

## CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE "EU 2020" STRATEGY

### Contribution from the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad)

The Hague, January 2010

With this paper, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad) expresses its contribution to the development of the EU2020 strategy in response to public consultation of the European Commission. In our view, education, research and innovation are central to the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs and must be key elements in its follow-up post 2010 (EU2020). We fully support that the EU should continue to strive to be the leading most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world and strongly recommend that the attention for the EU2020 should not be decreased, because of the economic crisis the European Union is facing.

We would like to present the following considerations:

#### **European Knowledge Area**

We applaud the efforts to achieve a genuine European Knowledge Area. Research and education *in their mutual relationship* can contribute to innovation and improvement of professional practice.

The practice or problem-oriented focus is the most dominant feature for any kind of research by Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). This research is strongly embedded in the professional practice to which UAS are oriented and for which they prepare their students. As this practice is increasingly evidence based and thus knowledge-intensive, innovative research and knowledge transfer play an ever growing part in this. At the same time research should improve the quality of education and innovate curricula through the interface between education and professional practice.

#### **Skills of the professional knowledge worker**

We agree that skills (of the professional worker) are a key element in achieving a European Knowledge Area. The European knowledge society demands highly skilled professionals, equipped for fast-changing professional practice. We take this very seriously: our EDUPROF project<sup>1</sup> is aimed at improvement of the quality and alignment of education to the demands from new professional practice and to develop joint initiatives.

#### **Innovation and SMEs**

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play an important, growing role in the European economy. However, many SMEs struggle to hire high-skilled knowledge workers and we believe SMEs have not yet realized their full potential as agents of innovation.

In order to increase the innovativeness of the Dutch business sector, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science is funding the RAAK scheme. RAAK (Regional Attention and Action for Knowledge circulation) aims to improve knowledge exchange between SMEs and Universities of Applied sciences. Subsidies can be awarded to regional innovation programmes that are aimed at the exchange of knowledge,

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<sup>1</sup> EDUPROF: an initiative of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and nine European partners with the support of the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme

and are executed by a consortium of one or more education institutes and one or more businesses. These regional innovation programmes have to focus on innovation demands from SMEs in the region.

RAAK is very successful in the Netherlands. The uniqueness of the approach lies in the linking of innovation potential at the regional level and the coupling of that potential to the national and international knowledge infrastructure. We believe a European programme based on the RAAK model could help increase the innovativeness of SMEs (and non-profit institutes) in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> More information on RAAK: <http://www.innovatie-alliantie.nl/?id=492>