

Dutch academics targeted by Saudi university to boost its reputation

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Part of the Wageningen campus. Photo: Vincent via Wikimedia Commons

Academics in the Netherlands are also being approached with lucrative offers by a Saudi university with the aim of helping it rise up international rankings, the [Volkskrant reported](#) on Saturday.

[El Pais reported last week](#) that Spanish academics are being paid by Saudi universities to lie about their main affiliation and boost their position on the influential Shanghai Ranking.

Now Wageningen University has launched an investigation into the claims after it emerged two Dutch researchers have gone along with the offer made by the [King Saud University](#), the VK said.

talked about an alliance in a scientific area totally different to my own,' he is quoted as saying.

All he was required to do, Van Groenigen said, is change the name of the institute he most often worked for (Wageningen University) for KSU, and place the KSU first in three publications a year.

Some of Van Groenigen's colleagues were also approached by KSU and made similar offers but refused, the Volkskrant said. Two researchers did accept the offer, the paper said.

One, food technologist Vincenzo Fogliano, told the VK he had named KSU as his primary employer on a '[highly cited researchers list](#)' from 2018 to 2020, following a deal with the Saudis, and had carried out research with the university. He said the money went to Wageningen and that he personally had not been paid.

'I realise it is a grey area and I understand that colleagues would rather not do it,' he said. 'But worse things happen in the academic world. Moreover, you can pay for research and PhD students with the money, so I think it has value.'

Fogliano told the paper Wageningen had given its permission for the deal. The university told the VK it had started an investigation.

Former Utrecht professor Teun Boekhout also said he had accepted the Saudi offer and had received 'significant money'. He said the money had enabled him to continue his research following his retirement.

KSU did not respond to the Volkskrant's request for comment.

The journal Science [reported in 2011](#) that Saudi universities, including KSU, were offering money in exchange for academic prestige.

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