

>Return address P.O. Box 16375 2500 BJ The Hague

**Higher Education and
Student Grants**
IPC 2250

Rijnstraat 50
The Hague
P.O. Box 16375
2500 BJ The Hague
www.rijksoverheid.nl

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Annexes
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Date

Subject Into the world: Letter on the government's vision on the international dimension of higher education and VET

1. Introduction

Researchers at the University of Florida charged three groups of students with the same set of creative tasks.¹ One group consisted of students who had studied abroad, another group consisted of students planning to study abroad and the third group was composed of students who were determined to stay in the United States. It appeared that the creative skills of the internationally experienced students were by far the most advanced. Internationalisation offers challenging educational pathways and potentially makes students smarter, more creative and more enterprising. William Maddux, INSEAD professor and an expert on the internationalisation of education, confirms this view: 'People who have international experience are better problem solvers and display more creativity. What's more, we found that people with this international experience are more likely to create new businesses and products and to be promoted.'² I am convinced that Dutch education should train 'competent rebels': pioneering thinkers and doers who are able to promote change through a combination of creativity, courage and ambition. In this letter I will present my vision on the internationalisation of higher education and senior secondary vocational education.

In my view, internationalisation is crucial for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and professional competencies. At the same time, internationalisation is extremely valuable in terms of contributing to the students' personal development and identity. As such, it presents a number of interesting interfaces with my commitment to other policy areas of the Ministry of Education, Culture and

¹ Lee, C. S., Therriault, D. J. and Linderholm, T. (2012), On the Cognitive Benefits of Cultural Experience: Exploring the Relationship between Studying Abroad and Creative Thinking. *Appl. Cognit. Psychol.*, 26: 768–778. doi: 10.1002/acp.2857.

² Maddux et al. Expanding Opportunities by Opening your Mind – Multicultural Engagement Predicts Job Market Success Through Longitudinal Increases in Integrative Complexity. *Social Psychological and Personality Science* December 11, 2013. Quote from *Time Magazine*, see <http://time.com/#79937/how-studying-or-working-abroad-makes-you-smarter/>.

Science, which focus on the promotion of citizenship, human rights, emancipation and international awareness. I would like to emphasise, however, that internationally active institutions should also, and particularly, focus on the quality of their own study programmes.

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I would like to draw special attention to the manner in which this letter has come about. There is no lack of ambition in the education sector when it comes to internationalisation. This is why I thought it would be appropriate to challenge the sector to draw up and present a detailed vision on internationalisation. It gives me great pleasure to note that the research universities and universities of applied sciences decided to submit a collective response, resulting in a vision on internationalisation that largely reflects my own views on the subject. This is why I intend to help them achieve the ambitions they have described in their vision.

I also promised the House to discuss a number of topics in further detail in this letter. In addition to dealing with academic and higher professional education, this letter also discusses senior secondary vocational education (referred to in this context as Vocational Education and Training or VET (Chapter 6))³. VET is characterised by its own dynamics in the area of internationalisation, which is reflected in this integrated vision on internationalisation in higher education and VET. The main focus in this letter is on higher education and VET; the internationalisation of academic education will be explored in the Science Vision (*Wetenschapsvisie*) that you will receive after the summer. Given the many connections between education and science, it goes without saying that I will closely monitor the synergies between the two visions.

2. The global dimension of the Dutch education system

Every year, Dutch higher education institutions attract many thousands of students from all over the world. They benefit from the high quality of education in the Netherlands while, in turn, enriching Dutch education as well as the academic community and the knowledge economy at large. The same applies to international staff members working in the Netherlands, and to the countless partnerships between Dutch and foreign institutions. The knowledge sector is an important showpiece of the Netherlands and is increasingly developing into a highly valuable export product. I strongly believe that in addition to stimulating and retaining 'home-grown' talent, the Netherlands could do more to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the global education market. One of the key principles of internationalisation policy is that the parties involved should join forces abroad so as to secure a joint position for Dutch higher education and research in the rest of the world.

The umbrella organisations have identified a number of unique selling points of Dutch education. For example, the Dutch binary system (higher professional education and academic higher education) offers a wide range of high-quality study programmes, from short labour market-oriented Associate degrees to vocationally oriented Bachelor's degrees and academic Research Master's degrees. The Netherlands is also characterised by close collaboration between knowledge institutions and the business community. Outside the English-speaking

³ In implementation of the Jadnanansing–Straus motion (Lower House 2013-2014, 22 452 No. 39).

world, no country offers more English-taught programmes than the Netherlands. The umbrella organisations also emphasise the reputation of the Netherlands as a country with an education and research culture that centres around freedom of speech, critical reflection and intellectual independence.

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I subscribe to the analysis of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen) that the Netherlands could do more to highlight these unique selling points. In this effort, education and research should join forces. It would also be useful for them to tie in with the policy pursued by other government departments, such as the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, and benefit from their infrastructures. This includes an analysis of how Study in Holland branding fits within the overall Holland branding. I am committed to promoting maximum synergy between knowledge institutions, businesses and the government during foreign trips, joint trade missions and other types of collaboration, and within major structures such as the government's top sector policy and the Dutch Trade Board. The economic mission conducted by the Royal couple to Brazil in November 2012 is a good example of this approach. The broad trade delegation of this mission included educational institutions, allowing synergies between education and business to be used to maximum effect.

