

Introductory talk of Emil Broesterhuizen at the Workshop 'Neuroinformatics: Challenges for the Netherlands', 26 November 2004, The Hague

Ladies and gentlemen,

By our participation in the OECD Global Science Forum our country is involved in the initiation of scientific programmes, of which the scope requires joint multinational efforts on a global scale. Representing the Netherlands in this Forum, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has followed the progress of work in the Neuroinformatics Working Group of the Global Science Forum in the past seven years with great interest. At the meeting of ministers of science of the OECD last January our minister has given her warm support to the objectives and plans laid down in the final report of the Working Group. This support is based on several notions.

The first and most important is, that understanding the brain is a major scientific challenge for this century, with many implications for society as far as its well-being and welfare are concerned. Scientific progress in this important field will also be highly beneficial for innovation in public sectors as health care and in private industry.

Another important consideration is, that the complexity of the brain, being a challenge for neuroscientists, requires a global joint effort for the development of tools for data management and data sharing, and of tools for data analysis and theoretical modelling of unimaginable complexity. Clearly this is a challenge for information scientists, but most challenging is that it requires a co-operative and integrative effort of both disciplines. Furthermore it requires open access to scientific data, as these are the primary products of research. Open access to data is an important issue for my ministry. We realized that international standards and guidelines are needed to bring data access regimes about and that is why we took the initiative in the OECD to put this issue on the agenda of the same ministerial meeting of OECD ministers of science as I already mentioned. The ministers adopted a declaration asking the OECD to develop guidelines and principles for open access to publicly funded research data. In the area of neuroscience the International Neuroinformatics Co-ordinating Facility will be a crucial instrument for data management and data sharing.

Neuroinformatics is an important new field of research for the Netherlands because it builds on the high national research standards in the fields of neuroscience, information science and physical science, and because it sets new challenges for both education and research.

Our ministry fully supports the participation of the Netherlands in the global neuroinformatics programme through a membership of the International Neuroinformatics Co-ordinating Facility. It considers the organisation of a National Node and the setting up of a neuroinformatics programme at the national level an important issue for our national research council NWO.

The goal of this workshop is to bring together the building blocks of such a programme and that is why I wish you a successful workshop.