

Socio-Economic Value Added Through Ecosystem-Based Research: The Role of Universities of Applied Sciences in Bridging Europe's Innovation Gap

Dear Commissioner Zaharieva,

Following our insightful discussions on June 2nd, we wish to emphasize the essential role of **Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)** in Europe's innovation landscape. While **startups and scale-ups** are vital in bringing technological advancements to the market, UAS uniquely contribute by **bridging the innovation gap**—advancing low Technology Readiness Level (TRL) research into high societal readiness and practical application.

Through **deeply embedded ecosystem partnerships, multidisciplinary approaches**, and **targeted impact pathways**, UAS deliver **highly accessible innovation**, connecting research to SMEs, local industries, and government entities. Our research does not stop at proof-of-concept—it **translates knowledge into operational solutions**, ensuring **Technology Readiness meets Social Readiness**. With our **integrated linkages between research and education**, we also equip professionals with future-proof skills, strengthening Europe's socio-economic resilience.

We strongly support efforts to **enhance competitiveness** through research and innovation programs that **support development across TRL levels**. However, to maximize the effectiveness of our contributions at a European scale, we urge the European Commission to **design funding frameworks** that incentivize real-world application and upscaling of applied research driven innovations and help bridge Europe's innovation gap through UAS-driven research. To this end, we propose to **double the budget** of FP10. Beyond adequate funding, Europe needs **tailored funding rules and procedures** that stimulate demand-driven applied research and prioritize direct impact.

With gratitude for your continued collaboration, we welcome the opportunity to further illustrate our approach. Below, we highlight examples from Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences showcasing how our research model **accelerates impact** and fosters **regional and European innovation**, as well as funding instruments for UAS-research in the Netherlands. Both are ready to scale to the European level.

Kind regards,



Geleyn Meijer // president UASNL // Further contact Maaike de Loor loor@uasnl.eu

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I. Key Areas Where UAS Drive Competitiveness and Innovation

1. Rapid Impact

UAS operate in **accelerated innovation cycles**, typically achieving tangible results within **1–2 years**, starting from **industry-driven demand**. This agility enables UAS to translate challenges into **usable solutions** efficiently.

Example:

At Fontys University of Applied Sciences, the “Smart Mobility” project rapidly developed and piloted **smart traffic solutions** in Eindhoven, leading to measurable improvements in urban mobility within **just 18 months**.

 [Smart Mobility Research - Fontys](#)

2. Multidisciplinary Approach

UAS combine **science, technology, social sciences, and humanities**, ensuring innovations are not only **technically sound** but also **socially relevant and applicable in the real world**.

Example:

The Hague University of Applied Sciences’ Centre of Expertise *Mission Zero* brings together IT, urban planning, and municipal professionals and students to co-create digital tools that integrates data from multiple sources to provide tailored renovation advice to homeowners, accelerating the energy transition.

 [Mission Zero - THUAS](#)

3. Regional Embeddedness

UAS are **deeply integrated into local communities**, collaborating closely with **SMEs, governments, and civil society organizations**. This regional focus allows UAS to serve as **local innovation hubs**, while also **linking Europe’s ecosystems** for broader collaboration.

Example:

Saxion University of Applied Sciences co-develops and implements **regional thematic areas** in close collaboration with development agencies, regional authorities, and industry

partners.

[!\[\]\(c507f772dba2b921f86777f01218e570_img.jpg\) Regional Innovation Think East the Netherlands - Saxion](#)

4. Direct Knowledge Transfer

Unlike traditional academic research, UAS **embed knowledge transfer within research cycles** rather than treating it as an afterthought. **Co-creation with stakeholders** ensures immediate economic and social impact.

Example:

Avans University of Applied Sciences' *Learning Communities* integrate applied research into **continuous professional development**, enabling companies to adopt **circular economy practices** while **upskilling their workforce**.

[!\[\]\(e474458956c9a37fbf9586ddb60a7fa1_img.jpg\) Learning Communities - MNext](#)

5. Talent Pipeline

UAS play a vital role in **equipping Europe's future workforce**, ensuring graduates are **ready to drive innovation**, whether as employees, entrepreneurs, or change-makers. Also by offering programs for reskilling and upskilling of professionals.

Example:

Windesheim University of Applied Sciences' *Entrepreneurship Minor* has launched **over 100 student-led startups** in the Zwolle region, directly contributing to **local economic growth**.

[!\[\]\(0d5ec72f61334709c3fc9450209b754f_img.jpg\) Entrepreneurship is all about self-confidence | International](#)

II. Proven UAS Instruments ready for European Scale-Up

Dutch UAS have **structured innovation ecosystems**, supported by key instruments that **accelerate innovation and knowledge transfer**:

1. Centres of Expertise

These **multidisciplinary hubs** connect researchers with **industry and government**, fast-tracking **mission-driven innovation**. The Netherlands boasts 60 Centres of Expertise , samples of regional innovation-ecosystems spread-out all over the country with thousands

of SME's and other organisations involved in them.

