

# RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

*The association of universities in The Netherlands represents  
all of the country's research universities*

(c) hollan  
hoogte



FOCUS OF THE UNIVERSITIES

THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

THE ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES  
IN THE NETHERLANDS (VSNU)



**VSNU**

vereniging van universiteiten  
association of universities  
THE NETHERLANDS

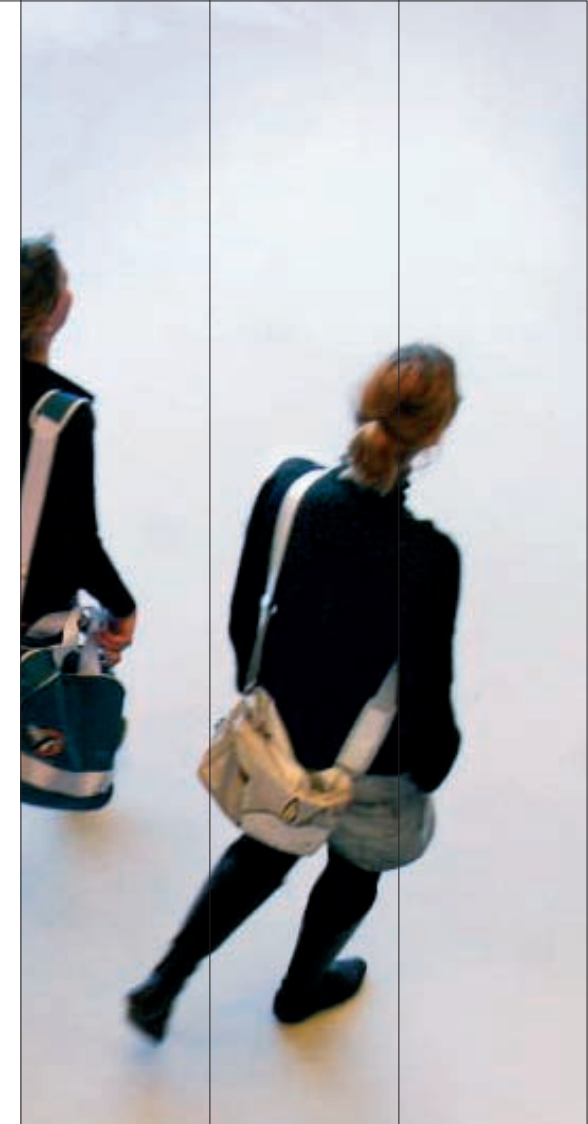


**VSNU**

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THE NETHERLANDS

## RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch universities have a long academic tradition. The first was founded in Leiden by prince William of Orange in 1575. Today the Netherlands has 13 research-intensive universities and one university of distance education, each of which offers high standard education and research. In addition to the three technological universities, an agriculture life sciences university and one distance learning university, there are a further nine which may be termed general or very broad-based in their orientation.



*“Nearly all dutch universities are included in the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities”*



