

April 2023

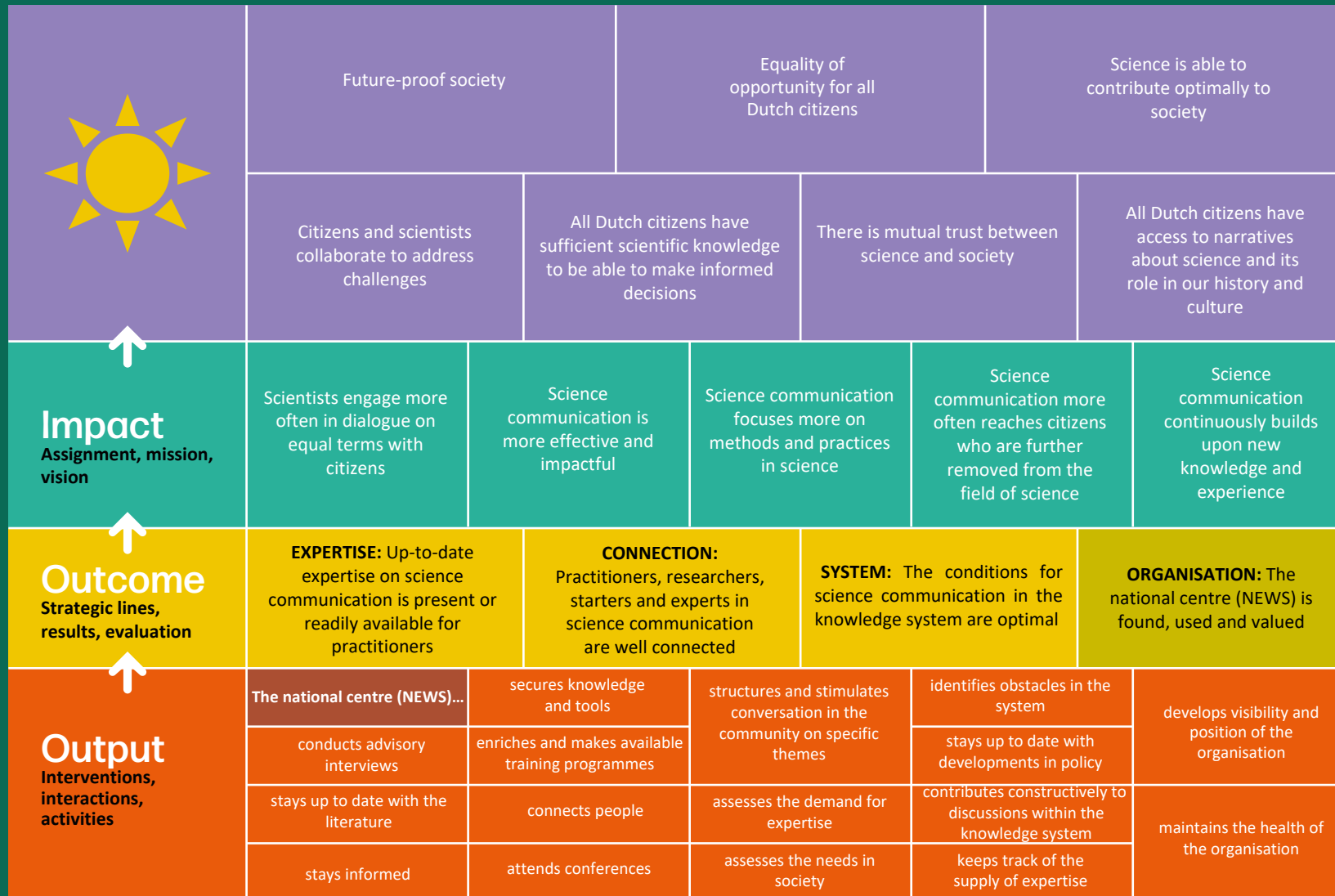
Alex Verkade &
Ionica Smeets

National Centre of Expertise on Science
& Society - The Netherlands

Action plan (summary)

Impact plan

National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society - The Netherlands



Summary

Note: The Dutch word for science ('wetenschap') includes the humanities and the social sciences, which will also be the premise of our National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society. For readability we will use the term 'science' in this summary as the translation of 'wetenschap'.

Science communication is important for society

Science communication is a two-way street between researchers and society about the methods, outcomes and consequences of scientific research. Science communication is important in a society where science plays a major role. It helps citizens to make informed decisions, and enables both citizens and scientists to work together in tackling societal challenges. It also enriches the lives of many people with accounts of our shared culture and history and contributes to mutual understanding and trust between science and society.

Science communication needs to improve

Science communication in the Netherlands is facing a number of structural challenges. Money, enthusiasm and effort are being wasted. This increases the risk of science and society drifting apart, which is likely to result in a decline in mutual trust.

This has to change: science communication needs to improve.

