

## Facts and figures on internationalisation of Dutch education 2018 a summary

In the Netherlands, the labour market and other parts of society are increasingly internationally oriented. For many, interaction with colleagues, customers and/or citizens from different cultural backgrounds has become a part of day-to-day life. It is therefore important for graduates to develop international skills and competencies that are relevant to multicultural society. Pupils, students, teachers and lecturers can do so by taking part in various internationalisation activities.

From primary through to tertiary education, schools and teachers organise a range of activities aimed at developing the international competencies of pupils, students, teachers and lecturers. We have identified a large number of these activities, and brought them together for the first time in a sector-wide overview of internationalisation activities in the Dutch education system. This summary presents the key conclusions for each education sector.

### **Primary education**

In 2017, the PO-raad (Dutch council for primary education) and Nuffic stressed the need to introduce students to international and intercultural society at a young age, as it gives them a broader perspective and equips them to function effectively in society.

The most common internationalisation activity in primary education is early foreign language education (vvto). Our data show that over 1200 schools have applied for grants to start offering early foreign language education. A bilingual primary education (tpo) pilot is also currently underway, in which 19 schools are participating. In bilingual primary education, 30-50% of all instruction is given in English from the first year onwards.

In addition to language education, schools have the option to work with internationally oriented content, such as the International Primary Curriculum. Furthermore, teachers can select lesson materials with an international focus, such as Samsam. There are six UNESCO primary schools in the Netherlands.

In 2016-2017, 12 schools requested mobility grants, covering fewer than 400 students in total. Although these figures only represent a small portion of all the activities that take place in education practice, we can say that mobility is still a relatively small form of internationalisation in primary education.

In 2018, nearly a quarter of the Dutch population had a migrant background, and classrooms are very diverse. This gives teachers various opportunities to work on internationalisation objectives, ranging from the application of teaching examples and lesson materials with an international focus to taking advantage of classroom diversity to help develop intercultural awareness.

Teachers therefore have a large responsibility, in that they must be able to successfully navigate complex themes and contexts, as well as improve students' intercultural awareness and skills. Successful internationalisation in primary education therefore starts with quality teacher training.

Lastly, it is vital for primary and secondary schools to maintain communication with each other. Secondary schools should respond to the existing level of the students transitioning from primary schools. Streamlining an intercultural development learning-teaching pathway is very complex, and is also dependent on a multitude of factors, some of which are outside the school environment. It is far easier to assess students' language proficiency. The challenge

there lies in the potentially large differences in language skills among students entering secondary school. In both cases, it is important for schools to be aware of the prior experiences of primary-school students, and to be willing to engage in discussion on the subject.

### **Secondary education**

In 2016-2017, at least 257 government-funded secondary schools participated in an internationalisation activity or network. This means that 39.5% of schools took part in an activity or network involving language education or internationalisation of the curriculum, or received at least one government grant to promote student or teacher mobility. Of course, schools can also run internationalisation activities without joining these programmes, which makes it difficult to estimate the actual scope of internationalisation in secondary education.

Bilingual education is one of the largest networks, with a reach of over 36,000 students. In addition to language proficiency, it offers international classroom content. This may take the form of virtual or physical mobility, which is a mandatory component of bilingual education. Languages offer access to other countries and cultures, and are necessary for communication with those who speak other languages.

In addition to language teaching, networks such as Elos, Nivo (now merged into the Global Citizen Network) and UNESCO aim to embed internationalisation throughout the curriculum. This can be achieved through:

- internationalisation of the teaching environment (e.g. collaboration with students abroad through an eTwinning project);
- internationalisation of classroom content (e.g. through world citizenship).

First-year students in higher education claim to have experienced internationalisation in higher general secondary (havo) or pre-university (vwo) education primarily in the form of mobility. Bilingual education students also demonstrated greater confidence in their linguistic ability, and considered themselves more likely to go abroad in the future. Teachers believe that their internationalisation projects promote various learning objectives, such as knowledge of Europe and the world, communication, and collaboration in international environments. To a lesser extent, they believe the projects promote entrepreneurship and working in international environments.

Lastly, teachers themselves can take part in international activities. It is crucial that they too acquire international competencies, in order to successfully pass them on to their students. The vast majority of mobile teachers goes to the United Kingdom, presumably to take part in language courses. Conversely, teachers from abroad also take part in Dutch education. The secondary education learning environment becomes more international whenever schools use such teachers in Dutch classrooms, e.g. as native speakers.

