



**PRESS RELEASE**

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**MORE INFORMATION**

<http://bit.ly/HxHV69>

**Full list of participants and universities**  
<http://bit.ly/Qmssl1>

**Programme**  
<http://bit.ly/SAxCNL>

## **Universities to work more with businesses, communities to boost student employability**

**GRONINGEN, the Netherlands: According to university leaders from Asia and Europe, university and business leaders should create more opportunities for students to acquire competences for the workplace and engage with the communities.**

More than 100 heads of universities from 76 universities across 37 countries in Asia and Europe met at the University of Groningen for the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEM Rectors' Conference in the Netherlands (25-26 September 2012). The conference was organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (Singapore) with the ASEAN University Network (Thailand) and hosted by the University of Groningen (the Netherlands).

"It's not a matter of whether universities should engage businesses, but how," says Prof Dr Sibrandes Poppema, President of the University of Groningen.

"The first task for every country with a knowledge economy is improving the quality of higher education," remarks Mr Halbe Zijlstra, Dutch Secretary of State for Higher Education, who opened the conference. University leaders present stressed that excellence and widening access are not mutually exclusive and are actually complementary.

"There is a gap between theory being taught in the universities and the practical requirements of the job market," says Vicki Baars, Vice President for Union Development at the National Union of Students in the UK. Students, who participated in the ASEM Rectors' Conference for the first time, presented their own set of recommendations. They suggested that "soft skills", such as intercultural and communication skills be integrated in the curriculum.

The debate over the years on the university's role with regards to employment has changed. "In the past, universities prepared students for a career for life. Nowadays, we develop students for a lifetime of careers," said Prof Tan Tai Yong, Vice-Provost for Student Life from the National University of Singapore.

Further recommendations from the rectors include promoting a credit-transfer system within ASEM; re-examining academic excellence; promoting student entrepreneurialism; increasing student participation in the ASEM education process through engaging student associations; supporting lifelong learning; and creating platforms for exchange of good practices on University Social Responsibility through industry and community engagement.

The results and recommendations will be forwarded for the consideration of the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (May 2013) in Malaysia.

The 4<sup>th</sup> ASEM Rectors' Conference will be co-hosted by the Chulalongkorn University and the Office of the Higher Education Commission in Thailand in 2014. #####

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Dutch Secretary of State for Higher Education Mr Halbe Zijlstra emphasised quality of education over the quantity of student intakes

## ABOUT THE ORGANISERS



The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) promotes greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Through ASEF, civil society concerns are included as a vital component of deliberations of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which currently comprises of 46 member states plus the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat ([www.aseminfoboard.org](http://www.aseminfoboard.org)). ASEF was established in February 1997 by the participating governments of ASEM and has since engaged over 17,000 direct participants through more than 600 projects in the realms of economy and society, environment, education, public health, arts and culture and human rights and governance. [www.asef.org](http://www.asef.org)

In 2012, ASEF is commemorating its 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and invites everyone to take part in celebrating **Connected Histories, Shared Future**.



Founded in 1614, the **University of Groningen (RUG)** enjoys an international reputation as one of the oldest and leading research universities in Europe with around 28,000 BA, MA and PhD students and more than 5,000 staff members. More than 10% of the student population is international, whereas 20% of the academic staff comes from abroad. Through research on themes such as 'healthy ageing', 'energy and sustainability' and 'sustainable society' the University of Groningen is contributing to some of the major social issues of the 21st century, using to the full the added value of cooperation with other knowledge institutes, government, industry and citizens in both Europe, Asia and other parts of the world. [www.rug.nl](http://www.rug.nl)



The **ASEAN University Network (AUN)** established under the umbrella of ASEAN as a result of the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in 1992. The AUN came into full operation in November 1995 with its secretariat office set up in Bangkok. AUN is an autonomous organisation responsible for higher education in ASEAN countries, dealing with the promotion of human resources and development in higher education within the region and its dialogue partners. The AUN is the main coordinating and monitoring agency as identified as one of the ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial bodies serving as ASEAN's implementing agency in higher education for the region's move towards ASEAN Community. [www.aunsec.org](http://www.aunsec.org)

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