

SURF AS INNOVATION BROKER

Text Reineke Maschhaupt Photo Ivar Pel

Ron Augustus wanted to contribute more to society. He recently made the switch from Microsoft Netherlands to SURF, where he has been Chief Innovation Officer (CINO) since September 2020. 'My question to ICT researchers is: how can we together do more for innovation?'

'Last October, all units of SURF were merged into a single organisation. Now we can more precisely determine where our focus should be. How can we ensure that the Netherlands once again progresses faster in the international economy? And how can we deploy knowledge from ICT research for this? In the 1990s, SURF played an important role in the emergence of the Internet. And the new supercomputer that we will install in 2021 is once again state-of-the-art. Money is increasingly important in maintaining that innovative position. If we want to achieve exascale computing capacity, then we will need to invest in international public networks and computer facilities.

With my background, I can fulfil a bridging role between the public and the world of commerce. There is much discussion in society about public values, such as privacy and the emerging power of large players like Microsoft, Google and Amazon. That sometimes leads to polarisation. There is a lot of uncertainty among our members about how that data can be stored in the public cloud. But you can also make agreements about that with public parties. I think that many benefits will be gained by bringing those two worlds together. We can make use of the innovations from companies, under certain conditions, of course.

DIGITAL DATA PLATFORM

SURF can act as a broker with respect to data management from research. Researchers can then use the national facilities of SURF, but they can also switch to the public cloud if that is necessary. I want to make this as easy as possible for them. I also see a role for SURF as an innovation broker in the storage and sharing of research via a digital platform. I would like to call upon ICT researchers to help us think about the form such a digital platform could take.

During the COVID-19 crisis, it has transpired that communal research capacities could be very important. At present, it is still difficult to offer a researcher a quick research pop-up environment. Our goal is to be able to facilitate that quickly using modern resources. Currently, France, the UK, Germany and even Belgium and Finland are progressing faster in that development. With my contribution, I want to ensure that the Netherlands will be a frontrunner once again.'

A portrait of Ron Augustus, a middle-aged man with light brown hair, smiling. He is wearing a blue button-down shirt under a dark blue blazer. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

Ron Augustus has been Chief Innovation Officer (CINO) at SURF since September 2020. Before that, he was Director Customer Success Unit at Microsoft Netherlands. He studied Management Business Administration with a minor in Information Technology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. In his spare time, he teaches courses in art history and the history of science.