policy.

The Committee is of the opinion that the entire process has also resulted in greater transparency. Together, the proposals present a rather detailed picture of the diversity in Dutch higher education and research, as well as the direction in which these sectors will develop in the near future. This picture does, however, require further analysis; the Committee will return to this matter in its system report.

### *First impression*

Nonetheless, a first impression can be given of the state of affairs in Dutch higher education and research. In this respect, it can be concluded that the basis of Dutch higher education is sound, though several points for improvement can be identified. The quality of the research performed by the universities is good to excellent, but the study success of bachelor's students leaves room for further improvement. Without playing down the issues that emerged with regard to the generic quality of professional higher education, it can be concluded that the universities of applied sciences are also performing well. This picture accords with the reports drawn up by the

Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)<sup>2</sup> and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-Raad)<sup>3</sup>.

In its report, the VSNU paints a picture of the performance achieved in the period from 2000 to 2010 and gives an indication of the developments expected for the next ten years. A substantial improvement in the bachelor's programmes success rates requires an ambitious study-culture that makes demands both on the institutions and on the students. In addition, the VSNU states that further profiling of research universities is essential in order for their research to maintain their current leading position. The VSNU correctly states that the performance agreements are part of a continuous process. In its report, the HBO-Raad stresses that the quality of education is a primary concern of the universities of applied sciences. It consequently concludes that this quality agenda is pivotal in the translation of the outline agreement into the proposals of the individual universities of applied sciences.

However, the object of the performance agreement was not to map the quality of education and research, but rather to challenge the universities to develop a distinct profile and to formulate ambitions with respect to teaching, research and valorisation, wherever possible tying in with desired developments at the system level.

### **3. Teaching**

#### *Quality of teaching and study success*

Improving the quality of teaching and study success constituted an important reason for the performance agreements. To that end, the universities formulated target figures for 2015 with respect to a number of so-called mandatory indicators. Most of the goals are ambitious: success rates to go up across the board, major steps to be taken in enrolment in excellence tracks, in 2015 all full-time bachelor's programmes to involve a minimum of twelve contact hours per week, and substantial efforts to be expended on improving the quality of teachers. Differences can be observed in this respect between academic higher education and professional higher education. The Committee has briefly identified these differences but does not wish to emphasise them. A better idea, according to the Committee, would be to present the outcomes of institutions with comparable profiles. Even within such a group of institutions, however, considerable differences are found.

At the research universities, the bachelor's success rates are, on average, lower than at the universities of applied sciences. In both sectors, however, distinct differences exist. The intended levels of approx. 70 per cent are closely connected. The technical universities constitute an exception; their bachelor's success rates after four years are low and – despite the ambition of significant improvement – in 2015 they will probably still stay relatively low. In professional higher education, the average success rates of the mono-sectoral teacher-training colleges, the arts programmes and the green universities of applied sciences are higher than those of the multi-sectoral universities of applied sciences. A number of universities of applied sciences are faced with decreasing success rates and are focusing on reversing this trend. Many universities of applied sciences find that raising the bar too high with regard to success rates may clash with more stringent quality requirements, especially against the background of hitherto wide diversity in (the quality of) the intake.

At the research universities, average dropout rates are slightly lower than at the universities of applied sciences. However, considerable differences can be observed among the various research universities; the same goes for the broad-based multi-sectoral universities of applied sciences. Across the board, dropout rates are relatively low in the arts programmes, which generally pursue a selective intake policy. At the teacher-training colleges and the green universities of applied sciences, dropout rates are on average relatively high, yet these institutions have generally formulated more ambitious proposals with regard to reducing dropout rates.

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<sup>2</sup> VSNU, *Prestaties in perspectief. Trendrapportage universiteiten 2000-2020* [Performance in perspective, trend reports on research universities 2000-2020], The Hague, May 2012

<sup>3</sup> HBO-Raad. *Voortgangsrapportage Hoofdlijnenakkoord* [Progress report on Outline agreement], memorandum by the HBO-Raad, The Hague, 31 May 2012

Many institutions have commented on the indicator pertaining to "switching". High switching rates can be regarded as the result of a failing information and intake procedure, whereby too many students end up in the wrong place. However, high switching rates can also be interpreted as the result of properly functioning referrals in the first year of study. Furthermore, in mono-sectoral institutions switching is, by definition, not relevant. Among institutions offering a wide selection of programmes, high switching rates tend to occur more frequently than among institutions with a limited number of programmes. The Committee acknowledges these facts and definitely does not regard switching as the main indicator with respect to study success. It is, however, of the opinion that properly functioning choice and selection procedures before enrolment could limit the number of students switching to another programme.