Both the VSNU and the Vereniging Hogescholen have drawn attention to an instrument which is central to the international positioning efforts of many countries around us: a national scholarship programme for international mobility. Scholarship programmes of this nature offer immediate added value in terms of attracting the best international students to the Netherlands (also see Chapter 4), but can also be deployed to fuel the outbound mobility of talented Dutch students. More generally, a national scholarship programme would serve to strengthen the profile of Dutch higher education, highlighting the country's attractive educational climate worldwide. It is very important, therefore, to develop a powerful and efficient scholarship programme in order to shine the spotlight on the Netherlands and stimulate international mobility.

To that end I have decided to launch a scholarship programme as part of which a sum of approximately € 5 million will become available for scholarships every year. The programme will focus primarily on international students from outside the EEA, but will also be open to Dutch students (i.e., it will fund both inbound and outbound student mobility). Over the next ten years, the programme will enable approximately 10,000 top-class students to study abroad. Half the costs of the scholarships for inbound students – and possibly also for outbound students – will be borne by the institutions, which moreover will share responsibility with Nuffic for the selection of candidates. I will lay down further conditions and determine the ratio of inbound and outbound mobility scholarships in due course. In doing so, I will examine opportunities to involve the business community in the programme. In addition, in cooperation with the educational institutions and Nuffic I will identify the best way to gear student selection to the needs of the Dutch knowledge economy and the national and regional labour markets. I will inform the House about further details of this scholarship programme in the beginning of 2015.

The share of international staff members is on the rise, especially at the research universities. In my view this is a welcome development, because it is important for the Netherlands to remain attractive for talented researchers and lecturers alike. Indeed, it has become impossible to imagine Dutch higher education without the contribution of, in particular, international PhD students. At the same time, international staff members help to reinforce the links with international research networks.

Increasingly, educational institutions are facing the challenge of creating an international profile for themselves. Again, Dutch institutions are leading the way. For example, several of them now offer MOOCs, which, in addition to facilitating contacts between tens of thousands of students from all over the world, also improve the visibility of Dutch higher education at large. As indicated in my letter on Open and online education, I will encourage the development of MOOCs and other types of online teaching in collaboration with SURF, the research universities and the universities of applied sciences.⁴

The VSNU and the Vereniging Hogescholen have noted that institutions are increasingly pushing back frontiers by entering into partnerships with institutions abroad (around 15 Dutch institutions already offer joint degree programmes, and many more offer double or multiple degree programmes).⁵ I have already stated my intention to further facilitate joint and double degrees by eliminating obstacles in current laws and regulations. Some institutions aspire to take further steps, for example by offering full study programmes abroad (transnational education, also referred to as 'offshore education'). According to figures from the British Council, the United Kingdom currently is the largest player in this field, with 1,395 transnational study programmes, 73 overseas campuses and as many as 454,473 transnational students.⁶ Dutch universities of applied sciences and research universities tend to regard transnational education as an interesting instrument that they can use to promote Dutch higher education abroad, present themselves in emerging education markets, further intensify partnerships, facilitate student exchanges and 'sell' Dutch higher education.

I acknowledge this added value and aim to open up transnational education for both non-government-funded legal entities for higher education (rpho's) and government-funded institutions, and for both Bachelor's and Master's programmes. In 2009, the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act laid the legal foundation for transnational education (Higher Education Act, Section 1.19). This provision will take effect once further conditions have been laid down by order in council. In response to quality issues at Inholland University of Applied Sciences, my predecessor in office decided not to draw up an order in council for the time being, but I think now the time has come to make that step. By doing so I will continue the line of approach with respect to transnational education that has been followed since 2009. I will lay down further conditions by order in council regarding quality assurance and a strict segregation of private and public

⁴ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013/2014, reference 31288 362, Letter to Parliament on the digitisation of higher education, 8 January 2014.

⁵ *Internationalisation at home: Dutch institutional policies*. Nuffic, 2014.

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http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/the_shape_of_things_to_come_2.pdf

resources. In the order in council I will also identify the institutions which will be allowed to offer fully fledged study programmes abroad. The point of departure in this respect is that only institutions and study programmes whose quality is beyond all doubt can be given such permission. After all, they will be expected to present the best that Dutch education has to offer.

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The umbrella organisations are drawing attention to the position of Dutch Master's programmes compared with Master's programmes abroad, which normally last two years. However, I do not believe it would be opportune at the present moment to switch to two-year Master's programmes on a large scale, since such a move would prolong the normal duration of studies for part of the students involved, with the associated high costs. I do look forward however to meeting with the educational institutions and discussing the opportunities that they themselves have identified.

Educational institutions each have their own specific profile and excel on various different themes. I aim to challenge them to create a clear educational profile not just to stand out within the Netherlands, but also – and especially – to do so in an international context.

