

Towards a normal academic standard

Dutch universities are among the best in the world. Our entire society benefits from this fact. It ensures that our economy is competitive and innovative. Our universities educate the people we need to meet the challenges we are facing.

Unfortunately, our universities are struggling because they have been chronically underfunded. Although the number of students has been increasing for years, funding per student has dropped. As a result, faculties do not have enough time and money to either conduct high-quality research or deliver high-quality teaching, let alone both.

Students no longer receive the education they deserve and our lecturers and academics are struggling to cope. It is high time this situation was addressed, and to work towards a Normal Academic Standard to ensure the students of today receive the proper education they need to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Stating the problem

The academic education sector has been chronically underfunded for some time now. There is too little money for teaching, too little time and too little connection between proper teaching and proper research. Research funding has been lagging behind the increasing numbers of students for years now. The quality of degree programmes is inextricably tied up with the amount of research funding allocated to universities.

Due to chronic underfunding and the fact that the amount of funding universities receive is based on the number of students, universities are all too often forced to hire lecturers who only teach and do not have the time to conduct research. Degree programmes suffer from the fact that these lecturers are unable to conduct research. Yet these close connections between research and teaching are crucial for the quality of university education. Only when students are taught by experienced researchers and learn to participate in research projects themselves can they develop academic skills.

Solution

The academic education sector needs an additional annual €1.1 billion capital injection. This claim is substantiated by an [independent report prepared by PwC](#) at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.



Facts and figures

- Of the €8.5 billion the government has committed to allocate to compensation for the impact of the coronavirus crisis, €5.8 billion will go to primary and secondary schools, while €2.7 billion will be divided between VET colleges, universities and universities of applied sciences. Ultimately, this will boil down to €0.4 billion for universities. These funds are meant to be used to offset the backlogs caused by the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, universities will be allocated another €0.4 billion to compensate for the fact that students' tuition fees will be halved. These funds will not go any way towards resolving the underfunding we have seen in recent years due to the fact that research funding did not increase in line with rising student numbers.
- The amount of funding the government allocates to universities for each individual student decreased by more than 25% between 2000 and 2018.

Why is academic education so important?

- Research and innovation are crucial to sustainable economic recovery.
- Science helps us solve global problems, such as the need for a transition to different types of energy.
- Without science, there would be no solution to crises such as the coronavirus pandemic.
- The critical eye and investigative attitude of university graduates are also needed outside academia.

Why universities need a capital injection at this time

- Without a capital injection, the Netherlands will lose its high rankings and high-quality degree programmes.
- The Netherlands only spends 2.2% of its GDP on education and innovation, even though EU member states have committed to 3%. (Including the first graph on this page)
- The research projects carried out by universities are increasingly dependent on uncertain non-governmental funding (i.e. funding allocated by the EU, health funds and private parties). External granting agencies are less inclined to finance risky and therefore groundbreaking research, which may jeopardise our ability to be innovative.
- The competition for research grants is so great that even applicants whose proposals have been found to be excellent will sometimes not be awarded any grant at all. As a result, we are in danger of losing highly talented researchers who quit academia in disappointment.
- All the time researchers spend drawing up applications for grants awarded by external parties is time they cannot spend on proper scientific research and teaching.
- We must prevent lecturers and professors from leaving academia. Many of them are currently doing overtime as a matter of course.

This information was compiled by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), which took the greatest care in doing so.

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