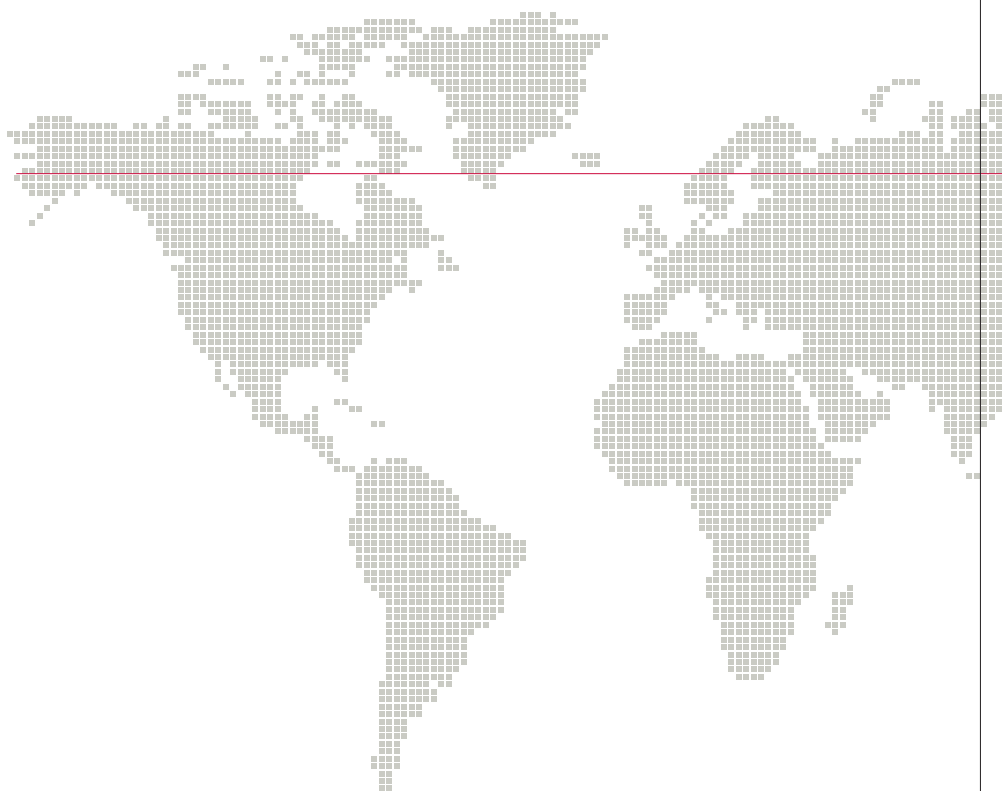
*William of Orange (1533-1584) - founder of the first dutch university in Leiden*



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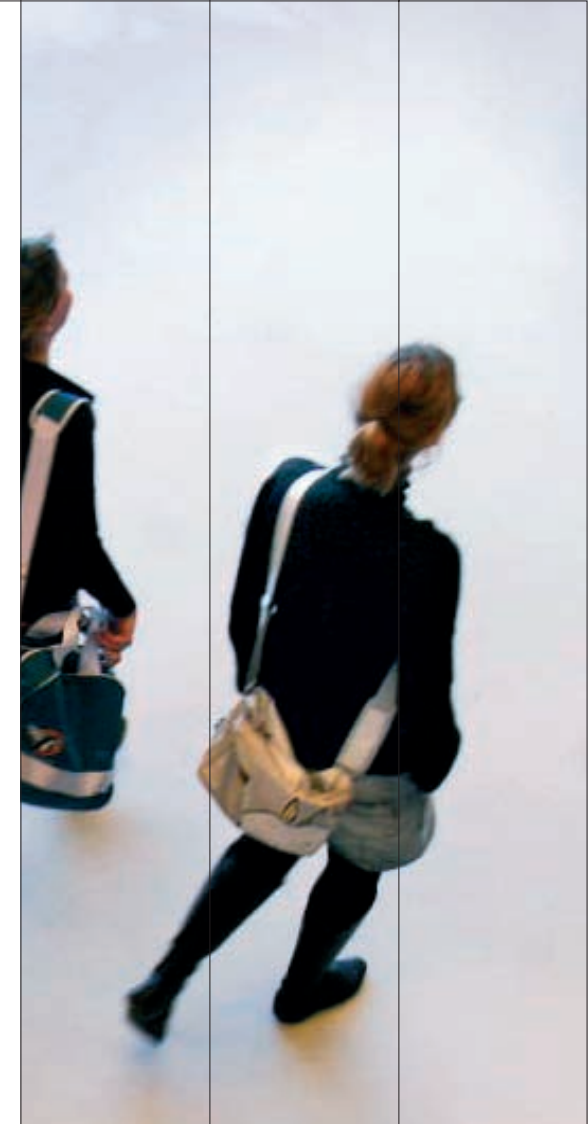
FOCUS OF THE UNIVERSITIES



## AROUND THE WORLD

Dutch university education and research is not only qualitatively high standard but also very internationally oriented. All the universities are represented in international networks and work together with other universities from around the world. What the Netherlands has to offer - what makes it unique - is the emphasis placed on educational differentiation, international classrooms, research-based education and learning environments that are devoted to critical thinking. The university colleges, graduate schools and tenure track programmes of the Netherlands attract talented Dutch and international students and academics. The universities' centres of excellence focus on highly specialised fundamental research. Today's dutch universities also work closely with the private sector in technological top institutes, science parks and innovation labs. They are attracting employers by offering stimulating research environments, challenging career perspectives and good labour conditions.