One example of positioning on the basis of reputation, knowledge and network is provided by education and research within the Agri-Food and Horticulture sectors. Knowledge and competencies aimed at climate-smart agriculture, efficient chains and promising agri-businesses have become important Dutch export products. Agri-Food, Horticulture and Propagation Materials are top sectors that have drawn up an ambitious international agenda which aims to expand trade relations and investment in emerging markets and developing countries. Dutch solutions to global challenges such as food security, sustainability and the bio-economy. One distinctive feature of 'green' education is that in addition to training the right people for the labour market, it actively contributes to capacity building and the dissemination of practical knowledge on the basis of a shared infrastructure. Apart from enhancing education, this contribution also supports the business community. Government policy aims to join forces with 'green' education in further strengthening the international position of the cluster.

3. Attracting international talent and binding it to the Netherlands

The Netherlands depends on international talent. Attracting and retaining talented international students is of huge importance to the Dutch knowledge economy. It boosts the quality of education and of academic success rates among both Dutch and international students, improves the academic experience of international students, strengthens the profile of Dutch higher education worldwide, helps expand the pool of science and technology professionals and also yields considerable economic benefits. Moreover, it appears that as many as 70% of students would like to stay in the Netherlands while only an estimated 27% actually do so. Clearly, there is scope for improvement in this regard. Subject to a number of assumptions for important uncertain factors, Statistics Netherlands has calculated that inbound mobility can have a net positive effect of approximately

€ 740 million.⁷ In other words, retaining international talent in the Netherlands strengthens Dutch education and the Dutch knowledge economy alike.⁸

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The number of international students coming to the Netherlands to attend a full study programme is growing, especially in academic education, where over 12% of the student population is now international. In higher professional education, the share of international students has averaged around 7% in recent years. Yet despite this growth, the Dutch score for inbound student mobility is below the European average. Given everything that Dutch education has to offer, I am convinced that we can and indeed should work to improve that score. As in previous years, student quality is our first priority. I do not believe it would be opportune, therefore, to impose targets for inbound mobility.

The joint action plan, 'Make it in the Netherlands!', was launched on 23 November 2013 and discussed with the House on 12 December 2013.⁹ Over the next few years, this action plan will serve as a guide on inbound mobility policy – for the government but also, and especially, for educational institutions, businesses and other parties, including student organisations. The plan unites a range of measures aimed at strengthening international students' ties with the Netherlands. Recent months have seen a great deal of progress in the development of those measures. Nuffic is the secretariat for the action plan and issues quarterly progress reports. The following steps have been taken so far:

- An online introduction to the Dutch language will promote the integration of international students in Dutch society and help them find a job. A variety of online training options have been examined and, following the example of several successful comparable tools abroad, I have decided to opt for the 'serious game', which will also be available as a mobile tool. The online introduction to the Dutch language is expected to be launched before the summer of 2015.
- Information about starting a career in the Netherlands has been gathered in a single portal, www.careerinholland.nl, geared to international students. This information portal is highlighted among international students visiting career events and through online promotion. Links with the business community are being strengthened, for example through an annual conference (NL4Talents) and specific information on the information portal (www.careerinholland.nl) about labour market prospects in the various top sectors.
- The elimination of bottlenecks in legislation is a complex operation that requires a careful approach and needs time. Constructive talks are being held between the Ministries of Economic Affairs, Social Affairs and Employment, Education, Culture and Science and Security and Justice. One of the changes is an extension of the *Zoekjaar Afgestudeerde* (job-seeking year for graduates) to include the target groups of the *Regeling Hoogopgeleiden* (highly educated persons scheme). This will remove the need for aliens who studied or earned a PhD in the Netherlands to obtain

⁷ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013/2013, reference 22452 34, The Appeal of the Netherlands among International Students, 8 July 2013.

⁸ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013/2013, reference 22452 35, Submission letter on joint action plan entitled 'Make it in the Netherlands!'.

⁹ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013/2013, reference 22452 35, annex to Submission letter on joint action plan entitled 'Make it in the Netherlands!'.

a work permit. At the same time, this will eliminate the confusing differences between the two schemes. In addition, a Mobstacles information line has been created where students can report problems in connection with work placement regulations. Up-to-date information about the applicable regulations will be made more specific and provided faster thanks to the Pathfinder application. In addition, it will be made more attractive for international business owners to start a company in the Netherlands. You have recently received a proposal to that effect from the State Secretary of Security and Justice.¹⁰

- The first steps towards regional pilots have been made. In four Dutch regions (the North, the East, the West and Brainport Eindhoven) work is being done to develop a pilot for binding international talent, focusing on collaboration with the business community and regional labour market needs. The results of these pilots will acquire national relevance through the action plan, which will also encourage their dissemination in other regions.
- Finally, organisational aspects of the action plan have been arranged. Actions have been factored into the budgets and division of tasks, the focus group has been established, priorities have been identified and an initial Steering Group meeting has been held.

The Duisenberg motion calls for more strategic recruitment and retention.¹¹ This call is being followed up especially within the regional pilots. For example, the pilot at Brainport Eindhoven specifically focuses on the recruitment and retention of science and engineering students. Apart from that, I will leave it to the institutions themselves to sharpen the strategic focus in their recruitment and retention policies. In collaboration with the business community, they will be able to determine the need for talent within their respective regions. Given the fact that changes on the labour market tend to outstrip the nominal duration of a study programme, recruitment could be given a more generic orientation. In contrast, the efforts to retain international talent are likely to be made from a more strategic perspective. This can be seen in practice at NL4Talents, for example. At this annual conference, some 900 international students and alumni are brought into contact with Dutch employers from top sectors and sectors that are coping with labour shortages.

