

Country report of the Netherlands: achievements so far relating to the goals mentioned in the Bologna declaration and in the Prague communiqué

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

The Diploma Supplement is considered a suitable instrument for making degrees readable and comparable. Using the Diploma Supplement is not obligatory in the Netherlands. A survey of two years ago showed that the Diploma Supplement was not yet broadly in use. Now, many institutions have introduced or are introducing the European Diploma Supplement and much is done by the umbrella organisations VSNU and HBO-raad from the higher education institutions, the government, studentorganisations and the Dutch ENIC/NARIC, to promote the use of the Diploma Supplement.

2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles

In September 2002 a bachelor-master's structure was introduced in higher education. At the same time a system of accreditation was introduced to guarantee the quality of the bachelor and master programmes. A programme will be accredited either as academic or higher professional. Bachelor- and masterprogrammes will have to be accredited separately.

The universities have converted most of their traditional "one-cycle" programmes to bachelor- and master programmes. For the time being, "one-cycle" programmes may continue. Studies in medicine and dentistry have not yet made changes.

The traditional programmes at the universities of professional education (UPE's) are converted into bachelor programmes. UPE's can present their master programmes for accreditation as from this summer 2003. Herewith these master programmes (mainly business programmes) will be recognized by law. Furthermore new master programmes will be offered in especially the field of education, architecture, health and fine arts.

The main characteristics of the Dutch bachelor-master system are the following.

- Bachelor degrees require 180 ("ects"-)credits in academic education and 240 credits in higher professional education. The primary aim of the professional bachelor is to move on to the labour market. The academic bachelor's primary aim is to follow a master programme. However, an academic bachelor can also opt for entering the labour market.
- Master's degrees in academic education require 120 credits in engineering, in agricultural disciplines, in life sciences, in natural sciences and in dentistry; 180 credits in medicine; a minimum of 60 credits in other subjects. Master's degrees in higher professional education require a minimum of 60 credits.
- Access to academic master programmes is based on entrance requirements determined by the institutions. In general students are admitted to master's programmes on the basis of their having completed a relevant bachelor's programme. In fact the law specifies that every academic bachelor programme should give entrance to at least one academic master programme. In those cases where the master's programme doesn't correspond to the bachelor's programme, admission may be selective.
- Graduates have the option to choose between the bachelor/master degree and the traditional titles (doctorandus, meester of ingenieur for academic programmes and ingenieur, baccalaureus for programmes in higher professional education) thus continue to exist.
- Access to doctoral programmes is determined by the institutions, in general a master's degree is required for admission to doctoral programmes.
- Student aid and funding mechanisms for institutions are adapted to the bachelor-masterstructure.

3. Establishment of a system of credits

Under the 2002 law, an ECTS-compatible system of 60 credits per year is introduced, replacing the old system of 42 credits. According to the new law the studyload for a year's study is 60 credits. Sixty credits corresponds to 1680 hours of study.

The Dutch institutions are redesigning their curricula in "ECTS"-credits. This should be finished by september 2004. Course duration is already expressed in "ECTS"- credits.

The new credit system is not obligatory in the context of lifelong learning (e.g. postexperience master programmes), but may be a condition for accreditation of these programmes.

4. Promotion of mobility

The Dutch immigration procedures often prove to be a serious hindrance to foreigners wanting to study, do an internship, teach or conduct research in the Netherlands. This issue has been taken up by setting up a small team of experts at Nuffic (the Dutch ENIC/NARIC) to address problems regarding visa, residence permit and work permit procedures for foreign students and research staff.

Important recognition instruments such as "ECTS" (see under 3) and the Diploma Supplement (see under 1) are in use. Recognition of parts of a study elsewhere will become more important now that the Dutch system has changed from a "one-cycle" programme to a "two-cycle" system: In a relative short programme (3 year bachelor) it is more important that the entire period spent in another country is recognized, and not just a part of it, like was often the case for programmes of a formal duration of 4 or 5 years.

5. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance

In developing descriptors for bachelor- and master's degrees to be used as reference points for the quality assurance system, the Netherlands joined hands with the Flemish community of Belgium and with several other countries with comparable systems of quality assurance of programmes. Thus the informal network of the *joint quality initiative* was set up. Participating countries were the Netherlands, Flanders, Germany and Lower-Saxony, Spain and Catalonia, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Ireland and the QAA of UK . Later Swiss, Austria and recently Finland joined the network of the joint quality initiative. The network developed general qualification descriptors for a Bachelor and for a Master. These descriptors are tested, also in cross-reference to subject specifications, in the TEEP project, executed under the responsibility of ENQA.

Accreditation in the Netherlands

In 2002 the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO) was established by law, to guarantee the quality of the bachelor and the master programmes. Dutch accreditation is based on peer review of programmes. Flanders participates as an observer in the Board and a treaty will be developed to formally ensure that the accreditation organisation works for both the Netherlands and the Flemish community of Belgium.

Internationalisation of quality assurance is furthered by several actions. First a Bachelor and a Master must satisfy international standards. The general descriptors, as developed by the joined quality initiative, are used as the example. Second, peer review implies the participation international peers. Finally the peer review does not have to be organised by a Dutch organisation, but may also be organised by a foreign quality assessment/accreditation organisation

For further European co-operation the NAO organises a meeting with all other accrediting organisations that have been installed by governments to legally accredit programmes in higher education. The meeting is scheduled for June 2003. Aims of the meeting are provisionally formulated as:

- To contribute to the development of a concept of accreditation and the development of an accreditation framework, that not only meets the national needs, but also the needs of the European Higher Education Area.
- Exchange of information and experiences concerning accreditation, especially with regard to the European dimension.
- To promote a better understanding of each other's accreditation system with the final aim to achieve mutual recognition of the systems and by doing so to achieve recognition of outcomes of the accreditation process.
- To contribute to the political developments concerning accreditation in the light of the Bologna process and the follow-up of Berlin 2003.

6. Promotion of the European dimensions in higher education

The higher education sector is very busy implementing the bachelor-master system. Implementing the bachelor-master system implies the development of new, international comparable, bachelor- and master's programmes. The increase of "European" content is supposed to be part of that process. Also some higher education institutions are participating in the EUA Joint Masters Project.

7. Lifelong learning

Promoting lifelong learning is more and more considered to be an essential element of the Dutch policy aimed at upgrading the level of education of the working population. As such, lifelong learning is looked upon as essential for innovating and improving Dutch economy. In two documents (dated April 2002 and March 2003) Dutch government set out the lifelong learning-agenda for the years to come. The main topics in this agenda concerning higher education are: setting targets for participation in higher education of the population aged 25-64, promoting responsiveness of higher education to the needs of employers and individuals, stimulating development and implementation of instruments for recognition of learning obtained outside higher education, increasing transparency of supply, defining financial responsibility of the government, considering financial incentives to lifelong learning and creating a platform to integrate and coordinate the initiatives of the various ministries concerned.

8. Higher education institutions and students

The higher education institutions and the students are contributing to the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area in that they are shaping an international comparable bachelor-master system. In addition they are participating in the Bologna process as they are consulted (preparation follow-up group, preparation Berlin meeting) and as they attend e.g. EUA conventions of European Higher Education Institutions, ESIB conferences and Bologna seminars.

A special point of attention in the Bologna process is the participation of UPE's in the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. Although the Dutch UPE's co-operate closely in bachelor and master programmes with universities and with other higher education institutions all over and outside Europe, they are not represented in the EUA. New initiatives, which are funded through the commission for the implementation of the Bologna objectives, as the Tuning project or the Joint Masters Project, are therefore not open for participation. As the UPE's represent about 65% of all students in higher education in the Netherlands, the lack of participation of these institutions in new EU-funded initiatives should be an urgent point of attention of the EUA.

9. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

Much attention in the present debate about the further development of Dutch's higher education is being paid to the development of institutions and programmes with different profiles, as this is seen as an important determinant of Dutch's international attractiveness and competitiveness. In addition many higher education institutions are participating in international consortia like the League of European Research Universities, IDEA-League and the European Consortium of Innovative Universities. The new bachelor-master's structure offers new opportunities, e.g. for the development of high quality internationally acknowledged master programmes with a selective admission. Universities are developing such programmes, among others, with special subsidies.

A special point of attention is the international attractiveness of the UPE's in the new bachelor-master system.

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