### **Vocational Education and Training**

Internationalisation is gaining importance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the Netherlands, with almost all internationalisation activities showing a rising trend. The number of students completing work placements abroad has risen in recent years, for example, putting the Netherlands above the EU benchmark (6% in 2020). Students also rate their international experience very positively, and indicate that they learned a lot during their time abroad. Particularly when it comes to language acquisition and intercultural skills, they consider their experiences abroad to be very worthwhile. However, based on the available

data, it cannot be concluded that experience abroad leads directly to improved prospects on the labour market or a higher income.

We also see increased participation in internationalisation activities that do not require students to go abroad. In 2018 the Netherlands had 36 programmes offering bilingual VET, one of which was in German. International electives also prove popular. Over 3000 students have taken one of the international electives, which cover themes including diversity and interculturalism. Teachers play a vital role in presenting these themes and integrating them into lesson content. Teachers who have been on exchange report improvements in their intercultural skills and an expansion of their professional networks, both of which can be valuable in setting up activities such as online collaboration (eTwinning) projects or discussions on intercultural topics in class.

Internationalisation policy objectives are also becoming more and more ambitious. In her vision statement titled 'Internationalisation in Balance' (*Internationaliseren in evenwicht*), Minister Van Engelshoven of Education, Culture and Science claims to "see greater scope for internationalisation in the VET sector". One of her goals over the five years ahead is to increase the number of graduates with international experience to 10%. Forms of Internationalisation at Home (which are often more difficult to measure) also deserve ongoing attention, e.g. by including world citizenship as part of careers counselling or via a work placement at an international company in the Netherlands.

Despite the increased focus among policymakers and increased interest among students, there is still room to improve internationalisation of VET. For example, it is often still difficult for international students to complete a VET programme in the Netherlands. This is primarily due to a lack of both proficiency in Dutch and of acknowledgement of the learning results. Non-EU VET students also tend to have trouble obtaining a temporary or other student visa.

The accessibility of internationalisation deserves further attention. Participation in internationalisation activities (such as work placements abroad) is not evenly distributed across the VET sector. While over 50% of students spend time abroad in some programmes, such participation is rare elsewhere. Studying abroad is also most common among level-4 VET students. Although this situation is not necessarily problematic and international experience is more important in some programmes than in others, it does raise questions regarding accessibility.

## **Higher education**

There is a long tradition of internationalisation in higher education. In research-oriented education, internationalisation is most prominently expressed through the cross-border nature of research itself. In the applied sciences, internationalisation has more to do with the globalisation of the labour market that graduates end up in. Although internationalisation in the 1990s concentrated mostly on student exchanges and intercultural learning, attracting international students has become increasingly important for some study programmes since the turn of the century. This latest trend is a direct result of the rise of English as a language of instruction. The public debate on internationalisation focuses mainly on this inbound diploma mobility as it relates to the capacity of higher education.

In recent years, new forms of internationalisation such as Transnational Education (TNE), open online and blended learning have taken on greater significance. The varied forms of Internationalisation at Home have also become key aspects in the internationalisation policies of more and more research universities and universities of applied sciences. Unlike the figures on exchange and diploma mobility, there is little quantitative data available on these new forms of internationalisation. Lastly, internationalisation has been embedded in the

policies of the National Government, European institutions and the vast majority of universities in 2018.

The conscious implementation of various mutually cohesive forms of internationalisation presents a major challenge for the future, but one that must be tackled in order to achieve intercultural learning objectives. The goal and content of the set curricula in the various study programmes will be the guiding factors. Another challenge is to make international experiences more accessible to the groups of students who rarely go abroad for studying or for internships. Lastly, the effective inclusion of internationalisation in teacher-training programmes (at home and abroad) deserves special attention, as this will have a major influence on the intercultural competencies of future generations of teachers.

### **General conclusion**

The sector-wide overview indicates that internationalisation is on the increase in virtually every form, activity and education sector. The international aspect of the Dutch education system, therefore seems to be becoming stronger. Educational institutions are consciously investing in internationalisation to equip students for living in an intercultural society, for learning in increasingly diverse classrooms and for working in an international labour market. Students have three means by which to acquire these skills: international mobility, an international curriculum and improved language education. Teachers play a key role by taking part in internationalisation activities themselves.

In order to make quality improvements to internationalisation in the future, based on our research, we recommend focusing attention on system-wide internationalisation, social inclusivity, new forms of internationalisation and the professional development of teachers.

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