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## Information and communication technology (ICT)

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### LETTER FROM THE STATE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SCIENCE AND FROM THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND KINGDOM RELATIONS

To the President of the Lower House of the States General  
The Hague, 30 June 2011

In accordance with our previous commitment<sup>1</sup> we hereby present you with the Archive Vision aimed at archiving and handling information in the digital era. Modern-day IT and digitization have transformed the government's information management. The Public Records Act of 1995 assumed archival material to be paper, and paper can wait. Even after many years it can be brought into order and selected for transfer to a public archive institution. There is a time limit of 20 years with an extension of up to 30 years to do so. Nowadays however we are faced with digital information that without proper care will disappear or become inaccessible in a very short period of time. The need for an archive does not commence after 20 years but comes into existence the moment the information is created. This requires a completely different approach if information is to be managed sustainably and stored for future generations.

The government also forms part of the information society. An open society in which digital information is instantly available. That is the light in which we must reassess openness and reuse. Most information can be available to everyone sooner than 20 years on. By doing so, the government accommodates its citizens. It also reinforces the trust the citizens can put in their government.

Roughly 10% to 15% of the information produced by the government ends up in a public archive institution. But the «Archive Collection NL» comprises more than just government information. It is precisely the interaction between government and society that produces a wealth of information. In order to later write the history of today, archives are of interest to social organizations and companies. To safeguard this requires a more focused approach. As government, we must ensure that citizens can readily access the many information sources, as it were through one entrance. The above considerations have brought us to the following challenge and task - to ensure that we manage government information in a *sustainable* way and we give a modern interpretation of the term *public access*. This is done with the overall objective to make the *Archive Collection NL*, in the form of social capital, as *accessible* and *profitable* as possible for citizens and companies. We have attached to this vision a number of measures for the short and long term and we sketch the implications for the responsibilities within the archive sector.

It is a comprehensive vision on archives. The vision ranges from creating an archive to making digital cultural heritage available online. This means that the primary responsibility of the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science for archives and cultural heritage is fulfilled in close conjunction with the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations for the public administration and government of the Kingdom.

This vision does not provide a blueprint for the coming decade as the developments

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2010/07/05/uitstelverzoek-voor-een-motie-en-enkele-toezeggingen-cultureel-erfgoed.html>

in the digital area are too uncertain. For example, who could have predicted five years ago what a prominent role social media was to play in communication? Actions anticipated in this letter should be seen in the light of encouragement. The precise details must be elaborated further on the basis of an innovation agenda for the archive sector. The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science will make structural resources available. Structural means for the duration of the transition from paper to digital in government and the archive sector.

In drafting this vision we have benefited from the input and feedback from the administrative and professional field, including municipalities and provinces, the Council for Culture, representatives from the industry and archive sector and individual institutions from the world of archives, information, education and cultural heritage.

#### *Overview*

Each section begins with a main task, followed by a long-term vision and short-term actions (between now and 2016). Section 1 discusses the question of digital sustainability. Section 2 sketches how the government can make information public in a timely manner. Section 3 is concerned with the representative creation of collections of both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Section 4 deals with better access to the Archive Collection NL. Section 5 is concerned with the administrative division of tasks and roles and the innovation agenda while Section 6 comprises the financial resources. The appendix<sup>2</sup> provides an overview of legislative measures.

## **§ 1. Sustainability**

### *What is the task?*

The world in which the Public Records Act 1995 came into effect was a world in which information was recorded, distributed and published on paper. In some cases information could be kept for 20 years or more before it was selected to be transferred to the public archives. But in the coming decade, government information will almost exclusively be digital. This information is transient and because digital information has a short life cycle, it will quickly become inaccessible. Without adequate measures it will no longer serve as justification and evidence and its existence as cultural heritage for future generations is at risk of being lost. It is hardly comforting therefore that many local governments seem unaware of this task. Sustainable information management commences the moment the information is created. In future, digital information will no longer be physically transferred to the archives, as the Public Records Act now prescribes. That requires a change in mindset in government and a vision on information management as records management<sup>3</sup>, including the associated consequences and responsibilities.

