

Foreword by Jet Bussemaker, Minister of Education, Culture and Science

As I see it, imagination and connection are the two most important characteristics of science and the Dutch National Research Agenda.

Imagination is a vital prerequisite for developing new perspectives in scientific research. After all, we are now developing the knowledge we will need in the future.

Imagination finds expression in the vast number of questions posed by scientists, citizens, businesses, and civil society organisations as part of the Dutch National Research Agenda – close to 12,000 questions on a wide variety of themes and topics. These range from the human significance of art to organising healthcare on the basis of unique and individual characteristics, showing the depth of people's interest in and commitment to the world of science: one of the main reasons why the Dutch National Research Agenda exists.

The questions the Agenda addresses also illustrate the challenges that science is facing in the years to come, and the essential nature of connection and cooperation between sectors and disciplines.

If we want to find answers that have an impact on society, I firmly believe that we need to come up with new, creative combinations. Combinations between technology and art, between historical roots and futuristic concepts, facts and imagination, science and the working world, new and existing knowledge. The Dutch National Research Agenda invites us to make these connections and to embrace cooperation throughout the chain of knowledge, in particular with society.

One inspiring example is the collaboration between museums, universities, universities of applied sciences, and industry, aimed at developing innovative products on the basis of long-established museum collections. One research group is using the collection of the Naturalis Biodiversity Centre in Leiden to develop natural sweeteners, which can be sustainably cultivated and help prevent diabetes. Museum collections are also a source of expertise, for example helping customs officials to detect endangered wood species in musical instruments.

The essays in this volume, all of which reflect upon the Dutch National Research Agenda, can be seen as an ode to imagination and connection. They are also an ode to critical inquiry, encouraging us to continue to interrogate the types of questions we ask.

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