*"12 percent of all students at research universities in The Netherlands come from abroad"*



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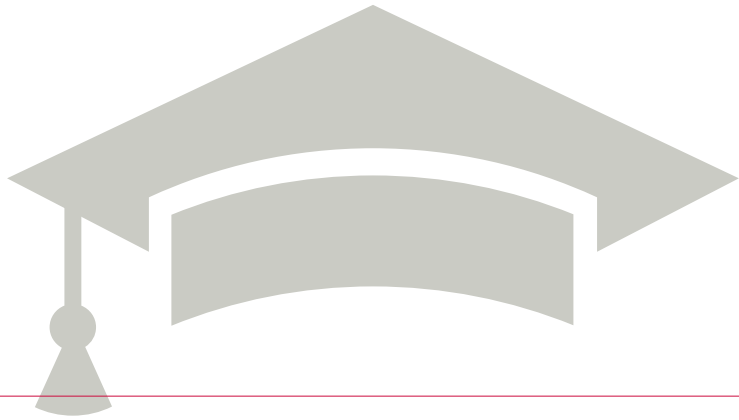
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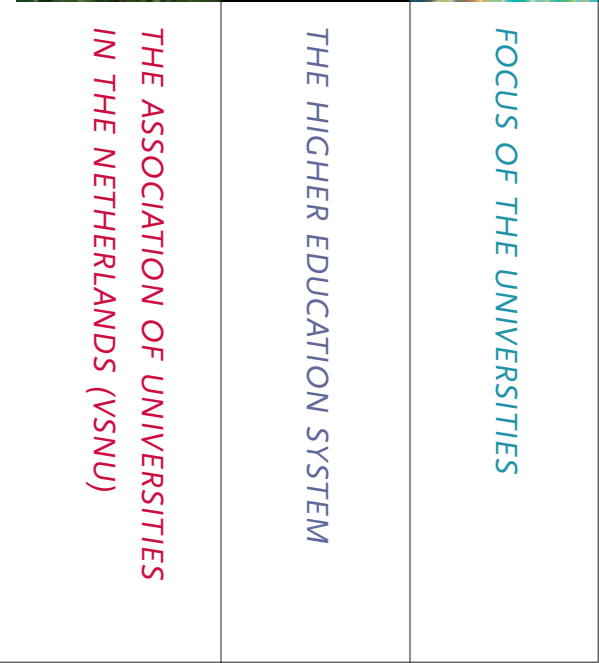
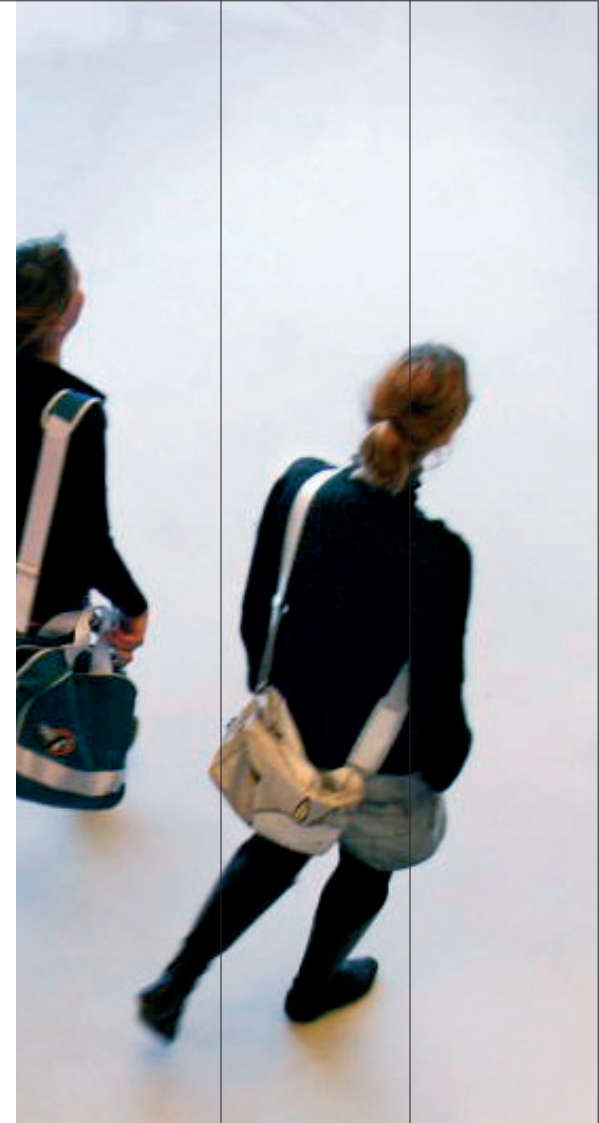
*"At present, over 50 percent of the more than 1,150 different master's degree courses are taught in English"*

