

# Drug firms eye move to Holland

Life-sciences companies are being wooed to the Netherlands by the country's government, as it seeks to profit from the Brexit-mandated relocation of the European Medicines Agency.

The EU drug regulator and its hundreds of staff will move from London to Amsterdam in 2019.

The Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency, a government body, is in touch with more than 200 companies that are thinking of relocating because of Brexit, in fields including the life sciences, a spokeswoman told Research Europe. In 2017, 18 companies moved to the Netherlands because of Brexit, bringing 483 jobs, she said.

"Interest from firms abroad is growing," agrees Gerard Schouw, a former Dutch MP who leads Nefarma, a group representing pharmaceutical companies in the Netherlands. "There are thousands of small companies based around the EMA that work directly or indirectly with the regulator. I can imagine that a major part of the activities of these companies will be transferred to the Netherlands."

Nefarma is working with the Dutch government to set up meetings with firms, and organising a dedicated conference for companies thinking of moving to the Netherlands in the autumn. It was also involved in setting up PharmInvestHolland, a coalition trying to

by Eleni Courea in Amsterdam

encourage more investment in the Dutch life sciences. The coalition published a briefing this month aimed at persuading firms to set up shop in the country.

According to the coalition the number of biopharmaceutical companies in the Netherlands increased from 205 in 2012 to 420 in 2016. Kaja Natland, the managing director of the Dutch arm of the UK-headquartered pharmaceutical company MSD, said the EMA move would boost these numbers further.

"The Netherlands has good infrastructure, innovation-friendly policies, an international outlook and a strong talent pool," she said. "We want to attract more small biotech companies as well as [getting] global pharmaceutical companies to increase their footprint here."

The EMA will also help homegrown biotech firms, according to Natland. "Being close to the EMA will help start-up companies to be more efficient in the way they use their resources, by making more help and information from the regulators available."

But MSD itself has no plans to move big parts of its operations from the UK to the Netherlands because of Brexit, she said. "We will need to move some regulatory activities, but that is paperwork more than people."

## Unrest over fixed-term posts spreads in Spain

Strikes in Valencia could spread to other universities unless pay and career prospects for professors on fixed-term contracts improve, researchers in Spain have warned.

Associate professors on temporary contracts at the University of Valencia have been striking over working conditions since 29 January. Last week, their counterparts at the Polytechnic University of Valencia voted to strike for two weeks starting on 16 April.

"We've spent years talking with the university managers but we have reached a point where people say 'we can't stand this situation any longer'," said Vicent Monroig, a historian at the University of Valencia and spokesman for the institution's Platform for Associate Professors and Researchers.

Monroig says universities are using renewable, temporary associate contracts of three, six or 12 months to fill permanent positions "on the cheap". Associate professors make up more than a quarter of the academic workforce at many institutions, he said, adding that at his university they earn up to €500 a month working part-time.

The strikes are expected to spread after researchers announced on 3 March that they were setting up a national association of associate professors. The group

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has been endorsed by staff from the two institutions in Valencia, the universities of Alicante, Vigo, Málaga, Murcia, Zaragoza and Burgos, as well as the Jaime I University in Castellón.

"Associate professors around the country have started to organise themselves, and strikes in other cities could take place at the start of the next academic year," Isabel de la Cruz, a sociologist at the University of Valencia and a member of the association, told Research Europe.

Striking professors are trying to persuade their universities to give more full-time, permanent contracts. The strikers also want a proportion of permanent posts to be reserved for them, in part because their short-term contracts stop them from leading research projects.

"We'll take our fight to the courts if politicians do not agree to reform the universities legislation to stop institutions from using this type of contract for staff that should be recognised as permanent," said De la Cruz. "We are demanding an urgent solution."

The University of Valencia did not respond to a request for comment.