

Dutch get CSR centre

The Dutch government has established an independent 'knowledge centre' on corporate social responsibility to act as a national information point.

Known as CSR Netherlands, the centre is being run with seven full-time staff and five years of government funding worth €6million (\$7.8m, £4.1m).

While it will mainly answer queries from business, the centre will also collect examples of good practice and may broker partnerships between companies facing similar social responsibility challenges.

The creation of the centre fulfills a pledge made by the Dutch government in its national 2001 white paper on CSR. However, it has been set up two years later than originally planned, partly as a result of recent political upheavals.

In the long term the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs wants the centre to be funded by its 130-odd mostly corporate partners – among them Shell and ABN Amro. It has not yet decided whether the centre should be funded by an annual membership fee or by charging for individual projects.

CSR Netherlands' deputy director, Carla Neffs, told EP that much of its programme will reflect the needs of the partners. 'We will have a website and will produce an annual CSR report, which will give an overview of CSR in the Netherlands. Beyond that, we are holding meetings with each of our partners and in March will announce what other activities we have agreed.'

The organization has already been criticized by some Dutch non-governmental organizations for defining CSR too broadly and not putting enough emphasis on the need to raise standards in companies. Joris Oldenziel, a researcher at the Somo Centre for Research on multinational corporations, who co-ordinates a group of Dutch NGOs that has reservations about the centre's remit, said he would like it to ask companies that become partners to commit to internationally recognized standards, in particular the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises and the core conventions of the International Labour Organization.

Despite their reservations, many NGOs have nevertheless become partners. 'It might be flawed at present, but I believe that we ought to give CSR Netherlands the benefit of the doubt and do what we can to improve it,' said Oldenziel.