## THE ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS (VSNU)

The VSNU represents the shared interests of the 14 research universities in the Netherlands in the fields of research, education, knowledge transfer, funding, personnel policy and international affairs.

### *Its basic tasks are:*

- > **to promote** the common interests of the universities vis-à-vis dutch and european politicians, government and civil society organisations
- > **to create** a forum for discussion so that common viewpoints can be developed.
- > **to provide** all kinds of services and information
- > **to serve** as an organisation for employers by participating in discussions with the government and employee organisations regarding employment conditions within the university sector (a sector responsible for some 49,072 employees)



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*“The eight Academic Medical Centres, all affiliated to dutch research universities, are world leaders in Clinical Medical Sciences”*

### *Governing structure*

- > All the member universities have a seat in the General Council, the association's governing body. The representative is always a permanent delegate from the Executive Board, usually the board's presiding member. The General Council establishes the VSNU's policies, budget and membership fees. The VSNU president chairs the General Council.
- > The Presidium is responsible for the daily administration of the association.
- > The General Council is advised by several steering committees.

### *VSNU bureau*

The VSNU has a policy, a communications, a labour relations and a facilities department, including institutional research. The VSNU has a permanent staff of around 35 fulltime employees.

The association is run by a Management Team (MT) consisting of the secretary general and the heads of the various departments.

### *Current priorities*

In the coming years the VSNU will be concentrating especially on stimulating high attainment levels in the bachelor's degree phase. It will focus on top research and researchers whilst encouraging young and talented researchers to excell inside or outside the academic community. Finally, it will continue to establish even greater levels of internationalisation.



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*“The Netherlands ranks second in the world in terms of research publication output per capita”*

## THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

### *A binary system*

The Netherlands has two main types of higher education. Research universities focus on the independent practice of research-oriented work in an academic or professional setting. They essentially train students in academic study and research, although many study programmes also have a professional component. Universities of applied sciences are more practically oriented, preparing students directly for specific careers. Their study programmes focus on the practical application of knowledge.

Overall there are 14 publicly funded research universities, 41 publicly funded universities of applied sciences and various privately funded universities and institutions of higher professional education.

### *The three tiers*

In 1999, European ministers responsible for higher education met in Bologna to lay the basis for a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The idea is that students will be able to choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from reciprocal recognition procedures. One of the ways to establish Europe-wide standardisation within the higher education system resides in the three-tier bachelor's, master's and PhD academic award system. The Netherlands is a front-runner as far as the Bologna Process is concerned. The three-tier system was fully implemented here in 2002.