### *Vision*

Government information must also be stored sustainably in the digital future and its reliability and access ensured. A prerequisite is that information can be stored properly at the time it is produced. This requires the expertise of archivists just as much as the input of information specialists and IT architects. But this commitment will only be effective if there is a digital infrastructure to sustainably store and open up this information, i.e. an e-depot, the archive of tomorrow.

There are more things to consider, however. Paper government archives are physically transferred to a public archive institution. In central government, the administrative responsibility is therefore transferred to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. As regards digital information files, the delegation of administrative responsibility will continue to exist, but the physical transfer will proceed differently. It will be downloaded into the e-depot through secure connections almost at the press of a button. Information can be transferred to a

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<sup>2</sup>Available for public inspection at the Central Information Office for the Lower House.

<sup>3</sup>The identification, classification, archive, storage and sometimes destruction of records. For further information see <http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/informatiebeheer-archiefvorming/recordsmanagement>

sustainable e-depot soon after a case is closed or an administrative process is completed. Furthermore, a government body may opt to transfer its own information management to the e-depot of an archive institution well before transfer is required under law. Conversely, it is conceivable that a government body itself has facilities that meet the requirements of an e-depot.

Due to this development, we foresee that, in the longer term, the time of information transfer in the more distant future will no longer be exclusively determined by the lapse of a term or period but by the government body's range of duties, the type of information, the quality of the digital infrastructure and the technical transitions that entail information loss. Cost and efficiency considerations also play a role, as managing digital information and keeping it accessible costs money. The option of use or part use of a digital infrastructure (e-depot) can mean a cost reduction and efficiency gain for individual records creators.

Although this does not constitute a blueprint for the entire government – customized is the operative word – it could in time result in the following division into three categories:

- 1) in the short term policymaking bodies bring their information to an e-depot associated with a public archive system;
- 2) temporary organizations (project or themed) manage their information within the facility of the above e-depot; on termination of the activities the files are subsequently stored here sustainably;
- 3) executive organizations store their digital information in their own digital infrastructure, as long as they require this information for their business operations.

In this model, adequate agreements are made regarding the level of access to the information. Although the term transfer may in part acquire a different meaning, what remains is that the transferred archive material falls, as it does today, under the scope of the operation of the Public Records Act and as such is public in general, notwithstanding statutory exceptions. The Public Records Act stipulates who has administrative responsibility for the care and management of information.

#### *Short-term actions*

Digitization of the government is nothing new. Examples include the National implementation programme for better service and e-government, the Central Government's Digital Work environment, digital business and chain oriented work and the development of norms and standards for IT architecture. In these developments the role of the archivist in conjunction with that of information specialists and IT architects can be strengthened. It requires norms and standards across government. This development forms part of the innovation agenda for the sector.

Furthermore, the government will prioritize the development and expansion of several central e-depot facilities in the coming five years. These are, for example, the e-depot of the National Archives and the digital records facilities of several major implementation services such as JustId and the tax authority. But these also include the municipalities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, that already have an e-depot set up. In light of the common interest and the broader administrative responsibility, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations will discuss with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, the Association of Provincial Authorities and the Association of Regional Water Authorities how these developments should be coordinated. Knowledge of this field is scarce and the aim is to use it to the full for all levels of government. In addition, jointly developing and sharing facilities will save costs and leave room for regional and local considerations. This fits in with a compact and efficient government. The aim is to have all departments and the High Councils of State connected to a government-wide e-depot before 2016<sup>4</sup>. This allows for the

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<sup>4</sup>Parliamentary paper TK 2008–2009, 29 362, no 156. Furthermore TK 2009–2010, 29 362, no. 162 regarding the implementation of digital document management for government up to 2015. Progress is reported in the annual report Management of Central Government. Implementation institutions who wish to transfer their digital

joint digital management of information and records. The National Archives is developing a business or calculation model as basis for an agreement with the records creators about cost price, products and services. The development of this model will become part of the cabinet programme compact government service.