With respect to the quality indicators, many research universities opted for the indicator of "participation in excellence tracks". A number of universities of applied sciences also opt for this indicator, but many universities of applied sciences currently give priority to the generic quality of teaching for all students rather than setting up a high-quality programme for a small group of students. These institutions opt for the indicator of "student satisfaction", which pertains to the satisfaction with the programme in general. Two research universities give precedence to students' assessments over the indicator of "participation in excellence tracks".

With regard to the indicators designated as "measures" (quality of teaching staff, intensity of education and indirect costs), the institutions were allowed a certain degree of freedom to deviate from the standard definition. Many of them took advantage of this latitude. As a result, conducting a comparative analysis at the system level became more difficult, but it did enable the institutions to take their own context into account in their proposals.

All the universities of applied sciences aim to increase the percentage of teachers with a master's degree or PhD among their staff. Many of them comment that it is of paramount importance to have a sufficient number of teachers who are clearly practice-oriented and/or possess practical experience. Among the research universities too, a great deal of attention is focused on the quality of teaching staff. Some research universities, however, introduced the BKO [basic teaching qualification] certification at a later date; as a result, large differences exist in this respect. In addition, a wide diversity can be observed with respect to the procedures for awarding BKO certificates and granting exemptions to incumbent staff. However, all the research universities have formulated an ambition to introduce BKO certification on a large scale.

The ambitions relating to the indicator of "intensity of education" are clear and concurrent: in future, none of the full-time bachelor's programmes will have an average of less than twelve contact hours a week during the first year. As for the indicator of "indirect costs", the bulk of the institutions expressed the intention of reducing or stabilising these costs. Yet the differences in indirect costs are large, even between similar institutions. This warrants an assumption that gains are still to be made here.

Finally, with regard to this initial overview covering the quality of teaching and study success, the Committee wishes to reiterate that this topic has featured justifiably high on the policy agenda for several years. For too long, it has been regarded as normal for students to take more than the official length of a study programme to graduate. At the same time the Committee points out that placing too much emphasis on success rates and efficiency only poses the risk of adverse incentives. It underlines the vital importance of the fact that these performance agreements focus simultaneous attention on study success and quality of teaching. However, the Committee has observed that the quality indicators are even less robust than the indicators pertaining to success rates. In the years ahead, these must be developed further in order to maintain a proper balance in this respect.

The outline agreement concluded with the universities of applied sciences stipulates that part of the selective budget will be available for institutions that expressly distinguish themselves for their "continuous, proven quality of teaching". The Committee set high standards for the assessment of this criterion. In the opinion of the Committee, a university of applied sciences demonstrates a "continuous, proven quality of teaching" if it has achieved very good scores in comparison with the average results achieved in the professional higher education sector with regard to each of the following indicators: dropout rates, switching, bachelor's success rates and quality of teaching /

excellence.<sup>4</sup> Based on their continuous proven quality of teaching, eight universities of applied sciences were awarded the highest score with regard to the criterion of ambition: four arts institutions, three small teacher-training colleges and a broad-based university of applied sciences.

### *Differentiation*

The research universities focus a great deal of attention on excellence. This involves teaching aimed at the best students, who want more and can do more than that which is offered in the regular curriculum. This group comprises approximately the top 20 per cent of the entire student population. Virtually all the research universities offer special tracks for this group of students which enable them to achieve a higher level than the regular curriculum. Excellence is promoted through honours or excellence programmes, either as a special track within a programme or as an extracurricular programme. In addition to the attention paid to excellence, the proposals submitted by the research universities demonstrate a clear trend towards broadening the bachelor's programmes. Virtually all the institutions expend efforts to that end. This allows students more leeway in postponing the selection of a specific discipline, and this is expected to contribute to a reduction of the numbers switching and to an improvement in the efficiency of the study routes, as well as enhancing academic training. To an increasing extent, research universities provide training in the form of university colleges offering small-scale residential programmes with a broad-based curriculum and a selective intake. These colleges are generally characterised by both excellence and broadening.