The average university bachelor's programme leading to a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree takes three years and provides a broad but predominantly in-depth basis for further specialisation. University Master of Arts (MA) or Master of Science (MSc) degree courses take one to two years to complete, depending on the respective discipline.

PhD degree courses leading to the title of doctor are only available from research universities and entail four years of full-time research under the supervision of a professor. The research emanating from the conventional doctorate degree must be original, accompanied by an extensive dissertation and publicly defended.



### *University governing structure*

Each university has an Executive Board comprising a president, a rector and usually one other administrator, one of whom is the vice-president. All such university or executive boards are answerable to a Board of Trustees appointed by the Minister of Education and Science. The responsibilities, obligations and constraints of all these different parties are laid down in the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act. The University Council, comprising staff and students, reports directly to the Executive Board and the voice of students in such councils is certainly important. At faculty level there are also councils. All universities consist of a number of faculties, which are sub-divided into departments and sections and are headed by deans.

### *University Funding*

The total funding for all universities depends on the number of EU students. The share of the individual university depends on the number of students and (bachelor-, master-, postgraduate) degrees. The current annual national budget for research universities lies around the 3.7 billion euro. That money is used for education and research. Precisely how the received lump sum is invested is a matter to be determined by the individual universities. However, the money they spend has to be accounted for. Roughly 70% of the financing derives from public funding in the form of government subsidies (3.7 billion euro), a portion of which is distributed by the national research council. The remaining 30% (... euro) falls into the private funding category and may be traced to tuition fees and income received from third parties. This final source is often termed the third funding flow. Much of this kind of financing goes towards research projects that are supported by national or international public and private organisations. These days research subsidies are becoming increasingly market-oriented.

### *Quality assurance and accreditation*

#### *Education*

All university degree courses are permanently subjected to internal quality control and external assessment. The current system of external quality assurance was introduced in 2002/3 when the bachelor-master structure was introduced in the Netherlands. All degree programmes have to be accredited by the NVAO (Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) to be eligible for government recognition and subsequent government funding. Also students can only apply

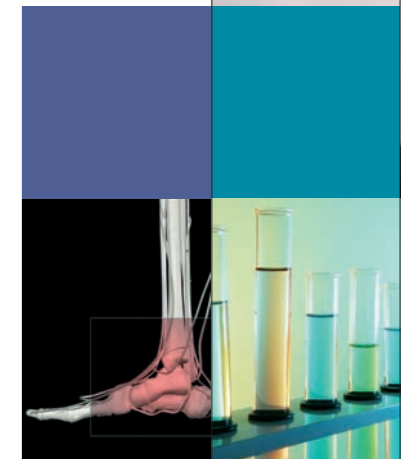
for financial support and receive nationally recognised degrees if they register for programmes that are officially accredited.

Accreditation is based on a six-year cycle system. Accreditation is granted on the basis of an evaluation report produced by an external assessment panel acting under the authority of the Dutch assessment agency QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities) and involving assessment of a self-evaluation report of the programme under review and on-the-spot inspection. The protocols used by NVAO en QANU aids the transparent, systematic and reliable assessment of programmes in relation to national and international benchmarks. Failure either to comply with or to meet these regulations leads to enforced study programme closure. Within the framework of the Bologna process European countries are working towards the mutual recognition of their accreditation resolutions.

#### *Research*

Every six years the quality of research institutes and research groups at Dutch research universities is systematically assessed. Universities organize the assessment themselves and appoint an independent international peer-review committee. Next to an overall assessment of the institute, the quality, productivity, viability and relevance of all research groups is evaluated. PhD programmes are also included in this process. In addition to the external evaluation, an internal evaluation of the institutes takes place every three years.

The present research quality assurance system has been in use since the 1990s. Up until 2003, the VSNU had been responsible for organising nation-wide evaluations on discipline level. Since 2003 the universities themselves organize the research assessments based on the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). In this protocol, emphasis is placed on the international position of institutes and research groups. The VSNU, the national research council (NWO) and the national academy of sciences (KNAW) have established the Meta-Evaluation Committee, an independent committee which reviews the way in which universities organise their evaluations based on the SEP-protocol.