The scholarship programme will be a very significant factor in terms of promoting inbound mobility. I intend to use part of the scholarships for international students specifically to attract top-class students from outside the EEA. This will not involve 'full-cost' scholarships, but rather a contribution towards the costs of studying. Alongside this new instrument, we will continue to benefit from the European programmes where possible. For example, in addition to the well-known Erasmus scholarships, Erasmus+ will enable students to take out a supplementary loan in order to attend a Master's programme abroad (the Erasmus Master Loan Guarantee Facility). While I do recognise the potential opportunities offered by this facility for attracting talented EU students, it does not appear to hold much added value for Dutch students relative to the Dutch portable student grants.

¹⁰ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013/2014, reference 493897, letter to Parliament on the Start-up Scheme, 18 March 2014.

¹¹ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013/2014, reference 22452 No. 36, motion tabled by the Members of Parliament Duisenberg and Jadnanansing, 17 December 2013.

The Modern Migration Policy, effective since June 2013, has accelerated migration procedures and reduced the administrative burden. Furthermore, the Standardisation (Compulsory Study Progress) Regulations have introduced safeguards to ensure that international students actually come to the Netherlands to study.¹² Under the regulations, international students have to obtain at least 50% of the annual nominal number of credits to retain their student visa. This measure helps to combat inappropriate use of student visas and prevents displacement of Dutch nationals on the labour market. Awareness of the Standardisation (Compulsory Study Progress) Regulations is a point of concern. A recent study by the Code of Conduct Committee has revealed that there is room for improvement when it comes to the provision of information, on the institutions' websites, about these regulations.¹³ This is currently being remedied in consultation with the educational institutions concerned in order to make sure that the information will be up to standard before the end of the academic year. The Standardisation (Compulsory Study Progress) Regulations will be evaluated at the beginning of 2015.

International students who return to their home countries after graduating will remain valuable for the Netherlands as contacts and ambassadors that help Dutch higher education and businesses achieve their international ambitions. However, this calls for an active alumni policy. Both Nuffic and the institutions will step up their efforts in this regard (for example, through the Holland Alumni Network with its 44,000 members). Alumni policy is also immensely important for the group of students from developing countries. Development cooperation programmes such as NFP and NICHE give these talented students the opportunity to pursue at least part of their studies in the Netherlands, on condition that they return after graduating in order to prevent a brain drain effect. They will remain valuable contacts within the context of our international policy. This also applies to Dutch students studying abroad. At the same time it is important to focus on retaining and encouraging Dutch students and, if they do opt for a career abroad, to stay in touch with them through an active alumni policy.

4. Dutch talent across the border

Dutch students themselves are the main force that fuels internationalisation – even before they embark on their studies. One of the many options available to them is to spend a lap year abroad. Over 90% of students who travel in this lap year also intend to go abroad during their studies, and 53% said the international experience they gained during the lap year was useful for their studies.¹⁴ In addition, young people show a surprising degree of international orientation in their social contacts: 95% who spend an international lap year maintain contact with a friend abroad, 50% on a weekly basis or even more frequently.¹⁵

According to the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, the international and intercultural skills that students acquire during their studies are

¹² Standardisation (Compulsory Study Progress) Regulations, Government Gazette No. 15622, 13 June 2013.

¹³ National Code of Conduct (International Students) Committee, Website information survey, December 2013.

¹⁴ Nuffic, *Internationalisering in beeld* 2013.

¹⁵ Ibid.

becoming ever more important as an indicator of success on the labour market.¹⁶ Many employers already apply international experience as a standard criterion; graduates without such experience are the exception rather than the rule. In addition to broadening their international orientation, experience gained abroad will also promote a student's development in a variety of other fields. I am convinced that Dutch education should aim to train 'competent rebels': pioneering thinkers and doers who are able to promote change through a combination of creativity, courage and ambition. This will also contribute to promoting the skills required for the 21st century - a goal included in the Cabinet's response to the WRR's recommendation entitled 'Naar een lerende economie'.¹⁷

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My aim is to improve the balance between inbound and outbound mobility. The outbound mobility of Dutch students has barely increased over the past few years.¹⁸ This means that we are putting our students at a disadvantage and that we fail to recognise the importance of international knowledge and skills. For this reason I intend to stimulate the acquisition of intercultural and international skills and present these as the norm over the next few years. Every student ought to gain such skills during the course of his or her studies, and one way of doing so is to study abroad. I am aware that a number of these students may opt to stay abroad, and I will also make a special effort to strengthen our ties with Dutch students.

If we are to strengthen outbound mobility, four important conditions will have to be fulfilled:

- Integration into the curriculum through a mobility window;
- Provision of information;
- Financial support;
- The international classroom.

