PARLEMENT & WETENSCHAP

About Parliament & Science

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Parliament & Science

Since 2011, The Young Academy, KNAW, NWO and Universities of the Netherlands have been working with the Dutch House of Representatives to give scientific knowledge a more prominent place in the work of Parliament. After a pilot phase, their collaboration was enshrined in the Parliament & Science Agreement (1 October 2014) and intensified as of 1 January 2019. The number of participating science organisations has also been increased: TNO joined the partners in early 2019, UMCNL in early 2020 and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences in early 2026.[1]

Building bridges between parliament and science

'Fact-free politics is of no use to anyone. To build bridges across the swirling waters that divide these two worlds, we need solid bridgeheads with a deep knowledge base. This requires politicians to understand the workings and natural limitations of science, and to grasp its intrinsic uncertainties. Politicians must learn to have 100% faith in researchers who say they are 50% sure of something. Researchers, in turn, need to realise how much pressure politicians are under to make choices and take decisions based on what can sometimes be very limited information and generalisations. This is where there is a gap between professional doubters and professional deciders.'

(Robbert Dijkgraaf, President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, at the launch of the Parliament & Science pilot, November 2011

1 KNAW: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences; NWO: Dutch Research Council; UMCNL: umbrella organisation of university medical centres.

Tools used

- ***Network survey:*** survey of scientists who conduct research on a specific (usually current) topic of interest
- ***Scientific fact sheet:*** state of knowledge in a particular field
- ***Breakfast or lunch meeting:*** informal conversation between MPs and scientists about a current topic of interest
- ***Mini-symposium:*** meeting focusing on a significant development that could have a major impact and that transcends the remit of individual House Committees
- ***Scientists' assessment of proposed policy:*** scientific assessment of policy and legislative proposals based on Section 3.1 of the Government Accounts Act (*Comptabiliteitswet*)
- ***Scientists' assessment of EU proposals:*** scientific assessment of the potential impact on the Netherlands of EU legislative proposals
- ***Monitoring:*** the staff of the Analysis and Research Department, who are responsible for providing information to House Committees, receive information about current scientific research on relevant subjects

These tools are interlinked to a certain extent. In many cases, a network survey produces the names of researchers who write a fact sheet and are subsequently invited to a roundtable or other meeting. MPs then use the knowledge and information provided by the scientists, for example in debates with the relevant minister.

By way of illustration

During the 2025–2026 session of Parliament, Parliament & Science conducted 26 network and other types of surveys. It was involved in 15 technical briefings, roundtable meetings and other meetings. Participating scientists wrote a total of 11 scientific fact sheets covering 10 different topics. Three scientists' assessments and two scientists' assessment of EU proposals (a new tool) were completed, and one lunch meeting was held. The annual mini-symposium took place on 27 May.

New tools are regularly explored and trialled with the House of Representatives' Analysis and Research Department (hereafter: DAO).

Working method

Since 1 January 2019, the science organisations have funded a full-time Parliament & Science liaison officer. They also invest in support for the liaison officer by staff from within their organisations. The liaison officer works closely with staff from the Analysis and Research Department.

Analysis and Research Department (DAO)

The Analysis and Research Department was established on 1 September 2017, in line with advice from the Liaison Group on Reinforcing the House's Knowledge and Research Role. Each House Committee was allocated a knowledge coordinator and an information specialist, who act as information and knowledge brokers for MPs. DAO seconds the relevant members of staff to the Committees. Each Committee was also allocated a knowledge budget, for example to fund contract research or knowledge-related events. The third change is that Committees started working with knowledge agendas identifying the topics about which additional knowledge needs to be acquired. DAO organises, advises and manages the knowledge budget. The full knowledge agenda is published on DAO's web pages. Since its establishment, DAO has added EU advisers, legislative advisers and a service team that includes data analysts. It has also increased the number of knowledge coordinators and information specialists on its staff.

By way of illustration: Cases

The digital rule of law

The Standing Committee on Digital Affairs appointed two rapporteurs from among its members to examine the 'digital rule of law', one of the topics on its knowledge agenda. They presented their final report on 2 July. Three pairs of scientists made a significant contribution by writing a fact sheet on this topic. The scientists presented their findings to the Committee on 11 February 2025. The purpose of their fact sheets was to support the development of a digital assessment tool that would help all MPs navigate the increasingly prominent digital component involved in implementing legislation. The assessment tool contains sample questions to assist MPs in evaluating legislation whose implementation relies heavily on IT.

Defence Policy Memorandum 2024

When the Schoof government published its *Defence Policy Memorandum 2024*, the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Defence asked the scientists who had contributed to the first scientists' assessment (see the following case) to also scrutinise the latest memorandum. Part of their assignment was to examine whether the government had learned from the previous scientists' assessment. The answer to that question was 'yes, but...' The memorandum was more balanced on certain key points; nevertheless, the criticism was, once again, harsh. For example, the section on the government's many ambitions is anything but concrete; instead, it consists of a string of unrelated objectives. This makes it difficult for the House to oversee defence policy.

The *Defence Policy Memorandum 2024* has precisely one quantifiable objective, but there is no mention of how it is to be achieved or how realistic it is. Shortly after their presentation to the House, the authors of the scientists' assessment were welcomed to the Ministry for a further exchange of views.

Defence Policy Memorandum 2022

At the request of the Standing Committee on Defence, three researchers examined the (then) new government's *Defence Policy Memorandum 2022*. The memorandum was completely taken apart in just 4 sheets of paper: no relationship to NATO and EU policies or national security policy, no measurable targets, etc. At the debate with the Minister, 12 (!) parliamentary parties were present, all of them referencing the researchers' findings. During the debate, the Minister was compelled to make various commitments: measurable targets, and comprehensive evaluation. A motion was subsequently adopted instructing the government to henceforth learn from the scientists' assessment when drawing up defence policy memorandums.