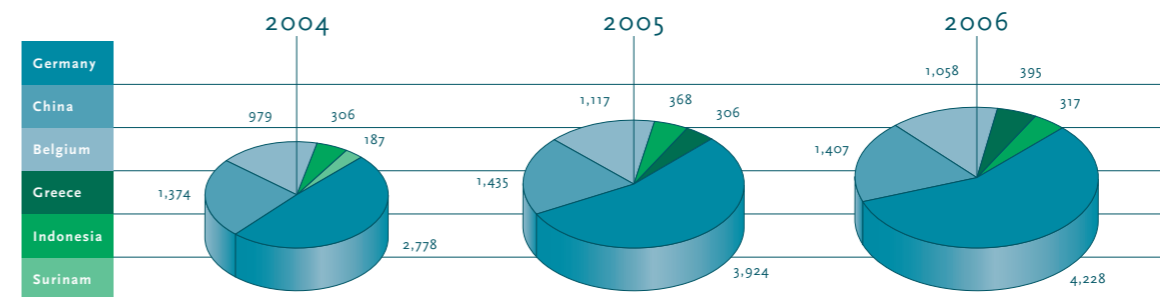
*“The Netherlands was the first non-English-speaking country to offer master’s degrees taught in English in subjects ranging from food science to biomedical sciences, accountancy and petroleum engineering”*

## FOCUS OF THE UNIVERSITIES

### Education

University education and research in the Netherlands has traditionally been characterised by its high quality and it has always been internationally oriented. The Dutch universities were therefore keen to quickly provide courses given in English. Nowadays more than half of all the master’s degrees on offer are entirely in English and about 12 percent of all students at research universities are international students.

### Top 5 countries of origin international students:



Based on: total number of registered students of foreign nationality and/or foreign preliminary education (source ICHE 2006, registrations).

Dutch universities are able to benefit from the country’s excellent infrastructure systems; a factor which is definitely conducive to internationally oriented education and research. They furthermore build on long national and international traditions with networks incorporating the oldest and most prominent universities in Europe and the rest of the world.

These days Dutch universities are striving to broaden the range of courses on offer by differentiating, by providing more made-to-measure courses and, thus, by creating more space for individual preferences and aptitudes. In many fields research master’s degrees offer students the opportunity to thoroughly prepare for a PhD degree course. Dutch students are encouraged to think critically, to accumulate and apply knowledge and to develop their creative, socially resourceful and organisational talents by learning how to engage in project work. In 2006 the institutes for higher education subscribed to a Code of Conduct pertaining to International Students in Dutch Higher Education, a document which lays down guidelines on such matters as admission, information provision and the obligation, on the part of Dutch universities, to offer assistance to students coming from abroad. An independent commission monitors the implementation of the Code of Conduct.



## Research

With its 14 research universities the Netherlands is rightly proud of its present track record. Talented young researchers are being trained for leading positions in tomorrow's world. The new graduate schools are broad-based and facilitate healthy competition.

Conscious of their intellectual capacity and potential, young researchers are adept at seeking out top institutes equipped with the most advanced techniques and run by leading academics. That is why Dutch research universities are not only exploiting their own unique specialist fields but also their various reciprocal relations with corresponding universities and centres of excellence abroad.

Universities in the Netherlands are represented in all the major international ranking scales: nearly all Dutch universities appear in the Shanghai University Ranking and, according to that same ranking system, 6 are among Europe's top 50 universities.

If one considers the relative impact scores for publications, Dutch universities do extremely well. Internationally the impact, especially in the field of science, is remarkable if one takes into account the small population (16,5 million inhabitants).