In the professional higher education sector, too, the Committee notes an increased differentiation of the programmes on offer. Relatively speaking, a great deal of attention has been focused on strengthening the position of professional higher education in the top tier of the education system: many initiatives have been launched in the fields of new professional master's programmes, fast-track VWO [pre-university education] routes, alignment with academic master's programmes and, at a number of institutions, excellence tracks. Virtually all the institutions are expressly introducing practice-oriented research in their programmes. Less explicit attention is paid to students transferring from MBO [senior secondary vocational education] and the expansion of the number of Associate Degree programmes (ADs). Several institutions indicate that the demand from the labour market falls short of expectations and many institutions exercise restraint in developing new AD programmes. On the other hand, the Committee also encountered successful examples. In this respect, the Committee comments that it is advisable for the universities of applied sciences to keep focusing sufficient attention on the diversity of intake in professional higher education.

### *Programme offerings*

The number of initiatives for new programmes at research universities is limited; they primarily involve master's programmes and joint degree programmes. Most of the universities of applied sciences are not seeking to expand their range of bachelor's programmes, but many of them have expressed the intention of offering more professional master's programmes. Only a limited number of universities of applied sciences indicate that they actually intend to terminate some of their programmes. For universities of applied sciences, incidentally, this is more cumbersome than for research universities; the former serve a regional purpose and consequently it is important for them to offer a wide range of programmes. The Committee considers the sector plan in higher agricultural education an interesting approach for achieving alignment and the development of focus areas.

In the professional higher education sector, the restructuring of the range of programmes on offer is accomplished primarily through sector plans. These plans also feature in the academic higher education sector. In addition, many research universities (especially the smaller ones) are either phasing out or amalgamating programmes. Virtually all the research universities are introducing broad-based bachelor's programmes. Although this trend can also be observed at a number of

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<sup>4</sup> With respect to the indicator of "quality of teaching" / "excellence", the Committee considered high student satisfaction, as measured by the NSE [annual national survey among university students], in itself as too narrow a basis, and deemed confirmation by an accreditation assessment necessary. As judgements of "good" / "excellent" at the programme level have not yet been given over the past period of time, in this transitional period leading up to a new accreditation system, the Committee additionally accepts the judgements given on the various standards in an accreditation procedure. A precondition is that the judgements of "good" and "excellent" prevailed across a large number of aspects; the limit was set at 2/3, counted across all the accreditations of existing full-time bachelor's programmes provided by the institution. Thus, the weightings the Committee assigns to the assessment criteria on the basis of its assessment framework differ from those assigned by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) in its assessment of the quality of teaching.

universities of applied sciences, it is less widespread in the professional higher education sector. The Committee expects that the institutions will continue to capitalise on sector plans in the years ahead, including plans that were not yet available when the assessment framework was established. In the academic higher education sector, for example, this is illustrated by the foresight studies pertaining to Education/Educational Sciences, New Biology and Earth Sciences. Examples in the professional higher education sector include the sectoral foresight studies on "Higher Education in Health Care" and "Higher Education in Economics and Management". In addition, the Committee mentions, for example, the recent call of the Education Council and the Council for Culture<sup>5</sup> to the teacher-training colleges to harmonise their curricula pertaining to the knowledge basis for cultural education.

The Committee is aware of the fact that an institution's profile constitutes a criterion in the new policy rule of macro efficiency. In this context, it sets great store by keeping profiling high on the agenda. However, the Committee is of the opinion that the government, in cases where there are weighty arguments in relation to profiling, should consider a tolerant approach to the enforcement of the location principle. In this connection, the Committee refers to the LDE alliance of Leiden University, Delft University of Technology and Erasmus University Rotterdam. The importance of the joint perspective and the potential gains to be made if the alliance is given free rein should carry a lot of weight here. This does not mean, however, that the Committee is arguing for abandoning the principle, because it acknowledges the risks of suppression and unwanted competition.

#### **4. Research and valorisation**

At the research universities, research policy is set in an international context. Although research universities are faced with increasing international competition, they are simultaneously closely committed to their own region, more so than in the past. The proposals contain a great deal of concrete information on this subject. At all the research universities, teaching is strongly linked to research. This is most evident at the graduate schools, at which teaching ties in with the research focus areas.