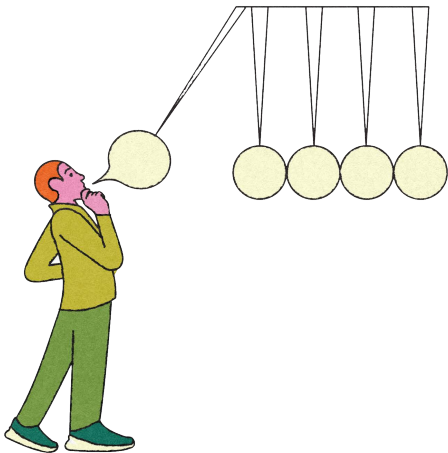
Better science communication means:

- A wider reach in society. Currently, some groups of people within society have more and better access to science than others;
- Engaging more in dialogue and interaction in addition to one-way communication;
- More focus on scientific methods and processes in addition to scientific results;
- Activities have to become more effective and impactful.

In addition, the field of science communication must develop a greater learning capacity to ensure the sustainability of these improvements.

A national centre is needed

The current field cannot achieve these improvements. Currently, science communication is often done on a one-time basis and depends upon the enthusiasm of individuals. They work for universities of applied sciences, research universities, other knowledge institutions, museums, and the media, as freelancers et cetera. Too often those who carry out science communication do not know the experts in this area – communication researchers, experts by experience and others – and consequently do not build upon existing knowledge. On top of that, science communication is not recognised and valued as a professional expertise or as part of a scientist's job.



Minister Dijkgraaf has therefore decided to establish a national centre for science communication.

This document is the action plan for the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society

This plan sets out the advice that we, coordinators Alex Verkade and Ionica Smeets, have passed on to Minister Dijkgraaf of Education, Culture and Science to improve science communication in the Netherlands. We have spent the past six months developing the best course of action. We have spoken to over 400 people: experts in the field of science communication, science and society, representatives of the Dutch knowledge system, parties involved with current initiatives related to the proposed centre, organisations with a somewhat similar task in a different field and national centres for science communication in other countries. We also read dozens of policy documents, evaluation reports and scientific recommendations about science communication. To allow us to also incorporate the perspective of society, we organised focus groups with citizens at different locations and commissioned a representative survey.

Mission of the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society

The centre aims to foster the connection between science and society through better science communication.

Vision of the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society

Science communication in 2033 will involve a wider segment of Dutch society, more often in the form of interaction between scientists and citizens. It will focus more on methods and practices in science, and will be more effective. It will also have greater impact and will be continuously evaluated and improved.

Better science communication means that in 2033 more Dutch citizens will have an understanding of processes and practices in science, as well as knowledge of the role of science in our history and culture. They will more often be involved in science on equal terms.

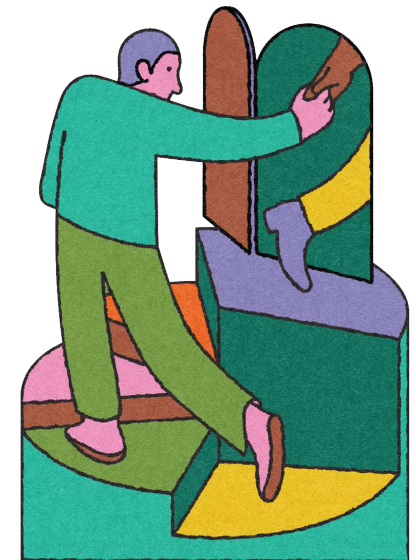
Activities of the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society

The conversations we had as coordinators, our literature study and our research into the perspectives of citizens have led us to a clear-cut conclusion: the centre must act as a catalyst to strengthen the current and future field of science and society. The National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society will do this by making sure that existing knowledge about science communication is shared and used, by connecting science communicators with experts and by improving the conditions for stimulating good science communication.

The centre will apply a range of methods to achieve its mission. It will, for example:

- conduct advisory interviews on how science communication can be done better;
- enrich the current training curriculum;
- suggest topics of conversation based on ideas from citizens among others;
- think along with funders to stimulate science communication, and
- collect and secure knowledge and experience.

The centre will not organise science communication activities aimed at citizens, provide funding, become a training centre or conduct communications research. There are a sufficient number of other parties in the field who perform these tasks, and the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society should not compete with them.





Organisation of the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society

That the centre should be an independent organisation is the second clear-cut conclusion from our work. This will guarantee the independence of sectional interests and is the only way to ensure broad support throughout the field.

A strong director and a team with diverse competencies are crucial for the success of the National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society. The centre will also have a board with broad support and a solid standing, as well as a steering committee in which parties in the field, stakeholders in the knowledge system and critical friends are represented.

The centre will be given space to develop iteratively and adapt to advancing practical insights and changing circumstances. To this end, it will be periodically evaluated against its vision and mission.

Connection between science and society

The National Centre of Expertise on Science & Society will contribute to the structural improvement of science communication, thereby fostering the connection between science and society. ■