### 10-year country rankings for: the Netherlands:

	Papers	Citations	Cites per paper
Total for the Netherlands:	214031	2666383	12,46
Rank for the Netherlands:	12	8	7

(Rank for the Netherlands among the 145 top performing Countries in ALL FIELDS)

SOURCE: Essential Science Indicators, 1997 to June 30, 2007; Country Search By Field (ALL FIELDS) > the Netherlands > sorted by papers, citations, and citations per paper. Essential Science Indicators is a web-based data file reflecting upwards of 7 million papers published in 11,500+ Thomson Scientific-indexed journals over the last decade, covering 22 main fields of science and the social sciences. Users can create citation-based rankings of scientists, papers, journals, nations, and institutions. Available from the Research Services Group

## Knowledge transfer

The Netherlands is aspiring to become one of the world's most innovative and competitive knowledge economies. The country thus endorses the ambitions voiced by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 and in Barcelona in 2002. Against this background, the country is focusing great attention on innovation and the transfer of knowledge between universities and society.

Fundamental research is of vital importance for the knowledge economy. Dutch universities contribute to the success and competitiveness of the economy by developing ever better ways to transfer knowledge from academia to the larger society. Together with business and public sector universities work towards an innovative knowledge society.

Within the context of the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (2007) the Netherlands aims to sustain its excellent Framework achievements of past years by fully utilising such facilities as Starting Grants for young researchers and by participating in the Ideas programme. In 2006 Dutch universities and private organisations together applied for 8180 patents, which makes it the 5th country worldwide in terms of patent applications. Innovation laboratories and contract funding are becoming everyday phenomena as an increase is being seen in the private funding of public sector research. At the moment all Dutch universities are obtaining increasing support from private investment sources.

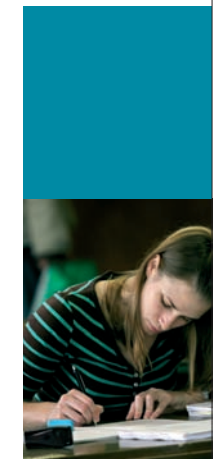
### Number of patents awarded in the Netherlands and other countries\*:

	2004	2005	2006
United States of America	52325	55539	59201
Japan	31966	36733	37762
Germany	28037	29108	30899
France	9465	9901	10010
Netherlands	8036	8582	8180
United Kingdom	6429	7731	6656
Korea	5715	6627	9612
Switzerland	5357	6028	6582
Italy	4822	5117	5366
Sweden	3393	3477	
China			4194
Other	23037	25960	28519
Total	178582	194803	206981