<https://netwerk.wijzjnkataapult.nl/map/netwerk/?f66=1>

Example:

The Centre of Expertise *Health Innovation* at HAN University of Applied Sciences unites **healthcare providers, tech companies, and researchers** to co-develop **system-based healthcare solutions**.

[Centre of Expertise - HAN](#)

Example:

The Centre of Expertise *Water Technology* at HNL Stenden UAS and Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences is the Dutch leading knowledge and innovation centre for **applied research** and **product development** in the field of **water technology**. The CEW brings together expertise from education, research, government and industry.

<https://www.cew.nl/en/>

Example:

The Centre of Expertise Energy, Entrance at Hanze University of Applied Sciences accelerates the transition to clean and affordable energy provision. Researchers, students, companies, governments and civil society organisations develop and share knowledge on energy transition and strengthen the regional knowledge economy.

[Home - ENTRANCE](#)

2. Integrated Knowledge Transfer

UAS ensure that research **delivers impact throughout the process**, rather than waiting for final results. UAS achieve this through a variety of applied research methods like living labs, field labs and action research where co-design and co-creation go hand in hand.

Example:

University of Applied Sciences Utrecht's *Co-Design Studio* integrates **SMEs in every research phase**, ensuring **immediate implementation** of results.

[Co-Design Studio - HU](#)

3. Impact pathways

UAS use **data-driven methodologies** to design applied research projects with **measurable socio-economic impact**. One example is **jointly developed** and supported by grants to be made available for all: the *Key Enabling Methodologies (KEMs)* –or 'key methodologies' - a large group of methods, strategies, processes and tools that **contribute to solving societal**

challenges - such as the energy transition or rising sea levels.

[!\[\]\(2e897e890e69d81eae4503a8342c36b0_img.jpg\) KEMs](#)

Example:

The *Sustainability Innovation Pathways* framework at Inholland University of Applied Sciences guides research project selection based on **clear societal and economic metrics**.

[!\[\]\(74d4806277d7e73349d8e8c0897931e9_img.jpg\) Sustainability Innovation - Inholland](#)

4. Ecosystem Orchestration

UAS go beyond **traditional university-industry partnerships**, actively **coordinating stakeholders** within **open innovation models**. Tools are made available.

Example:

Breda University of Applied Sciences' *Urban Living Lab* facilitates **quadruple helix collaboration** between citizens, companies, government, and academia to co-create **sustainable urban solutions**.

[!\[\]\(6bb0e4f14c4133b37d2887cb37e67ddd_img.jpg\) Urban Living Lab - Breda](#)

III. Demonstrated Funding Instruments ready for European Scale-Up

To fully harness the potential of applied research, we propose the establishment of a European Instrument or tailored funding rules for applied research functioning within regional and European ecosystems. This will strengthen applied research capacity, benefiting not only UAS but also other Higher Education Institutions across Member States as regional engines of innovation. Above all, it bridges the gap between basic research and market application leading to greater competitiveness and societal strength.

In the Netherlands, **Regieorgaan SIA**, a division of the **Dutch Science Council NWO**, provides targeted support for UAS-based applied research. Its **tailored governance model** ensures collaboration between universities, industry representatives, and research institutes, fostering **real-world impact**. This has allowed for more than 3000 impact-driven research projects (RAAK).

[!\[\]\(799877f5c2f906134441300079881630_img.jpg\) Regieorgaan SIA - Dutch UAS Research](#)

[!\[\]\(41aea2746216b27a6939d696d8e035da_img.jpg\) Projectenbank Regieorgaan SIA](#)

Key Success Factors:

1. Grants supporting both **early-stage research and scaling innovations to market**

2. **Short-term (1-2 years) low-threshold** grants with **minimal administration** to **increase SME participation**
3. **Mandatory SME partnerships** for application-driven research
4. **Student involvement at all EQF levels**, integrating education and research
5. **Balanced proposal evaluation**, including experts from **business and academia**

To help bridge Europe's innovation gap as efficiently as the in Dutch ecosystems, we strongly advocate for a **dedicated and low-threshold funding** for **applied research** to be created in FP10. This will support innovation for demand-driven applied research and real-world applications. It will promote and support **regional-based innovation ecosystems** of industries, knowledge institutions and government entities. This can be achieved through applying demonstrated funding instruments with **tailored rules and procedures** to support **applied research**. This requires adequate funding for, among others, UAS across Europe. We believe that **doubling the budget** of research and innovation in FP10, and dedicating a sizeable portion to impact driven research will be a considerable step towards closing Europe's innovation gap.

Closing Statement

The **Universities of Applied Sciences** stand ready to **accelerate Europe's innovation capacity**, embedding research within dynamic ecosystems to **drive real economic, social, and environmental impact**. We look forward to continuing discussions with the European Commission to **strengthen UAS contributions to achieve the EU missions**.

We are keen to further contribute to your effort in detailing the R & I framework programme trusting that abovementioned proven **Dutch UAS ecosystem** instruments guide the way.

With appreciation for your continued engagement, we remain eager to further exchange knowledge and explore **funding structures** that ensure applied research **delivers tangible results for Europe's future**.