The research universities focus increasing attention on partnerships with national and international partners. Examples include not only the LDE alliance and the AAA ("Amsterdam Academic Alliance"), but also various bilateral partnerships such as those between Utrecht University and Eindhoven University of Technology. At the international level, the research universities collaborate in various prestigious cross-border networks. In addition, collaborations exist between research universities and universities of applied sciences, predominantly focused on education (in Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Groningen). In its system report, the Committee intends to elaborate on these cross-institutional forms of collaboration and alliances.

Virtually all the universities of applied sciences list a limited number of substantive spearheads (also referred to as focus areas or priority themes) to strengthen their practice-oriented research. On account of the close relationship in professional higher education between practice-oriented research, teaching and valorisation, such spearheads pertain not only to research. They are knowledge domains and/or themes with regard to which the universities of applied sciences intend to excel through additional investments, the clustering of lectorates, and by linking up with the range of master's programmes offered by the universities of applied sciences. In a great majority of cases, one or more of these spearheads are concretised and detailed in a proposal for a Centre of Expertise.

##### *Development of focus areas*

Creating focus and mass in research occupies centre stage in the proposals of the research universities. Across the board, their point of departure is their profiling on their own research strengths, but the research universities also demonstrate that many of their ambitions are in line with priority areas designated at the national and/or European level. The universities usually select a limited number of strategic themes in order to be able to maintain and, wherever possible, improve their performance and the impact of their research. Research universities expend

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<sup>5</sup> Education Council [Onderwijsraad] and Council for Culture [Raad voor Cultuur], *Cultuureducatie: leren, creëren, inspireren!* [Cultural Education: learning, creating, inspiring!] Advisory report, The Hague, June 2012

substantial efforts on research themes for which considerable additional funds are available (such as the European programmes), obviously in order to acquire additional resources, but particularly in order to (continue to) tie in with international networks and consolidate their competitive position.

The proposals submitted by the institutions focus a great deal of attention on the top sectors and EU Grand Challenges, the Exact Sciences and Technology Master Plan and the sector plans. It goes without saying that the group of technical research universities (the three Universities of Technology and Wageningen University) place a strong emphasis on the application of knowledge and valorisation. The missions and profiles of these four research universities link up closely with the goals of Dutch top sector policy, the EU policy priorities (Framework Programmes and Horizon 2020), the Exact Sciences and Technology Master Plan and the sector plans. Comparatively little information is given on R&D partners in the business community. The general research universities indicate that the Innovation Contracts will offer opportunities for the further expansion of public-private collaboration with the industry, the government, knowledge institutions, health care institutions and social organisations. Nearly all the research universities refer to the letters they sent to the Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation at the end of February 2012, in which they communicated how they intend to participate in the top sectors. Many research universities identify common ground with the top sectors. Some research universities explain their involvement concretely in terms of capacity and resources. In part, this can be traced back to the fact that the financial and legal aspects of the innovation contracts still have to be developed in more detail, as well as their content. In addition, not much is yet known about the actual efforts to be expended by the NWO [Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research] and the business community.

In many cases, initiatives to develop focus areas in professional higher education appear to be effected following consultation with regional stakeholders and in-depth discussions within the universities of applied sciences. A dominant theme in this respect is alignment with regional priorities. An institution's track record (RAAK [Regional Attention for and Activities Promoting Knowledge Circulation] projects, success of lectorates) plays an important part in the choices made, as does its involvement in Human Capital Agendas and innovation contracts. In many cases, the choices have resulted in an application for a Centre of Expertise. The universities of applied sciences have submitted some 40 proposals for Centres of Expertise. A large number involve the top sectors. Some proposals are cross-sectoral; others pertain to social challenges. The bulk of the proposals for a Centre of Expertise involve an application by two or more universities of applied sciences. The Committee based its assessment of the Centres of Expertise on the recommendations of experts and various sector experts. To some extent, due to the lack of requirements regarding the format of the proposals, they appear to differ widely in nature and scope: the proposals range from brief descriptions covering half a sheet of paper to comprehensive business plans. The Committee ultimately judged eighteen proposals as satisfying the conditions included in the assessment framework. Two of the eighteen proposals fall under the responsibility of the Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. At least one Centre of Expertise was granted in each top sector; the same applies to the sectors of health care and education.

