

A national alumni strategy



Dutch education is more popular than ever. Each year, more than 112,000 international students from 164 countries enrol in a study programme at a Dutch higher education institution. These Holland Alumni are future key decision makers and promoters of Dutch education. As ambassadors of the Netherlands, they can also open economic and diplomatic doors. In short, we have a vital interest in strengthening the ties between these international talents and the Netherlands after their studies, too.

In order to make full use of this potential, Nuffic, together with a large number of stakeholders, is calling for an overarching strategy: a national alumni programme that focuses on (1) knowledge exchange & innovation, (2) promoting education & binding talent, (3) public diplomacy & building local knowledge, and (4) promoting trade & economic opportunities.

Such a programme requires a good organisation: central coordination, choices in terms of countries, themes and integration in policy.

A global alumni network

From 2009 onward, Nuffic has been managing the Holland Alumni network: a platform where alumni, international students, Dutch higher education institutions and companies can exchange knowledge and information in order to strengthen their ties with the Netherlands. The accompanying database has grown to a global alumni network with more than 60,000 members, 40 local alumni associations and active cooperative arrangements in thematic sectors.

But not fully utilised

This global network of professional offers tremendous potential but can be utilised more effectively. When promoting the Netherlands as an education country, a business headquarters country and a knowledge partner, there is room to make 'much more use foreign alumni of Dutch universities than currently is the case', the SER likewise noted.¹

Alumni can also be used more effectively to reinforce Dutch initiatives for reinforcing local knowledge. For example, the Netherlands has been financing knowledge building in developing countries for decades through scholarships.

Holland Alumni must be used structurally and become an integral part of trade missions and other trade, innovation and investment activities.

¹ SER recommendation 13/01, April 2013, p.29



"it is essential to maintain ties between students and the Netherlands longer. This can be achieved through (...) a good organisation and using alumni networks as ambassadors of the Netherlands."

Chris Buijink - chair of DTIB Steering Committee for International Trade, Innovation and Investment, April 2017

That requires a national strategy

In order to make the most of Holland Alumni's potential, a joint approach is required. A strategy that connects education, knowledge exchange, innovation and investment and trade promotion. This strategy must sufficiently serve and connect both the interests of the Netherlands and the interests of the alumni themselves.

Research shows that alumni are primarily interested in career possibilities and business opportunities.² This fits in with the wishes of Dutch companies that want to realise those opportunities by creating access to local networks and attracting international talent. Educational institutions are interested in the promotion of education, knowledge exchange, improvement of educational practice and cooperation in research, science and innovation. A cohesive alumni policy also offers opportunities to strengthen Dutch government initiatives. Consider, for example, the building of local knowledge infrastructure and the Dutch start-up and scale-up ecosystem.

With four connected pillars and central coordination

The strategy is fleshed out via concrete activities in a national alumni programme based on four connected pillars: promoting trade, knowledge exchange & innovation, promoting education & binding talent, and public diplomacy & reinforcing local knowledge. These pillars need to be further elaborated in consultation with the most important stakeholders: alumni, higher education institutions, representative organisations from the business sector and the government, including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“The (...) alumni network must be accorded a prominent ambassador's role”

**Joint International Vision
The Association of Universities in the
Netherlands and the Netherlands
Association of Universities of Applied
Sciences, May 2014.**

² The needs and wishes of Holland Alumni, Holland Alumni Barometer - Part I, 2012, p. 13



In an accessible and innovative configuration

Successful implementation requires an accessible configuration of the Holland Alumni network that provides quick and direct access to current information. To this end, the platform must be made widely available to stakeholders. In order to prevent fragmentation, the central coordination of the implementation can be assigned to Nuffic.

That is integrated into policy in phases

Finally, successfully unlocking the alumni potential calls for strategic choices in terms of countries, priority themes and integration in policy.

During the first phase, for example, the programme can focus on Southern Africa and China, Indonesia, Germany and Canada.³ These are important regions for both the Dutch knowledge institutions and the business sector. The Netherlands can make the difference here in sectors such as energy transition/sustainability/agriculture/water/food and quantum/high tech/nano/photronics.

Each year, approximately 30,000 students from these countries study in the Netherlands. With its Neso offices in different regions, Nuffic can strengthen local efforts and support local knowledge building.

³ The pilot countries in the country strategy taskforce

Pillars

Knowledge exchange & innovation

Promoting education & binding talent

Suggestions for implementation

Involve alumni in the definition phase of Private Sector Development projects by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency for the sake of expanding the local network.

Create a national *job portal* with vacancies for international talent and room for entrepreneurs to develop their plans in cooperation with expat centres and regional facilitators.

Use theme conferences to connect researchers, scientists, professors and alumni from the Netherlands and partner countries.

Train alumni to be ambassadors for Dutch higher education, the Dutch start-up eco system and public diplomacy themes.

Involve alumni in *fact finding* missions (for example Mexico Oil & Gas).

Use online and offline events to support students and alumni in starting a career in the Netherlands.

Thematic missions.
Use alumni at important trade fairs (Hannover Messe, Shanghai IT fair, etc.).

Recognise alumni with Alumni Awards and create a VIP Alumni base.

Organise thematic pre-alumni activities in the Netherlands in cooperation with knowledge platforms, for example the Water, Food & Business Knowledge platform.

Make Dutch business networks open to alumni and vice-versa (recruitment).

Organise conferences where alumni can work on solving global issues using the knowledge they acquired in the Netherlands.

Establish ties with talents by using them in international organisations via trainee and Young Expert programmes (for example YEP).

Public diplomacy & local knowledge building

Promoting trade

Suggestions for implementation

Set up internship projects for scholarship recipients.

Organise thematic alumni activities in cooperation with Dutch business sector and TKI Logistics, horticulture, agriculture, NWP during trade missions abroad.

Give embassies a larger role. For example in *pre-departure* and *welcome back meetings*.

Involve alumni in the preparation and implementation stages of economic missions.

Make scholarship recipient participation in an alumni network a requirement for receiving a scholarship.

Facilitate internships for students via alumni in the network.

Easy access to alumni database for employees of the posting network.

Facilitate alumni in setting up their own companies (for example via Orange Corner initiative).

Involve alumni in analysing new Ministry of Foreign Affairs projects.

Make the alumni network in the Netherlands open to international companies that want to base their operations in the Netherlands.

Use alumni in public diplomacy such as NGO-related activities but also incoming missions.

Make the alumni database available to the small and medium business sector in the Netherlands in order to help them in exploring new markets.

Geographic focus 1st phase

- Southern Africa
- China
- Germany
- Southeast Asia



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