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University Rebellion UvA
Attn.: Juul Verschuuren,

Per e-mail

Date
23 December 2022

Our reference
2022cu0959

Subject
Petition: UvA, cut ties with Shell

Dear members of University Rebellion UvA,

We share your concerns about the climate and the sense of urgency expressed in your petition. The climate crisis is real. The various IPCC reports leave no room for doubt: rising sea levels, melting glaciers and rising temperatures are measurable and the consequences for people and nature are serious. However, while the science is unequivocal, geopolitical decision-making is certainly not.

As a public institution, we have a duty to lead by example. Accordingly, we try to play a pioneering role wherever possible. We are therefore working to make our business operations and buildings more sustainable. In addition, we aim to contribute to an accelerated energy transition through our research and teaching. You can find information about the ambitious targets for our business operations [here](#)ⁱ, the wide variety of research projects within institutes and interdisciplinary partnerships is described [here](#)ⁱⁱ, and the ways in which degree programmes encourage students to contribute to the transition to a sustainable society in their respective professional fields can be found [here](#)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Your petition – in which you call for transparency regarding cooperation with the fossil fuel industry, ask for the UvA's Advisory Committee on Collaboration with Third Parties in Research to be actively involved, and call for all ties with Shell to be severed – reflects an important consideration: as a university, we should think about who we work with and why, and also make a moral assessment. When you presented the petition on 13 December, you asked us to respond to it by 23 December at the latest. We are happy to comply.

Transparency

We endorse the need for transparency. Below, you will find a brief description of four research projects with a specification of the primary applicant, the consortium partners and several other details. These are ongoing research projects in which the UvA is involved. Shell is one of the (co-)funders.

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As stated during the recent meeting, the UvA is not involved in research that contributes to the production or use of fossil energy. Among other things, the listed research projects focus on methane reduction, clean groundwater and molecular building blocks for sustainable energy.

Name	Applicant/consortium	Description
The greenhouse gas methane as a raw material for the chemical industry (NWO LIFT grant)	Primary applicant: UvA Consortium: University of Amsterdam, Shell Start date: 15 August 2021 End date: 14 August 2025	Although the concept of waste as a raw material is well known today, we should also develop the necessary chemical processes, as these will be crucial for achieving a circular economy. The researchers engaged in this project will develop a fundamentally new, light-driven method of converting the greenhouse gas methane into useful products. This project will help to reduce the impact of methane on the environment, promote the efficient use of methane as a raw material for the chemical industry and contribute to securing our sustainable future.
PARADISE measurements (NWO ENW PPP Fund grant)	Primary applicant: UvA Consortium: Genentech, Shell, DSM, Netherlands Forensic Institute, University of Amsterdam, VU Amsterdam Start date: 1 March 2021 End date: 28 February 2026	Academia and society need factual data in order to be able to decide and act responsibly. What is the cause behind the patient's symptoms? Is this drug safe? Is this substance explosive? Those who conduct such measurements and come up with new measurement methods are known as analytical chemists. The challenges that analytical chemists face are becoming increasingly complex and require highly advanced equipment and extremely smart software. These innovations are being developed as part of the PARADISE project, in which the University of Amsterdam and VU Amsterdam are working together with Genentech (a Roche company), Shell, DSM and the Netherlands Forensic Institute.
AquaConnect (NWO Perspective grant)	Primary applicant: Wageningen University & Research The UvA is a joint applicant	In the Netherlands, we are increasingly faced with freshwater shortages as a result of severe drought. The large AquaConnect consortium offers a solution for this: its researchers aim to harness new water treatment technologies to make wastewater and brackish groundwater suitable for use.

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	<p>For the long list of consortium partners, see footnote iv</p> <p>Start date: 1 September 2021</p> <p>End date: 28 February 2026</p>	<p>These technologies are supported by a system that determines the water quality required for a particular purpose. The government can then use this system to inform its legislation and regulations. In addition, the researchers are working on advanced computer models that connect water providers to users through ‘smart water grids’, which also include water storage underground. For four regions, the programme will show how they can become self-sufficient in terms of freshwater supply and thereby serve as an example for other places in the world.</p>
<p>Advanced Research Center Chemical Building Blocks Consortium (ARC-CBBC)</p>	<p>Founding partners: Eindhoven University of Technology, University of Groningen, Utrecht University.</p> <p>Consortium including VU Amsterdam, Utrecht University, Delft University of Technology, University of Twente, Radboud University, Leiden University, UvA, AkzoNobel, BASF, Nouryon and Shell.</p>	<p>The aim of ARC-CBBC is to develop the sustainable molecules of the future. Within the UvA, nine projects are in progress or have just been completed in the context of ARC-CBBC. As per Advanced Research Center Chemical Building Blocks Consortium - ARC CBBC (arc-cbbc.nl): ‘The Advanced Research Center Chemical Building Blocks Consortium (ARC CBBC) is the Netherlands’ national research centre for addressing current challenges facing society that are related to chemistry. We bring together representatives from industry, academia and the government in a joint set-up with the overall aim of greenifying the chemical industry. Our research contributes to the energy, feedstock and materials transitions.’</p>

The ongoing projects described above contribute to sustainability, the energy transition and health. Their academic independence is guaranteed.