Long-term approach to COVID-19

At the initiative of a university professor, and espoused by the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Sport, two scientists – including the professor – conducted a scientists' assessment of the proposed long-term approach to COVID-19. The result was presented to a sizeable delegation from the House Committee on 12 May 2022. When asked about the findings, the Minister provided a response, and a large number of MPs made good use of them during the roundtable discussion on 16 May and in the debate on 16 June.

Placement of children in care

At the request of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Sport, two researchers produced a fact sheet on the placement of children in care, i.e. removal from their parents (published in early 2022). The topic was simultaneously under discussion by the Standing Committee on Justice and Security, with members of that committee also drawing on the analysis in the fact sheet. After a journalist discovered the fact sheet, a wave of media attention followed.

Climate policy monitoring

The House of Representatives is briefed annually on progress towards achieving the climate targets, in particular the agreed reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. At the request of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, two researchers studied this method of monitoring. In their scientists' assessment, they concluded that the House of Representatives needed to monitor *more broadly* (system transitions rather than emissions), *more frequently* (than just annually) and with a *longer time horizon* (2050 rather than 2030). In the light of these observations, the House Committee invited the researchers, along with a number of colleagues from a range of disciplines, to contribute ideas on how to implement these recommendations. The House Committee placed the topic of 'System transitions and climate policy after 2030' on the agenda for debate. In preparation for a debate with the Minister, a breakfast meeting with scientists and a round-table discussion (with the authors of the scientists' assessment) were held on that topic in early 2023.

Livestock farm buy-outs

In late 2020, two researchers examined the rationale for the buy-out scheme targeting livestock farms near Natura 2000 areas (a key element of the policy aimed at reducing nitrogen emissions). Their scientists' assessment, carried out in a very brief period of time, was presented to the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The researchers' critical findings have been widely embraced by MPs and are being used, among other things, as a benchmark for evaluating policy. The scientists' assessment received attention in a number of professional journals and on the Argos radio news programme (VPRO).

Article 68 of the Dutch Constitution

Article 68 of the Dutch Constitution states: *'Ministers and State Secretaries shall provide, orally or in writing, the Houses, either separately or in joint session, with any information requested by one or more members, provided that the provision of such information does not conflict with the interests of the State.'* In late 2019, the Standing Committee on Finance requested position papers on this article of the Constitution, given the government's reluctance to share information with Parliament. Four authors were invited to provide their views on the issue. The four decided to produce a single joint position paper. The document provided fuel for a fundamental debate with the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, which in turn led to unanimously adopted motions setting homework for the Minister.

Nitrogen

After the Council of State's ruling on the Nitrogen Action Programme in May 2019, a network survey was carried out and three fact sheets were written. In October 2019 – precisely at the point when the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) came under fire in the media for its system for calculating nitrogen emissions – TNO launched its fact sheet; this came at a very relevant time and generated a lot of publicity. Thanks in part to the network survey, a roundtable discussion with a balanced programme was quickly arranged by the responsible House Committee.

Digital Future

On 4 June 2019, the House of Representatives adopted a motion by MP Kees Verhoeven et al. The motion was the prelude to the establishment of the Temporary Committee on the Digital Future. The relevant knowledge coordinator immediately involved the science organisations in the Committee's preparatory and other work. A link was then established with the Digital Society programme of the Association of Universities in the

Netherlands (now Universities of the Netherlands, or UNL), and discussions took place between the researchers involved in that programme and the House Committee. Consideration was also given to a literature review, to the recruitment of a parliamentary historian and to the composition of the external liaison group.
A network survey was prepared on the topic and scientific fact sheets (see under 'Digitalisation') were produced. In October 2020, the House of Representatives decided to set up a Standing Committee on Digital Affairs, in line with the recommendations of the Temporary Committee.

Nuclear energy

Did it start with Arjen Lubach's TV show? At a certain point, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) placed the issue of nuclear energy back on the House of Representatives' agenda. Based on a network survey, three researchers were invited to each produce a scientific fact sheet on the practical aspects (construction, costs, waste), the 'state of knowledge' and the place of nuclear energy in the energy mix. After delivery of the fact sheets, MPs Yeşligöz-Zegerius and Mulder submitted a motion instructing the Minister to carry out an investigation. The report on that investigation appeared on 23 September 2020, shortly after the issue of nuclear energy had once again been raised in the Parliamentary Debate on the Speech from the Throne. A roundtable discussion took place on 2 December 2020, to which one of the fact sheet authors was also invited. On 9 December, the Montesquieu Institute organised a current affairs debate on the topic, in collaboration with Parliament & Science. The Coalition Agreement of the fourth Rutte government included the aim of constructing two new nuclear power stations.

European Central Bank

In March 2019, three researchers produced fact sheets on the interest rate policy of the European Central Bank (ECB), ahead of a working visit to the ECB by the Standing Committee on Finance. One of these fact sheets formed a central feature in successive debates with the Minister of Finance: a request to push for an EU-level review of the ECB's monetary policy – something that had apparently not been done before. The author of the fact sheet was then asked to lead a group of 'eminent professors' advising the House of Representatives on ECB policy.

Climate Agreement

A common complaint about the Dutch Climate Agreement was that no scientists had been invited to join the sector platforms. In the spring of 2019, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and Climate Policy held six roundtable discussions on the draft Climate Agreement (five on the themes of the platforms and one on horizontal topics such as finance and education) in which science was indeed given a prominent role. Of the 23 scientists invited to these discussions, 21 were nominated by us. The scientists were found to be convincing and lucid. Observation: the conversations with the scientists were particularly interesting because they interlinked themes.

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