The most visible way of gaining international experience is through the student's physical mobility. This may involve short-term credit mobility or a work placement, as well as a full study programme abroad (diploma mobility). As pointed out by the umbrella organisations, the mobility window – a fixed period in the curriculum of a study programme during which the students can study abroad without incurring any delay in their studies – is the ideal way to facilitate outbound mobility. The mobility window also benefits the educational institutions, since it gives them the certainty of offering students a high-quality international experience without the risk of delays. I am aware that it will not always be possible to fit a mobility window in a curriculum and that it does not have added value for all programmes. However, for the majority of study programmes the introduction of a mobility window is a positive step. My aim is to achieve a situation in which virtually all study programmes include a mobility window.

It is very important for students to have freedom of choice when selecting a high-quality study programme or courses abroad. At the same time it is important to ensure a connection with the curriculum in the choices that they make. A wide range of destinations inevitably entails a great deal of research, and in many

¹⁶ Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA), *De arbeidsmarkt naar de opleiding en beroep tot 2018* (2013).

¹⁷ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013-2014, 27 406, No. 209.

¹⁸ Nuffic, *Internationalisering in beeld* 2013.

cases both students and institutions are forced to reinvent the wheel. Improvements can be made, therefore, if more study programmes select a regular partner institution with which to develop high-quality exchange programmes. This will also facilitate the incorporation of international study periods into the curriculum, possibly in the form of joint and double degrees. Since I also recognise the value of tailor-made exchanges, I tend to regard these two options as complementary.

While information about studying abroad can always be improved, I note that many arrangements have already been made in this field. Nuffic has already published a large amount of generic information through www.wilweg.nl and www.beursopener.nl. In addition, I have agreed with Nuffic that their Neso offices abroad will focus more actively on facilitating outbound mobility, particularly through the provision of generic information. The educational institutions themselves could also further enhance their information to students.

Studying abroad may involve extra costs, which prevents some students from taking this step. Dutch students who intend to pursue part of their studies abroad can benefit from portable student grants, and the availability of Erasmus grants is increasing. I will look into the best way for the new scholarship programme to supplement these existing facilities. In fleshing out the programme I will further consider the conditions attached to eligibility for these scholarships.

I promised to explore the possibilities for an accelerated procedure for excellent study programmes, which would reduce the time it takes for a student in a top-class programme at Harvard University, for example, to have certainty about portable student grants. However, given that the processing times for research into the quality and level of specific international programmes are already quite short, I see no opportunities for any further acceleration. As indicated in my answers to parliamentary questions¹⁹, the average time it takes to conduct the Nuffic's quality and level test is less than 15 working days. This means that on average it will take DUO 24 working days to process the request. This average is far below the maximum term of 12 weeks. In my view, therefore, thanks to the short processing time students obtain certainty relatively fast. Also note that this procedure does not centre around the quality of, in this case, teaching at Harvard, but rather on the question of whether the type of study programme is comparable to a programme for which student grants are available in the Netherlands. That test is also relevant to excellent study programmes.

Physical mobility is not a goal in its own right but is concerned with learning outcomes and with the knowledge and skills acquired through a period of study abroad. There are other methods to achieve that goal. It is important to bear in mind that physical mobility only concerns a limited number of students. The group of students who remain in the Netherlands throughout their study period should also gain international and intercultural skills. A study by Nuffic has shown that the Dutch education sector has taken all sorts of initiatives to incorporate international and intercultural components into individual study programmes.²⁰ Referred to as 'internationalisation at home', this approach, according to the institutions, is complementary to physical mobility. For example, in their policies

¹⁹ Answer to parliamentary questions 2012-2013, No. 2380.

²⁰ Internationalisation at home: Dutch institutional policies. Nuffic, 2014.

they state that they participate in international projects, invite foreign lecturers and offer intercultural skills modules. The Katholieke Pabo Zwolle organises a 'guest lecturer week' during which lecturers from foreign educational institutions give guest lectures in Zwolle to allow students to familiarise themselves with international education.

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One of the ways to achieve internationalisation at home is to place existing subject-matter in an international context. As part of the overall integration of international and intercultural competencies in higher education, institutions are also focusing on the didactic and linguistic skills of their own teaching staff. The umbrella organisations have pointed out that the institutions want to further elaborate this approach, for example by setting personal development targets within the framework of the collective labour agreement, by making arrangements within the context of the University Teaching Qualification (BKO), by providing training courses focused on the international classroom or by stimulating physical student mobility (for example through Erasmus+). One important advantage is that unlike physical mobility, the international classroom will reach all students. I have commissioned a survey of possibilities to strengthen the international classroom, for example by learning from experiences gained abroad and by examining the extent to which students in development cooperation programmes can contribute to the international classroom. Collaboration between education and development cooperation will promote both the long-term supply of 'global public goods' and the government's top-sector policy.

5. Worldwide Dutch partnerships

'International' is becoming the norm not just for students; increasingly, institutions can be seen to act as international players in a globalised market. Developments such as those in the BRICS countries²¹ and the next eleven²² are bound to have an impact on the competitive position of the Netherlands. As these countries are intensifying their participation in the 'battle for talent', they will also offer new opportunities for partnerships, as the VSNU and Vereniging Hogescholen have rightly observed. Despite the increasing level of private and public investments in these countries, demand for higher education is still outstripping the growing supply. At the same time the possibilities to meet that demand are developing very fast indeed. Open and online teaching technologies are creating opportunities for highly accessible education on a massive and global scale. In this global playing field, collaboration among institutions is becoming ever more important, for example within the Bologna Process and the European Union at large.