In general terms, the Committee is of the opinion that it has been wise to focus on the Centres of Expertise in the outline agreement concluded with the HBO-Raad [Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences]. The Centres of Expertise give concrete shape to the development of focus areas, they can result in focus and mass and they can promote the intertwining of research and teaching. The Centres have the potential for raising quality, improving collaboration between individual universities of applied sciences, and strengthening ties with professional practice.

### *Valorisation*

Many research universities and universities of applied sciences pay ample attention to their current valorisation efforts and the possibilities they see for future improvements. Across the board, the institutions have exercised restraint in formulating valorisation target figures for 2015, but the proposals they have submitted contain comprehensive overviews of activities and goals.

The research universities view valorisation predominantly as the utilisation of knowledge produced by scientific research. The emphasis is often placed on economic utilisation. The manner in which and the extent to which individual research universities have formulated their ambitions and

intentions regarding knowledge valorisation are largely determined by the nature and the knowledge portfolio of the research university in question. Some research universities focus a lot of attention on initiatives aimed at (improving) the transfer and utilisation of new knowledge, inventions and technologies; examples that are mentioned frequently include the top sectors, Top Consortia for Knowledge and Innovation (*Topconsortia voor Kennis en Innovatie*, TKIs), technology transfer offices, spin-off companies and collaboration with the national and international business communities. Other research universities adopt a much more small-scale approach to knowledge valorisation, which tends to be aimed at specific user groups in civil society, often outside the business community. Here, knowledge transfer takes place in particular through publications, lectures and/or teaching.

Four research universities indicate that in 2015 they intend to spend 2.5 % of their revenue on valorisation. Nearly all the research universities list performance indicators that are related, either directly or indirectly, to their own expenditure or revenue. Eight research universities formulate target figures with regard to knowledge-intensive activity, such as establishing spin-off companies, promoting techno starters and participating in seed funding. Five research universities state target figures with regard to entrepreneurship education. Intellectual property and commercialisation are also listed by five research universities, usually in terms of numbers of patents and patent licences. Six research universities, finally, express their general orientation towards the business community and civil society in numbers of research publications produced in collaboration with private companies, and in providing business advice. In addition, examples are given of social valorisation, such as attendance of activities in the fields of culture and science.

Among the universities of applied sciences, the goals regarding (practice-oriented) research and valorisation are closely in line with each other. By now, practice-oriented research is booming in the professional higher education sector, which the Committee regards as a key development with a view to strengthening valorisation. Most of the universities of applied sciences formulate their valorisation goals within the triangle of education, research and (professional) practice. Concrete intentions in this respect involve not only the expansion of the number of lecturers and/or the number of teachers and students involved in research, but also the expansion of the collaborative (research) efforts and co-productions with companies and public institutions ("the professional practice"). Ensuing ambitions of the universities of applied sciences include an increase in the number of profession-oriented (research) publications (and other output) and an increase of the third flow of funds (funding from "the professional practice"). In addition, many universities of applied sciences aim to expand, widen and/or improve entrepreneurship education and the range of post-graduate continuing professional education programmes (training and (refresher) courses) for working people. The establishment of Centres of Expertise also contributes to valorisation.

The proposals show that various research universities and universities of applied sciences have initiated or will shortly initiate tracks for developing their own performance indicators. The development of a broadly supported set of indicators pertaining to valorisation is still in full swing; it has not yet been adopted.

## 5. Conclusions

Reviewing the recommendations, the Committee concludes that all the proposals, with the exception of that submitted by the Open University<sup>6</sup>, satisfy the requirements for conditional funding. Each institution has formulated adequate ambitions with regard to teaching, research and valorisation. The quality differs from one proposal to the next, but the Committee has not come across any sub-standard proposals. All the institutions have formulated ambitions that are expected to improve the quality of Dutch higher education and research and to intensify the valorisation efforts. This paves the way for signing performance agreements with all the research universities and universities of applied sciences this coming autumn.