## § 2. Public access

*What is the task?*

The Public Records Act allows a term of 20 years before government information must be transferred to a public repository. That is a lengthy period, particularly in a society where IT and computerization has permeated everything and citizens know how to quickly get information. Citizens should be able to count on a transparent and reliable government.

*Vision*

In a society that provides digital information, government makes information public promptly. This serves the common interest and reinforces citizens' trust in a transparent government. Digital transfer to an e-depot under records legislation makes it possible that in principle information promptly becomes public and accessible<sup>5</sup>.

*Short-term actions*

The coming years will be utilized to put active public access into practice in joint consultation with records creators. Several cities are already experimenting with this. The National Archives will conduct pilots in the area of active public access with several parts of central government, such as the Delta Commissioner. The objective is to make suitable information public and accessible to citizens within a short period.

In addition, a new selection method will be put into practice that is suitable for handling information in the digital era. We discussed in our letter of December 2010 that the government will select digital information quicker and more efficiently than is currently done<sup>6</sup>. The «new style» selection list is the result. Selection lists are public documents published under the General Administrative Law Act (*Algemene wet bestuursrecht*)<sup>7</sup>. A new element of the «new style» selection list is that it provides a clear insight into which information should be stored or destroyed (in due course) but also when the information to be stored should be transferred under public records legislation. In order to implement this new selection methodology, government bodies must have a good overview of their information. The new approach will be implemented across government. The collaboration between the National Archives and the Association of Provincial Authorities has already resulted in a generic selection list that is suitable for all provinces and that fits in well with the proposed «new style» selection list. The new methodology fits in with the framework of the Public Records Act 1995; the Archive Decree will be amended in some areas.

The current 20-year term under public records legislation in which government information must be transferred to a public archive continues to be important in the transition period from paper to digital. This term will remain in effect during the

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archive for permanent storage to the National Archives may do so even before the term under public records legislation.

<sup>5</sup>See also Parliamentary paper TK 2008–2009, 29 362, no 156. The option of a transfer under records legislation to an e-depot in general exists as soon as a file is closed and is no longer required for policymaking or the management process. This can be quite quickly, for example, several years after the end of a cabinet or management period. Not all transferred archive material will become public immediately. Under the Public Records Act, the responsible records creator or legal caretaker may set restrictions to the public nature in relation to privacy, the interest of the State or its allies and the prevention of disproportionate favouring or prejudice of involved natural or legal persons or third parties.

<sup>6</sup>Parliamentary papers TK 2009–2010, 29 362, no 186 with attachment.

<sup>7</sup>As such the selection lists are open to objection and appeal by third parties.

transition but without the current extension period to 30 years. The Archive Decree will be amended to this end.

### **§ 3. Collection building by government and non-government**

*What is the task?*

Archives serve to provide a balanced and representative image of our society. In this context, the Council for Culture talks of the functions of memory, recollection and conscience<sup>8</sup>. This is only possible if the Archive Collection NL forms a comprehensive unity of records material from both government and private organizations (social organizations, citizens and businesses). Furthermore, the digital age requires an active effort to prevent valuable private archives sinking into oblivion. Municipal archives and particularly archival institutions for certain categories traditionally are active and experienced in securing private archives. In general, however, this is done on an *ad hoc* basis, by passively waiting for an archive to be submitted. Institutions are often ill-equipped and do not have a clear collection profile. Within the sector as a whole there is insufficient coordination or collaboration.

*Vision*

A balanced structure of the Archive Collection NL is necessary if we wish to be able to paint a representative picture of our society by the interaction between government and society. In our letter of 22 December 2010, we set out a new and broader selection objective for the government<sup>6</sup>. The government has primary responsibility for its own archives. This responsibility may be extended if private archives or archive collections of evident national interest are at stake or at risk of being lost for whatever reason. The State secretary of Education, Culture and Education follows the system recommendation of the Council for Culture. To be more specific, it concerns the interaction between the government and society as part of the Archive Collection NL.