Since 1999 the intergovernmental Bologna Process has generated sweeping changes in Dutch higher education. It has facilitated the phased introduction of the European higher education area, from the launch of the Bachelor's/Master's system and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to the diploma supplement and the national qualifications framework. The Dutch contribution to

²¹ Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

²² Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Turkey and Vietnam.

this agenda is being fleshed out in preparation for the ministerial conference to be held in Yerevan in 2015.

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With over 25 years of experience in providing Erasmus scholarships, the European Union has played a major role in stimulating international mobility, creating a vital infrastructure for internationalisation in the process. And through the new Erasmus+ programme and the opportunities provided by such programmes as Horizon 2020, the EU shows that it will continue to raise ambitions in this field. Between 2014 and 2020, the Erasmus+ programme will be a major source of support for important components of internationalisation: international mobility, joint degrees, international partnerships and capacity building in emerging countries and developing countries. During the European Council of 7-8 February 2013 the Member States agreed on a realistic increase in the amount available for international scholarships in higher education relative to 2013. The budget for 2014 is approximately € 17 million. In addition, the Erasmus Master Loan Guarantee Facility constitutes a new instrument for students to finance their studies. Dutch institutions will have every opportunity to benefit from Erasmus+, and the National Agency for Erasmus+ will actively support them in this.

At the same time, the European Union offers a valuable platform for discussing developments in higher education and exchanging experiences with the policies conducted in the various Member States. This is given shape, for example, within the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and the Education and Training 2020 strategy, as well as through communications on the modernisation of higher education and digital education.

The European Commission also intends to improve the transparency of education, using instruments such as U-multirank, the new multidimensional ranking tool that enables qualitative comparisons between higher education institutions. This instrument, launched on 13 May 2014, is going to be used by a large number of Dutch institutions. It will help them present their profiles and find international partners. The Netherlands will continue to use tools offered by the European Union as powerful supports for the further development of higher education. For that reason, education will definitely feature on the agenda of the Dutch EU Presidency in 2016.

International collaboration is an essential component of the academic world. I will return to this in the Science Vision. I subscribe to the view expressed by the VSNU and the Vereniging Hogescholen that it is desirable for international networks and collaboration to be strengthened, and I support their ambitions in this regard. At the same time I recognise the value of international institutional networks, such as LERU and UNICA, which support the creation of long-term partnerships.

Finally, it is my ambition to contribute to supporting this vision personally as well as through a joint effort, where necessary, with my fellow administrators. Experience has shown that this approach often helps to open doors that would otherwise have remained closed, for example with respect to themes such as the exchange of students, lecturers and PhD candidates. The focus is on the sustained building and maintenance of collaborative ties with partners abroad. One example is the bilateral collaboration between the Netherlands and Germany.

In this context, special attention is being devoted to the relationship with Germany. The political and economic significance of Germany calls for the necessary investments from the Netherlands which, with an eye to the future, will definitely also cover higher education. I have since taken the joint initiative with the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) and with colleagues in North Rhine-Westphalia to expand student mobility from the Netherlands to Germany, both through a pilot scholarship programme (the 'Duitsland Desk') and through a joint effort to intensify collaboration between research universities and universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia, possibly in the shape of joint programmes. The web portal www.studereninduitsland.nl plays an important role in this context. The pilots will be evaluated in 2016. On the basis of the results, further steps may be taken, which may also involve other German Länder.

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6. Further steps in VET

In 2009 the Lower House received an Internationalisation Agenda for Senior Secondary Vocational Education (Lower House of Parliament 2008-2009, 27 451 No. 102). While many of the considerations in this 'old' agenda still apply, most of the actions included in it do not, as they were largely limited to the 2009-2011 period. A great many things have changed since 2009, especially in the European dimension of internationalisation policy for VET. This letter offers an opportunity to reconsider the observations and choices made at the time. By carrying out this effort in the context of internationalisation policy for higher education (research universities and universities of applied sciences), we will be able to reveal differences and similarities between these sectors. For example, I share the view of the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad) that the VET sector can learn from the experiences with international mobility gained in higher education.

The first question that springs to mind with regard to internationalisation in VET is: Why? On average, VET students are several years younger than students in higher education, and when selecting their study programmes they are far less likely to look beyond the borders of their own country and indeed of their own region. In 1996 the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) introduced regional training centres and agricultural training centres with a regional function – and with good reason. Many young people who consider attending a VET study programme focus primarily on the regional labour market. All the same, we have now definitively abandoned the notion that internationalisation in VET should be restricted to neighbouring countries or to 'internationalisation at home'. The world has changed over the past decades, not just for academics but also for craftsmen and women. Businesses are becoming ever more international in their orientation and demand other competencies from skilled workers, as they do from academics, compared with one or two decades ago.

