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Subject
Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct

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European Commission
Commissioner for Research
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Dear Mr. Potočnik,

With this letter, the Association of Universities in The Netherlands (VSNU) welcomes the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The Dutch universities regard the Charter & Code as a means to stimulate career development and to ensure the attractiveness of European institutions for researchers.

The Charter & Code reflect good practices in human resources policies. Both documents have stimulated institutions and researchers to implement these good practices and will serve as a general reference for future improvement.

The universities in The Netherlands have long recognized good human resources management to be of vital importance for the quality and continuity of research. Notwithstanding the need for further improvement, the majority of the principles and requirements have been already implemented at our institutions. Furthermore, the VSNU represents the universities in negotiating the sectoral collective labour agreement. A large number of the principles and requirements are met in this agreement and therefore applicable to all Dutch universities and many related research institutes.

All universities have signed the Dutch code of conduct for the recruitment of personnel. Together with other associations of institutes for higher education, the Netherlands organization for international cooperation in higher education (NUFFIC) and the Dutch government, the VSNU has established a code of conduct for the recruitment of international students. In these codes, the principles and requirements put forward by the European Commission are fully reflected.

In supporting the Charter & Code, the Dutch universities wish to stress three important issues regarding both documents:

- Next to the implementation of the Charter & Code, more will have to be done to stimulate the mobility of researchers within Europe, but also beyond Europe. Special actions for researchers and more general, appropriate immigration legislation, should be in place to improve the attractiveness of Europe for international excellence.
- Experience has shown that flexibility in human resources management fosters innovation of research programmes. The Dutch universities aim for an optimum in non-tenured and tenured staff, and for variety in the way an academic career can be started. In the future we see career possibilities for PhD students, junior researchers, tenured researchers as well as the traditional tenured positions of lecturer, fellow and professor (or assistant-, associate-, and full-professor; in dutch universitair docent, hoofddocent and hoogleraar).
- The Charter & Code are specifically introduced to stimulate career development of researchers. Dutch universities see this as a major area for improvement. Too often there is a mismatch between the expectations of young researchers and the senior academics around them. This mismatch can lead to career problems, where the young researchers stay too long in temporary positions hoping for the tenure that will never come. With the Code & Charter in mind, Dutch universities recently have committed themselves to clarify and strengthen the career paths for young researchers. Indeed, this is one of the key strategic priorities of the VSNU!

The universities in The Netherlands fully support the Code & Charter, but would like to ask for caution: the principles and requirements do not always provide clear-cut criteria. It is therefore recommended that the Charter & Code should be referred to in European programmes, only with great reservation and after a due period.

The VSNU would like to stress the importance of adequate human resources policies within the great diversity of higher education and research institutions in Europe. Implementation of the Charter & Code at the level of the member states and institutions therefore requires a stimulating approach by the European Union. The universities in The Netherlands would like to take part in this process,

Yours sincerely,



Dr. S.J. Noorda
President