The many archival institutions that form the Archive Collection NL<sup>9</sup> retain their own primary responsibility for collection building. We do however see a supplemental role for the Central Government in this. The National Archives, in its role as facilitator, will make available the knowledge and methods to the sector and where possible ensure alignment between the institutions. The Government does not aim for new legislation that will interfere with the freedom of owners to have full use of their property. The owner will retain primary responsibility for storing the archive.

*Short-term actions*

To realize the broader selection objective, the National Archives has developed a practical methodology. In doing so, the technological tools are now available to build a representative Archive Collection NL both at government level and elsewhere. Where private archives of evident national interest are concerned, the primary responsibility lies with the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science to ultimately include it in the national collection. As facilitator for the entire archives sector, the State Secretary will make the developed selection methodology available to other levels of government and archival institutions.

The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Education does not follow the system recommendation of the Council for Culture to set up a register of preservation-worthy private archives. This task does not fall under the primary responsibility of the central government but is a matter for the sector itself. The recommendation of the Council to set up a separate fund for private archives at risk of being lost cannot be awarded priority for the time being, in light of the limited resources available.

With a view to the risk of digital loss it is important to actively provide information and advice to private records creators. This entails the importance of their archive,

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<sup>8</sup>Council for Culture, system recommendation archives, dated 26 April 2010, [http://2008.cultuur.nl/adviezen\\_vervolg.php?id=4&advies=6679](http://2008.cultuur.nl/adviezen_vervolg.php?id=4&advies=6679).

<sup>9</sup>Institutions for certain categories (e.g. International Institute for Social History, Aletta - institute for women's history, Netherlands Architecture Institute); company archives, collections of citizens and legal persons with non-independent archival institutions.

its conservation, structure, disclosure and possible transfer in due course to a professional archival institute. This is and will remain a responsibility of the archive sector as a whole.

#### **§ 4. Access to Archive Collection NL**

*What is the task?*

A records collection only has true value when it can be opened up. Over the past years many archival institutions have made efforts to provide digital access to their collections for a wide audience. Currently, various digital services exist in which information about archives can be found and the number of separate websites with records inventories or digitized materials is growing day by day. The digital services are however insufficiently connected and general search engines do not properly open up records material. Good access to the Archive Collection NL is thus becoming increasingly unfeasible.

*Vision*

The Archive Collection NL can only be completely realized when citizens have the best possible access. By creating a central access point that compiles existing digital initiatives, the Archive Collection NL will become visible and accessible for society. A start has been made to create that central access point with the project Europeana. It was launched in 2008 under the auspices of the European Commission and contains digital material from archives, libraries, museums and audio-visual institutions. This platform can be put to even better use by connecting the Archive Collection NL.

*Short-term actions*

Developing a central point of access to the Archive Collection NL concerns all archival institutions and will only succeed with broad support. Technological expertise and joint collaboration are required. But the wheel does not have to be reinvented now that the Netherlands is already linked to Europeana. Europeana and the archival sector can be connected through the Archives Portal Europe (APE) that is also supported by the European Commission in the eContentplus programme<sup>10</sup>, with the objective of building an internet portal for European archives. The National Archives is one of the initiators of the APE and plays a pivotal role regarding the connection of the European archive portal to Europeana.

With regards to organizing a national, central access, the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science considers a number of conditions to be important in advance, in light of support and efficiency. The first of these is the best possible use of investments already made by the individual institutions. Secondly, the preservation of identity and visibility of the supplying parties is important. Thirdly, it is important to consider a database behind the central access which can also be used by broader search services including Europeana (heritage-wide) and APE (archives). Control over the central opening-up should ultimately lie in the hands of the archive sector itself. The sector owns the content which is part of the public domain.

Opening up the Archive Collection NL by a central access point requires further research resulting in a number of implementation scenarios. On that basis a programme of requirements may be drawn up which will expressly include the wishes of users. A feasibility investigation will illustrate the investment and management costs. The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science is prepared to take the initiative for this research with the other levels of government and the archive sector. As of 2012 in the context of the innovation agenda, he will make a programme budget available to the sector as a share in the costs.

