

Summary Advice 70

A radiant future – policies for ‘valorisation’ of the humanities and social sciences.

Scientists and academics want to know how things work. What does this gene do? How do we learn to talk? Why do people have faith? Is global warming real? These are the types of questions that researchers are dealing with on a daily basis. The humanities and social sciences specifically (known in Dutch as the *alpha* and *gamma* disciplines, respectively) address questions that spring from human beings’ desire to understand themselves, their behaviour and their culture. Scientists and academics, however, are often not satisfied with knowledge and understanding alone. Many researchers want to make their knowledge available to society. They therefore publish articles, give lectures and interviews, write books, participate in documentaries, advise the government and start their own companies. Policymakers refer to these activities as ‘valorisation of research’.

This advisory report is about the valorisation of research. The Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT) attempts to describe how we should actually view this process and what needs to be done to encourage it. The humanities and social sciences are the primary focus, which is not the most obvious approach to take because a great deal of policy debate on valorisation centres on the technical, medical or natural sciences.

Suitability and availability

In the AWT’s view, the valorisation process facilitates the practical application of scientific knowledge. By enhancing the suitability and availability of research findings, valorisation increases the possibility that third parties can apply these findings. In this process scientists add value to their research.

Narrow and broad perspective on valorisation

Many people treat valorisation as merely the universities’ contribution to the economy by means of patent and technology transfer. This view of valorisation is appropriate for certain parts of the technical, medical and natural sciences, but hardly for the humanities and social sciences. A broader take on valorisation is more fruitful. Regardless of discipline, research generates more than economic value alone. Science also contributes to the preservation of our social fabric, culture and

democracy. This is certainly the case with the humanities and social sciences. For these disciplines, we certainly have to take a broad perspective on valorisation.

Valorisation in the humanities and social science disciplines

There is tremendous demand for the knowledge generated by the humanities and social sciences in such fields as law, education, mental health, politics and policymaking. There is also a great deal of interest from the public at large as demonstrated, for example, by the sales figures of management books and historical studies, or by the numbers of people who go to museums and cultural heritage sites. Research in humanities and social sciences is also an indispensable part of policy development. Issues in relation to cohesion and integration, intergenerational solidarity, international relations, market forces, globalisation or educational reform cannot be addressed without the knowledge generated by the humanities and social sciences. Even technical problems in relation to mobility, safety and climate change, for example, certainly require input from these disciplines because these problems cannot be solved unless people change the way that they behave.

Valorisation as a task for universities

An issue that policymakers have recently been discussing at length is whether valorisation should be a task for universities. The AWT thinks so: in addition to their role in education and research, universities should also bear responsibility for valorisation. However, we must be careful not to ask too much of them. In the AWT's view, responsibility for valorisation should be borne by the entire research system. All research institutions should make a contribution to valorisation. Of course, more will be expected of some institutions (e.g. the Netherlands Organisation of Applied Scientific Research [TNO] and major technological institutes [GTIs]) than of others (e.g. universities, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences [KNAW] and the institutes of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research [NWO]). Government policy should also be geared to support and promote valorisation, particularly with regard to research in the humanities and social sciences.

Recommendations for valorisation policy

A number of issues must change to facilitate valorisation in the humanities and social science disciplines. The AWT's recommendations therefore touch on several points simultaneously, the idea being to create a radiant future for the humanities and social sciences.

1. Plan socially relevant research

The AWT advises researchers in the humanities and social sciences to bear socially relevant themes in mind when planning research. This requires intensive interaction with parties that are active in the field. One of the tasks of research institutions is to support scientists in this process of interaction.

2. **Ensure that knowledge questions are clearly articulated**

The AWT advises potential knowledge users, and the government in particular, to clearly articulate their questions for the humanities and social sciences. They should organise themselves in such a way that they clearly express their questions and will be able to properly implement the answers.

3. **Plan more multidisciplinary research**

The AWT advises institutions and research financiers to encourage the planning of both multi- and interdisciplinary research. After all, social problems are not restricted by the boundaries of academic disciplines. In order to make it possible to valorise research, scientists should combine disciplines more often, including the humanities and social science disciplines.

4. **Incorporate valorisation into the strategic plans of universities**

The AWT advises research institutions and universities to clearly outline their ambitions with regard to the valorisation of humanities and social science research in their strategic plans. They should organise accordingly. Staff who work on the valorisation of research should receive good compensation and their value should be recognised.

5. **Encourage the valorisation of humanities and social science research at universities**

The AWT advises research financiers, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and SenterNovem in particular, to do all they can to facilitate the valorisation of humanities and social science research by universities. They have already developed the necessary initiatives in the sciences. These successes must be expanded to include the humanities and social sciences.

6. **Designate valorisation as the third task of universities**

The AWT advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to unequivocally designate valorisation as the third main task of universities. This task must be financed from a separate compartment of direct funding. The AWT advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to provide additional resources for the universities' valorisation task.

7. **Include valorisation in the assessment of research**

The AWT advises public research institutes to include the valorisation of research in research assessments. This requires a change to the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). This is a task that could be performed by research evaluators (e.g. Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU)).