Furthermore, the Committee observes that the assessments of the proposals submitted by research universities and universities of applied sciences have ultimately produced a more or less comparable overall picture for each sector. In the academic higher education sector, one proposal was assessed as "excellent", in the professional higher education sector two were assessed as "excellent". A small number of proposals were assessed as "good", while a relatively large group of

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<sup>6</sup> The Open University is the only case in which the Committee has drawn the conclusion that, as yet, there is no sufficient basis for making a performance agreement.

proposals was judged "very good". In this respect, the Committee wishes to emphasise that it has assessed the proposals and that its opinions do not imply any judgement regarding the quality of the institutions or of their teaching and research as such.

As indicated above, the Committee judged more than half of the 40 Centre of Expertise proposals submitted by the universities of applied sciences as unsatisfactory. It observes that some of these are potentially good and at a later stage may likely demonstrate that both conditions can be satisfied. The Committee requests that you ascertain whether it would be possible next year to create room for another round of Centres of Expertise to be granted.

With regard to the feasibility of the proposals (the third criterion), the Committee focused in particular on the feasibility of the intentions relating to the differentiation and development of focus areas. It concludes that some institutions have indicated the consequences of a division of tasks and prioritising in terms of capacity (FTEs) and resources. Although the Committee has seen a large number of first steps, most of the proposals do not demonstrate any budget shifts from activities to be terminated to new initiatives. The Committee is pleased with the steps that have been taken in the first round, but finds it hard to avoid the impression that more can be achieved in this respect. Further profiling will entail sharper and at times painful choices.

## **6. Follow-up**

In line with the decree concerning its establishment, the Committee has planned the following activities for the years ahead:

- Advising the Minister with respect to the progress reports on profiling drawn up by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences [HBO-Raad] and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands [VSNU];
- Drawing up an annual monitoring report on the progress of the profiling process in higher education and research;
- Drawing up a mid-term review in December 2014 of the manner in which the individual institutions are implementing their plans with the funds they have received from the selective budget;
- Drawing up a final evaluation regarding the manner in which quality/profiling focused funding has been implemented, and advising the Minister regarding the follow-up process after 2016.

The Committee intends to combine the first two activities in a report to be published in the spring of 2013. This will comprise an assessment of the profiling process at the system level. To that end, the Committee will consult with the Association of Universities in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences.

### *Assessment of Centres of Expertise in 2013*

With respect to all the Centres of Expertise that were judged in positive terms, the Committee recommends that a survey be conducted in 2013 to ascertain whether sufficient progress has been made regarding their implementation in accordance with the conditions laid down in the assessment framework, and whether new activities have been launched, and/or current activities have been developed further. In the opinion of the Committee, continuation of the funding should be dependent on sufficient progress with regard to the implementation and clear commencement of the activities. In addition, the Committee recommends in this respect to apply, as a minimum, the conditions that were in place during the first round of the Centres of Expertise process in 2011. It would prefer to review whether these conditions need amending and/or sharpening up.

Setting up a Centre of Expertise is no sinecure. A thorough thinking through of the plans, and the development of concrete details, are essential to achieve a successful public-private collaboration which leads to added value for students, staff and companies. In this respect, the Committee refers to the current monitoring and expertise programme, the Exact Sciences and Technology Platform [Platform Bèta Techniek], which is conducted among the Centres of Expertise that have been launched and the Innovative Professional Skills Centres (MBO; senior secondary vocational education). It goes without saying that the Platform will be requested to continue its facilitating role in this respect in the year ahead.

## **7. In conclusion**

In the opinion of the Committee, the process launched with respect to the performance agreements already demonstrates added value. However, the following questions are still under discussion: is diversity in the Dutch higher education system as a whole sufficient in light of the future requirements ensuing from developments in the knowledge economy and ever-increasing international competition? Is there sufficient critical mass in key domains? Should the institutions distinguish themselves from each other to a greater extent with regard to the ambitions they pursue when it comes to their international profile? Are the choices the institutions make with respect to their profile sufficiently geared to the demands from their stakeholders? These questions are important, yet difficult to answer, especially in a short space of time. The Committee deems detailed analysis at the system level advisable. Next year, it will return to this matter in its system report.

At this point in time, however, this round of performance agreements can be regarded as an important step in Dutch higher education policy, a step that other countries are also following with interest.

On behalf of the Higher Education and Research Review Committee,

Prof. Dr F.A. van Vught, Chair