



The Olympic ideal reflected in higher education

Faster, higher, stronger. This is the Olympic motto that inspires talented sportspeople throughout the world to achieve greatness. However, not only athletes are determined to reach the top. Promising students all over the world are setting new standards based on the motto *smarter, brainier, brighter.*

The Netherlands has an urgent need for such students, since we, too, are involved in a race – an economic race in which talent is the most important ingredient. Talent that can help the Dutch knowledge economy to develop and successfully market new products. To lead the way in markets that are rich in opportunities and in which high-quality knowledge is key.

However, the raw material of talent is becoming ever rarer due to a worldwide increase in demand. More and more countries search for promising students and more and more countries are offering high-quality education to tempt them in.

The Netherlands has always been an open society – a country in which diversity leads to opportunities and in which talent is rewarded. The Netherlands is open and accessible, particularly in higher education. We have to make use of this strength. The higher education sector, national government and the business community must work together as a team.

What exactly can we do?

Quality

We want to be the best. This has to be the point of departure in higher education. To achieve this goal it is essential for education to have a strong international focus. Any institution that wants to offer its students the best will encourage them to judge themselves on the basis of international standards. All students, and not just the best ones, can benefit from an international orientation that encourages them to get the very best out of themselves.

Reputation

Dutch higher education is in a strong position internationally. Nevertheless, it does not have the reputation it deserves. This may change as universities, universities of applied sciences and the government start pulling together, as they start cooperating to make Dutch higher education – in all its diversity – a recognizable presence on the international market.

Hospitality

International students deserve a warm welcome. The information they receive must be honest and complete. Legal and educational obstacles must be removed. Students' needs must be met – both inside and outside the lecture halls.

Accessibility

A lot of international students have more talent than money. These students, in particular, must be offered proper opportunities. Though the Dutch government is investing in this field, the business community also has a role to play by providing more scholarships and by cooperating in a system of loans for international talent. This would give companies a unique opportunity to connect with future partners and employees.

The new academic year is about to start and universities and universities of applied sciences will be re-opening their doors next week. The Olympic dream of competition and cooperation can serve as a source of inspiration. The government and the business community can help turn this dream into a reality.