#### **§ 5. System**

*What is the task?*

Digitization poses significant challenges to the world of archives and information. Knowledge and expertise are scarce and requires all levels of government to join

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<sup>10</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/econtentplus/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/econtentplus/index_en.htm)

forces with each other and with archival institutions to utilize knowledge as efficiently as possible. At the same time we see a fragmentation of more than a hundred, often smaller institutions in the archive system, while we are faced with substantial investments in knowledge, people and resources to accomplish the required innovation.

#### *Vision*

The archive sector is in a state of major transition because of digitization by the government and society. Successive recommendations and analyses of the Council for Culture, the Heritage inspection and publications from the sector itself underline this development. The interests of digital sustainability, public access and improvement of access to our collections not only imply innovation of the content but also of the system and sector itself. Innovation can only be realized if the sector comes together. The facilities required, such as an e-depot, will be shared or used as a shared service where possible by the compact and efficient government. The system needs a powerful support structure that can serve the entire sector.

#### *Short-term actions*

Administrative collaboration is necessary between all levels of government and the sector to further elaborate on the innovation agenda for the coming years. In addition to central government, participants include the Associations of Provincial Authorities, Netherlands Municipalities and Regional Water Authorities and sector representatives such as BRAIN and the Royal Association of Archivists in the Netherlands. The resulting administrative agreements may be set down in the form of a charter or covenant which includes purpose, responsibilities and agreements by the various participants. The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science is prepared to take the initiative for this. By joint efforts, such a charter can provide the desired impulse to accomplish the required innovation<sup>11</sup>.

In contrast to the previously drafted charter for the library sector 2010-2012, the government in this case only has very limited resources available as a share in the costs. All levels of government continue to be responsible for the digital sustainable storage and accessibility of their archive.

#### *Structure of knowledge and support*

To prevent knowledge within the sector becoming fragmented, resources will be redistributed in the broader framework of the cultural sector. Within the Basic Infrastructure (BIS) the heritage sector currently has a sector institute (Heritage Netherlands) and a development institute (DEN foundation, Digital Heritage Netherlands). The National Archives will be strengthened by the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science in the form of a knowledge and expertise centre for the entire sector in the years to come. The National Archives will also play a pivotal role in drafting and implementing the innovation agenda with the archive sector, including the education centres. The DEN foundation will subsequently be given the opportunity to fulfil its duties as knowledge centre for digital heritage for a further four years (2013-2016)<sup>12</sup>.

#### *National Archives and neighbouring institutions*

The National Archives will work closely with the Royal Library to achieve more efficient business operations. Further forms of collaboration, including in the area of knowledge, cannot be ruled out for the future.

The National Archives will house the collections and services in the area of genealogy with the Central Bureau for Genealogy (CBG) accommodated in the same building. The government grant to the CBG will primarily be used for management and maintenance of the developed digital infrastructure (such as [www.wiewaswie.nl](http://www.wiewaswie.nl)) in order to make genealogical sources more accessible. The

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<sup>11</sup>In this digital age collaboration is required for archives with institutions outside their sector. Conventional divisions between sectors such as archives, monuments, film, photo, art or library are beginning to disappear under the influence of digital media. This collaboration cannot be enforced from the top down, but it should primarily be a task for the sectors themselves.

<sup>12</sup>See Parliamentary letter: «More than quality: a new vision on cultural policy» dated 10-06-2011 with attachment/ policy document, p. 23.

CBG will keep its task as national expertise centre in the field of family research<sup>13</sup>

### *Legislation*

The cabinet does not yet deem it time for an «Information Act», whether or not by means of a comprehensive amendment of the Public Records Act. This fits in with the previous recommendation by the Council for Culture, that IT and computerization are still developing too rapidly to provide a conclusive picture<sup>14</sup>. For this reason, the cabinet is in favour of modernizing the Public Records Act in a series of small steps, without major interventions.

The change in legislation making the provinces responsible for the storage of their own archives in the Regional Historical Centres (RHCs) is a consequence of the coalition agreement<sup>15</sup>. The provinces, as the regional administrative level of government, will become more distinct as possible initiators and coordinators of innovation within their region. Further changes to the archive regulation are included in Appendix 2 to this letter.