One major challenge is to increase the competitive strength of Dutch businesses in the international arena. The promotion of international skills among (future) employees, the export of high-quality education by Dutch institutions and the development of students' and lecturers' international (cultural) competencies all contribute to that. VET students, like all others, will have to be prepared for a dynamic labour market which is no longer confined to the Netherlands. The border regions with Germany and Belgium are a case in point. More than ever before, international orientation should become an integral part of training – and especially so in sectors such as agri-food, catering and tourism, trade, and

economic and financial services. Due to the globalisation, this also goes for the care and welfare sector, in sports and exercise, and in engineering and safety. I am convinced that both the Dutch economy and Dutch VET students are best served by an effort to achieve a substantial increase in inbound and outbound mobility.

Degree of internationalisation in VET at least ten times lower than in higher education

The degree of internationalisation in the VET sector is incomparably lower – at least by a factor of 10 – than in higher education. One important explanation for the difference has already been mentioned: as a rule, VET students embark on their programmes two years earlier, and therefore tend to be younger, than students in higher education. While it is true that publicly funded outbound mobility in VET has risen in recent years (over the past two decades approximately 50,000 VET students did a work placement abroad), it still only amounts to 1.1% of the student population (5,500 students in 2013).²³ In all – sometimes these students and/or the foreign work placement company share the costs – outbound mobility in VET might be 2% at most. Inbound mobility in VET is much lower still: if we consider EU-funded work placements, in 2013 just 934 students came to this country for what in most cases was a short work placement period.²⁴ Despite claims to the opposite in the Advisory Council on Science and Technology Council's report entitled *Kiezen voor kenniswerkers*, in reality VET students are not counted among the category of 'knowledge workers'.²⁵ Unlike the approach in higher education ('Make it in the Netherlands!'), inbound mobility in VET is not stimulated. The scale of global exchange in VET has thus far been very limited. Again, unlike higher education VET cannot benefit from an Erasmus Mundus programme that focuses on collaboration with countries outside the EU. Within the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, the Netherlands and Belgium did call for the creation of such a programme, but in vain.

A solid international reputation for VET results in 'give' rather than 'take'

Dutch VET has an excellent reputation abroad, which is due in particular to the effective links between education and the labour market that have been integrated into the system, and to the relatively low level of youth unemployment, particularly among VET graduates. In the EU communication *Rethinking education* ('Een andere kijk op onderwijs') from December 2012, the Dutch VET sector is hailed as one of the five world-class systems in Europe (the others being the VET sectors in Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Denmark). Since then, the international interest in Dutch VET – which was already fairly large – has only increased. In the Copenhagen process of collaboration in vocational training the Dutch practice is often upheld as an example, especially during Peer Learning Events.

The emphasis on the quality of Dutch VET – which is justified and will continue to serve as a policy spearhead – has, in my view, upset the balance between 'give' and 'take' in international forums, particularly within Europe. VET parties could

²³ Cinop Erasmus+, mobility data Leonardo da Vinci (2013; not published).

²⁴ Cinop Erasmus+, based on <http://nl.statisticsforall.eu/maps-leonardo-mobility-incoming-countries.php>.

²⁵ *Kiezen voor kenniswerkers. Vaardigheden op de arbeidsmarkt voor kenniswerkers* Advisory Council on Science and Technology Policy, August 2013.

take part in joint missions more frequently than they have done thus far. I do believe, however, that this should only involve missions which offer real opportunities for the VET sector. The institutions concerned should also focus on safeguarding the quality of their own study programmes. In practice, outbound mobility in VET remains limited to work placements, which contribute to the quality of the students' professional training.

The EU benchmark for outbound mobility in VET

The EU has set an ambitious target for VET student mobility (which was endorsed by the Netherlands): in 2020, 6% of the total VET student population should spend at least two weeks abroad for studies or a work placement. This percentage reflects an aspiration that guides national policy but should not be pursued at the expense of quality. This target calls for a solid and collective effort from all the parties involved. In this connection, the VET sector can learn from the experiences with international mobility gained in higher education over the past decades, also as regards integrating international mobility into the curriculum. The quality of the study or work placement period abroad should be the guiding criterion, while the institutions should also ensure the quality of their own programmes.

The launch of Erasmus+ in 2014 will expand the financial resources available, including a substantial increase in the budget for VET.²⁶ The Dutch institutions should use all these resources to maximum advantage.

- On the basis of their own detailed internationalisation policy, nine Dutch VET institutions already hold a 'certificate for mobility' under the European Life Long Learning programme, which facilitates their access to the Leonardo da Vinci subsidy programme. The intention is for all Dutch VET institutions that pursue a structural international policy to hold the new mobility charter by 2020. The charter should greatly facilitate access to EU resources. The Erasmus+ resources may also encourage institutions to invest their own funds in outbound mobility.
- Not only students but lecturers too should be actively encouraged to benefit from the opportunities offered under Erasmus+. Like the MBO Raad, I regard lecturers as important drivers of internationalisation in the VET sector.
- I will therefore ask the National Agency for Erasmus+ to gear its publicity and support efforts to both lecturer and student mobility in VET and to include extensive attention for quality aspects.
- In this connection I will ask the MBO Raad and the Foundation for Cooperation between Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB) to draw up a proposal for simplifying the recognition of foreign work placement companies and of work-based learning abroad.