We were unable to find any examples of Shell sponsoring the UvA, e.g. by funding academic meetings, travel or grants for academics.

Your request, made during the meeting on 13 December, to provide a similar overview of any other companies in the fossil fuel industry is being processed. We will map this out and publish it as soon as it is completed.

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Public and private funding

Independent academic research is crucial for the energy transition and a sustainable future. It promotes understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change, while new knowledge and technologies help us to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Taken in combination, these factors allow us to contribute to measures that focus on facts rather than vested interests.

Naturally, independence and integrity are essential conditions in this respect. The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity takes precedence. The UvA's research agenda is therefore not determined by the fossil fuel industry, or any other industry. By contrast, research is driven by the researchers' curiosity and is almost always based on proposals and ideas from the research groups involved.

The majority of the UvA's research is financed by public funds. More than 80% of research funding comes from the Dutch government, including through the NWO. Another substantial part comes from partnerships with municipalities, provinces, civil-society organisations (including non-governmental organisations) and the European Union. Finally, a small proportion of research funding comes from partnerships with the private sector. In terms of substantive output, this has been highly beneficial. Partnerships, including those with the business sector, promote research.

Obviously, this does not mean that *any* research with *any* external party is acceptable. Agreements on respect for academic integrity and independence, protection of knowledge, freedom of publication, considerations of a practical and financial nature as well as moral and ethical considerations all form part of this process. Several factors play a role, and these must be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis.

Teaching

It goes without saying that the private sector does not determine the curriculum of any degree programme under any circumstances whatsoever – that is up to the educational organisation (lecturers, programme coordinators, the Programme Committee, the Examinations Board etc.).

Your petition states that Shell has been present at or has sponsored career days. This is not the case for the UvA career day. Although information is offered about applying for jobs, companies are not guests and do not provide sponsorship. It cannot be ruled out that Shell has been a guest at career days *organised by a study association*. There are many study associations at the UvA; these are independent organisations with their own board and they make their own assessments in this regard. The same applies to inviting guests to Room for Discussion on the REC, for example, or the 'Bèta Break' at Amsterdam Science Park. These debates are organised by students. We support the freedom of students to invite their own guests – provided, of course, that they do so within the boundaries of the law. The fact that a speaker is a guest from an organisation or a company does not mean that the UvA is working with that organisation or company.

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Sustainability as a yardstick

As mentioned above, the desirability of research cooperation should be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis, including moral and social considerations. The involvement of the Advisory Committee on Collaboration with Third Parties in Research is currently optional. In our view, this must change and become compulsory. The Committee will then be able to issue advice based on both academic and social considerations. This requires a new yardstick that – among other things – allows the following question to be asked: does this research actually contribute to a sustainable future?

We can imagine that you may have questions about this. Where do the boundaries lie, what are the considerations for deciding who to work with and on what, and what is the policy? We consider this topic to be so important that we would like to organise a UvA-wide exchange of views on this issue, possibly through the University Forum, and in any case involving researchers, students, board members and interested parties. We would like to invite you to be part of this.

Kind regards,



Jan Lintsen,
Vice-President of the Executive Board

ⁱ [Sustainable operations – University of Amsterdam \(uva.nl\)](#)

ⁱⁱ [Research on sustainability – University of Amsterdam \(uva.nl\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Education and sustainability – University of Amsterdam \(uva.nl\)](#)

^{iv} Consortium: Amsterdam Institute of Advanced Metropolitan Solutions-AMS, Brabant Water, Deltares, Dow Benelux, Dunea, Evides, City of Amsterdam, Municipality of Terneuzen, GlastuinbouwNL, Port of Rotterdam, HZ University of Applied Sciences, ICT Netherlands B.V., KnowH2O, KWR Water, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, Netherlands Water Partnership-NWP, North Sea Port, Nijhuis Industrial Technologies, NXFiltration, Oasen, Province of North Brabant, Province of Zeeland, Province of South Holland, RoyalHaskoningDHV, Shell, Stibbe, STOWA, Swinkels, Delft University of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam, University of Twente, Vitens, VU Amsterdam, Wageningen Environmental Research, Wageningen Food & Biobased Research, Wageningen University & Research, Water Alliance, the water boards Aa en Maas, Hoogheemraadschap Holland Noorderkwartier, Rijn & IJssel, Scheldestromen, Vallei & Veluwe and Vechtstromen, and Witteveen+Bos