### *Supervision and quality assurance*

With its internal quality assurance and management cycle of audit and control, the government is improving the quality of its information management. External monitoring by the Heritage inspection dovetails with the results of this methodology: close supervision where necessary, distance supervision where possible. Under the direction of the CIOs (Committees on Integrity in the Civil Service) the central government will get to work on the implementation of the quality assurance systems in the coming five years<sup>16</sup>. At municipal level, the development of quality indicators by the Association of Provincial Authorities, the National Consultation Committee of Provincial Archive Inspectors and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities is expected to strengthen the internal and horizontal accountability in the coming years.

The Revitalizing Generic Supervision Bill demands a repositioning of the position of provincial inspector. In addition to their regular duties as supervisor, many archive inspectors are occupied with research, assessment and advice. The municipal archive inspectors must primarily focus on a proper connection between local records creators and the archive service. We see a new key role for the current provincial archive inspectors as distributors of knowledge and advisors at a national, regional and local level in the implementation of the innovation agenda, without wishing to infringe upon the division between supervision and advice. The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science will make further agreements with the involved parties on this topic.

## **§ 6. Finance**

For the implementation of the innovation agenda, the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science will make a programme budget available as of 2012 for the coming five years. The budget amounts to a total of € 9 m in 2016 with the prospect of continuation<sup>17</sup>. Assessment and evaluation will take place in a timely manner.

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<sup>13</sup>Because this task is linked to the role of the National Archives as knowledge and expertise centre, CBG's funding will run through the National Archives as of 2012. This will allow for an optimal synergy effect to be achieved.

<sup>14</sup>[http://2008.cultuur.nl/adviezen\\_vervolg.php?id=4&advies=6333](http://2008.cultuur.nl/adviezen_vervolg.php?id=4&advies=6333), «Information: raw material with future value», recommendations on the future of information management.

<sup>15</sup>The agreements between the central government and the provinces concerning the RHCs have been set down in the proposed administrative agreement dated 21 April 2011 between the central government, the Associations of Provincial Authorities, Netherlands Municipalities and Regional Water Authorities: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/convenanten/2011/04/21/bestuursakkoord-2011-2015.html>.

<sup>16</sup>Parliamentary papers 2008–2009 29 362, no. 156.

<sup>17</sup>The budget amounts to €1,5 m in 2012 and 2013 and €2 m a year as of 2014. A pro

Self-reliance of the sector remains the basic principle. The challenge will be to induce investments from another source in light of the relatively limited government resources. The budget is intended for the following:  
1) research and development of directly applicable knowledge in the area of sustainability of and public access to government information; 2) accessibility and prestige of the Archive Collection NL; 3) reinforcement of the system. The government's share in the innovation programme should also be seen as an invitation to the sector to take part on the basis of matching. More detailed elaboration will take place in close consultation with the Associations of Provincial Authorities, Netherlands Municipalities and Regional Water Authorities and other sector representatives and the world of education and study programmes.

### **In conclusion**

In this time of great challenges due to the digitization of the world of information and heritage, fragmentation of knowledge and expertise is an unwelcome situation. Much needed, in addition to a bundling of knowledge, is the collaboration between the government and institutions and between organizations among themselves – including institutions outside the own familiar sector – to be able to realize our vision. The Associations of Netherlands Municipalities and Provincial Authorities, trade association BRAIN and the professional field as are represented by the Royal Association of Archivists in the Netherlands have in the recent past paved the way and made suggestions for the innovation agenda<sup>18</sup>. It is a positive sign that during the preparation of this vision and the regional conference in the autumn of 2010 there was considerable willingness to cooperate and work together. The task now is to jointly detail and implement the innovation agenda. This vision on archive and information offers sufficient starting points to do so, in the opinion of the cabinet.  
*The State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science,  
H. Zijlstra*

*Minister of the interior and kingdom relations  
J. P. H. Donner*

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rata division will be made over the three components of the programme.

<sup>18</sup>See the documents on the websites [www.kvan.nl](http://www.kvan.nl) and [www.archiefbrain.nl](http://www.archiefbrain.nl).