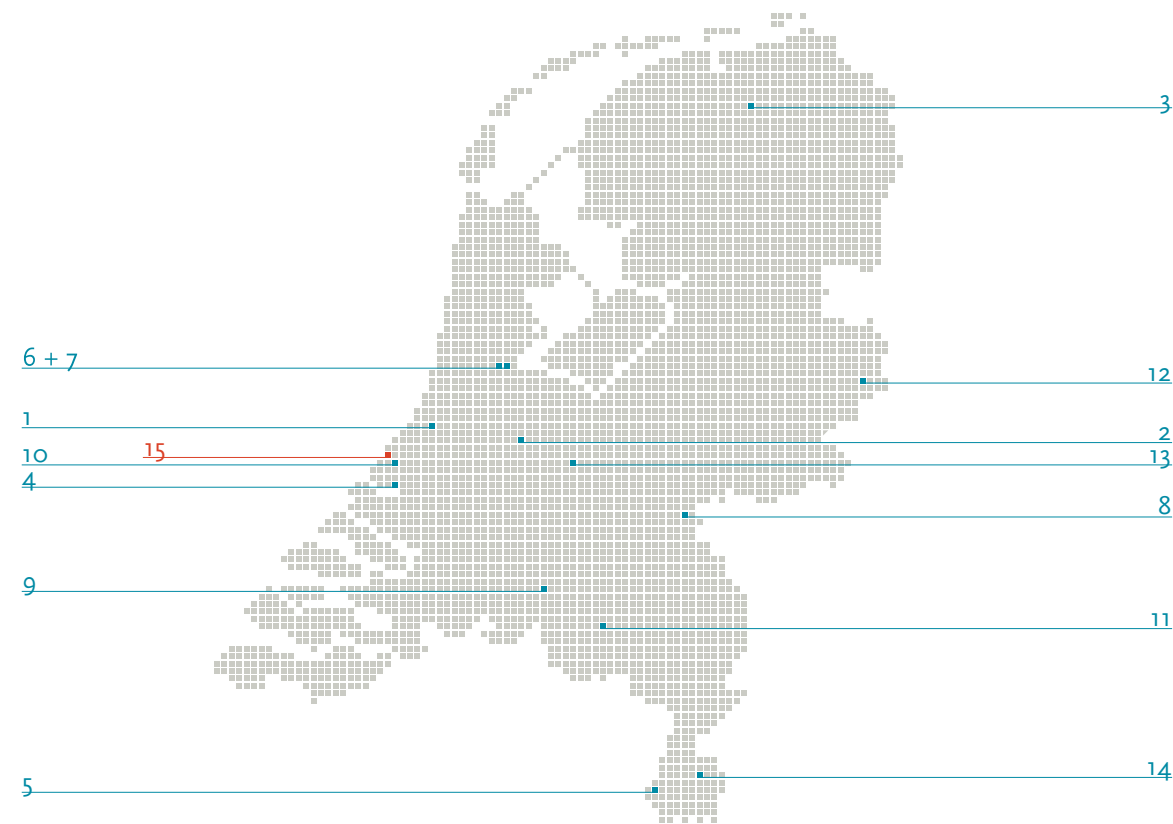
Source: Netherlands Patent Centre, 2004 and 2005 annual reports.  
\* 2005 data subject to confirmation

## Universities as employers

Dutch universities are autonomous employers with a joint, fully developed Collective Employment Agreement. Compared to university labour conditions in surrounding countries those of The Netherlands are very favourable. For instance, it is not the Dutch government but individual universities themselves that are responsible for determining personnel policies. Thanks to their Collective Employment Agreement, Dutch universities are able to offer employees income guarantees and a high degree of employment protection and social security. In the Collective Employment Agreement doctoral candidates are regarded as employees and tenure tracks offer promising academics a perspective to a full professorship.



## THE 14 RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES



- 1 LEIDEN UNIVERSITY > [www.lei.nl](http://www.lei.nl)
- 2 UTRECHT UNIVERSITY > [www.uu.nl](http://www.uu.nl)
- 3 UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN > [www.rug.nl](http://www.rug.nl)
- 4 ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM > [www.eur.nl](http://www.eur.nl)
- 5 MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY > [www.unimaas.nl](http://www.unimaas.nl)
- 6 UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM > [www.uva.nl](http://www.uva.nl)
- 7 VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM > [www.vu.nl](http://www.vu.nl)
- 8 RADBOUD UNIVERSITY NIJMEGEN > [www.ru.nl](http://www.ru.nl)
- 9 TILBURG UNIVERSITY > [www.tilburguniversity.nl](http://www.tilburguniversity.nl)
- 10 DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY > [www.tudelft.nl](http://www.tudelft.nl)
- 11 EINDHOVEN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY > [w3.tue.nl](http://w3.tue.nl)
- 12 UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE > [www.utwente.nl](http://www.utwente.nl)
- 13 WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH CENTRE > [www.wur.nl](http://www.wur.nl)
- 14 OPEN UNIVERSITEIT NEDERLAND > [www.ou.nl](http://www.ou.nl)
- 15 ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS > [www.vsnu.nl](http://www.vsnu.nl)

Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)

Lange Houtstraat 2  
P.O. Box 13739  
2501 ES The Hague  
The Netherlands  
T +31 (0) 70 302 14 00  
F +31 (0) 70 302 14 95  
[post@vsnu.nl](mailto:post@vsnu.nl)  
[www.vsnu.nl](http://www.vsnu.nl)

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[post@vsnu.nl](mailto:post@vsnu.nl)

