

Higher Education in the Netherlands

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Abstract: There are some particular features of higher education in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has had an attitude of openness towards the rest of the world, not only in business, but also in social life and culture. The Netherlands is a place where knowledge, skills, ideas and cultures from all over Europe come together. The Netherlands is non-English-speaking country, but most people can use English fluently. In the Netherlands, There are now 1000 study programs and courses conducted entirely in English, so students have a wide choice. The Netherlands is now attracting more and more foreign students. There are three basic higher education styles in the Netherlands. How to understand the features of Dutch higher education system, the general situation of the Netherlands higher education and different degrees are the topics will be introduced in this article.

Keywords: Netherlands; Higher education style; Higher education features

MAIN SECTION

THREE TYPES OF INSTITUTION

Higher education in the Netherlands is offered at three types of institution: research universities (in Dutch *universiteiten*), universities of professional education (in Dutch *hogescholen*) and international education institutions (in Dutch *internationaal onderwijs*).

Research universities include general universities, universities specializing in engineering and agriculture, and the Open University. Research universities are primarily responsible for offering research-oriented programmes. There are total 14 research universities in the Netherlands, three of which specialize in engineering (Delft, Twente and Eindhoven). Stu-

dents in the research universities could study on Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programs.

Universities of professional education include general institutions as well as institutions specializing in a specific field such as agriculture, fine and performing arts, or teacher training. Universities of professional education are primarily responsible for offering programmes of higher professional education (in Dutch *Hoger Beroepsonderwijs, HBO*), which prepare students for particular professions. These tend to be more practically oriented than programs offered by research universities. There are a total of more than 60 Universities of Professional Education in Holland. Students can follow Bachelor's and Master's programs (often offered in partnership with foreign universities). However, PhD courses are not be offered in

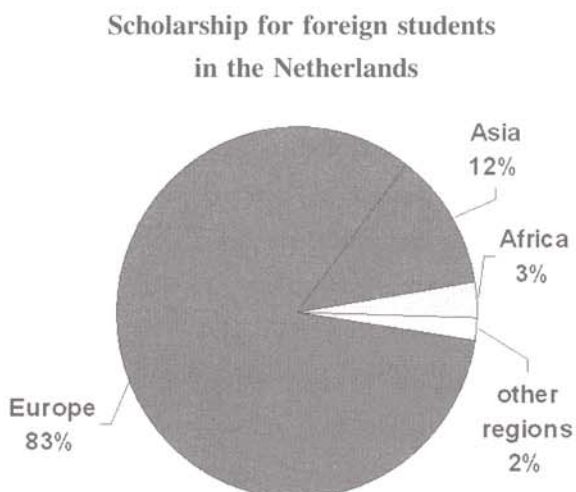
professional education universities.

The higher education system also includes a third branch (this branch is not basic one but just offers courses to a few students), with a relatively small number of students, known as *internationaal onderwijs* (IO), or international education. There are a total of 15 specialized Institutes of International Education in Holland, where students can follow Master's and PhD programs, often aimed at mid-career professionals.

IO offers advanced training courses originally designed for people from developing countries whose jobs require highly specialized knowledge. Problem-oriented courses and programs of various types, including Master's programs, are offered in a wide range of specific fields. The emphasis can be either on research or on the practical application of knowledge. Courses are given in English and last from a few weeks to two years.

STUDENTS

Total enrolment: 510,000 students, with men and women in approximately equal num-



bers. Institutions vary in size, enrolling anywhere from 300 to 25,000 students, there are 3000 to 4000 students in most professional ed-

ucation universities. Each year some 82,000 students complete their studies. (70% of regular students complete their degree successfully. At the institutes of International Education, the completion rate is 95%).

Foreign students enrolled in full-time, government financed programs (2002-2003): Estimated at 23,000. Recipients of scholarships through programs for exchange or short-term mobility: Some 8,750 foreign students study in the Netherlands with a scholarship from one of the main programs. This means that most foreign students have to pay for their study. Dutch government spending on scholarships for foreign students (2003-2004): 4.8 million Euro a year, excluding the scholarships awarded from the budget for development cooperation. Regions from which the scholarship recipients come: About 83% come from Europe. The others come from Asia (12%), Africa (3%) and other regions (2%).

THE DUTCH WAY OF TEACHING

The Netherlands has received international acclaim for its ground-breaking Problem-Based Learning (PBL) system, which trains students to analyze and solve practical problems independently through emphasis on self-study and self-discipline. A large portion of all study programs is dedicated to writing papers, working in groups to analyze and solve specific problems, acquiring practical work experience through internships, and conducting experiments in laboratories.

Students from other countries soon notice that at a Dutch institution for higher education everyone is expected to do a lot of talking. The most common form of teaching is the seminar or working group. It's a big challenge for some

Asian students, because most Asian students do not used to speak in public and are not self-confident of their English.

Under a teacher's supervision, a small group of students analyzes a certain problem. They get together to discuss it as a group, usually on the basis of a paper one of them has written about one aspect of the problem in question. Teachers stimulate students to take a critical view, and everyone is expected to play an active part, unlike in China where professors will give students the theory and certain answers to questions. Usually, most Dutch professors will not give the "correct" answers to the case study, but encourage students to think about questions by themselves and discuss with other students to find suitable ways to solve the questions.

In examinations students must demonstrate not only that they know the material, but also that they have formed well-founded opinions on the subject.

All of these western teaching methods help students become their own teachers and especially open a new door for eastern students to develop practical ability.

CONCLUSION

BRIGHT PROSEPECT FOR THE NETHERLANDS HIGHT EDUCATION

Thanks to various programs of international cooperation and exchange, more and more foreign students are coming to the Netherlands to complete all or part of their studies. All of these students soon learn that higher education in the Netherlands offers lots of opportunities but also lots of hard work. Students are expected to be critical of what they read and hear, and to be capable of working independently.

The Dutch government is attempting to make Dutch higher education as accessible as possible to students and mid-career from other countries. The Dutch government is even cooperative in a financial sense. Higher education is heavily subsidized in the Netherlands, which means that tuition fees can be kept relatively low, especially compared with countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. For Bachelor degree students, the annual tuition fee is from 1400 Euro to 4000 Euro, which is not so high. And Bachelor degree students could get the opportunity to become exchange students to other countries for learning more different cultures and knowledge. This is also an attractive element for students.

The Netherlands is small country, with good quality higher education and competitive tuition costs, so more and more foreign students from European countries and other countries choose the Netherlands to continue their studies.

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