The time has now come for an integrated EU-level revision of EU instruments that serve to promote transparency and mobility. Apart from the European Qualifications Framework for Life Long Learning EQF – a framework that covers the entire education sector and distinguishes between eight levels of qualification to which the Member States link their national qualifications so as to promote the transparency of their systems and mobility in education and on the labour market – several other EU instruments have been made available specifically for VET to

²⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/figures/index_en.cfm.

enhance mobility levels. Unfortunately however, these instruments, which date from 2008 and 2009, have not been properly implemented thus far. Due to the economic recession, which began immediately after the introduction of these instruments, many Member States have been unable to give them the attention they require, which, in many cases, has unduly prolonged the pilot phase. The instruments concerned are the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European System for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). ECVET is a system for the acquisition of credits on the basis of (international) experience; EQAVET is a system for evaluating the quality of education systems primarily in order to promote quality awareness and the quality of the VET sector.

The time has come for an evaluation of the effectiveness of these instruments (EQF, ECVET and EQAVET) and their mutual connections. As indicated in the response to the broad consultation on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications (EASQ), the Netherlands supports the Commission in its efforts to evaluate and more effectively implement the existing instruments.²⁷ The Netherlands will call for a more effective structure of the credits system for VET (ECVET). This would involve dividing qualifications into units that qualify for credits that can be exchanged between institutions (also at the European level). This would then make it possible to validate the international experiences of students within the curriculum (in the same way as experiences in higher education are validated through ECTS). Adult students could attend fast-track programmes, making it easier for them to obtain exemptions from certain components of the curriculum. This could also enhance transfer mobility from VET to higher education. With varying degrees of success, more than 40% of level 4 VET students move on to higher education; 10% do so at a later stage in their careers. Apart from transfer to higher education, level 4 VET students have a wealth of other options, including transfer to an associate degree or a part-time higher education programme, or they may leave the education system with a Master's title and enter the labour market. It goes without saying that in study programmes, sectors or regions where a premium is placed on international orientation, the effect will be greatest if the orientation is integrated in all stages of the curriculum.

Focus on mobility

According to the MBO Raad, there is a small group (several hundreds) of international students at VET level 4. This information, from the quick scan conducted by the MBO Raad for the purpose of my letter on English-taught programmes in VET, is interesting for a variety of reasons.²⁸ Inbound mobility in VET appears to be extremely small. Perhaps international students are unable to meet the required 3F reference level of Dutch language proficiency. In my letter I highlighted a number of pragmatic solutions to this problem.

In view of the above, I do not opt to amend the law at the present stage, but will first endeavour to increase outbound mobility levels in VET. Specific niches may exist however where inbound mobility can play a distinct role. In such cases, targeted stimulation of inbound mobility is a realistic option, for example through the promotion of inbound mobility in 'green' education within the framework of

²⁷ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013-2014, reference 22 112, No. 1828.

²⁸ Lower House, parliamentary year 2013-2014, reference 31 524, No. 195.

capacity building for food security by relaxing the criteria for student visas. I will explore the possibilities in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The context of 'green' education, being part of the government's top sectors of Agri-food and Horticulture, offers a suitable environment for a possible experiment. This will also enable us to gain the experience we need for a potential broader incentive policy. While I do not believe the time has come for a broad incentive policy to stimulate inbound mobility in VET, I do have an open mind – also in view of the afore-mentioned AWT report 'Naar een lerende economie' – as regards the idea put forward by the MBO Raad to analyse the costs and benefits of such a policy. This would allow us to make better informed choices on these issues in the near future.

Support for internationalisation in VET

I subscribe to the view of the MBO Raad that internationalisation can be an effective tool to promote excellence in VET. This is why I am prepared – as indicated in my letter entitled *Ruim baan voor vakmanschap - een toekomstgericht mbo* – to facilitate this process within the institutions concerned from the € 25 million budget earmarked for promoting excellence in VET in the government's budget agreement for 2014. The amount I have in mind is € 4.5 million. These funds would be made available on condition, however, that the institutions can demonstrate organisational and financial stability and that the study programmes that they wish to nominate for support are of sufficient quality as assessed by the Education Inspectorate. These resources can also be used to finance mobility outside Europe, for example with institutions in China. During my visit to Beijing in March 2014, a new memorandum of understanding was signed with China which lays the foundation for intensified collaboration. In due course this would definitely also include VET programmes on trade and logistics, hospitality programmes or 'green' education (an area where the Netherlands enjoys an excellent reputation).

On top of the € 4.5 million subsidy for VET institutions, I will provide Nuffic with an annual amount of € 0.5 million from the excellence budget. In their merger plan, Nuffic and the European Platform propose to adapt a number of generic services so as to make them suitable for VET, such as the Neso network. Such support appears to be essential in order to ensure the success of the plans that the institutions are expected to develop and to increase the coherence within internationalisation policy for the education sector.

In addition, efforts will be made to optimise the participation of Dutch VET institutions in the Erasmus+ programme. Apart from stimulating learning mobility, as mentioned above, this programme also promotes internationalisation at the institutional level through the instrument of knowledge alliances and strategic partnerships. Furthermore, within the context of the Copenhagen process and the Bruges Communiqué I will – in preparation for the Dutch EU Presidency in 2016 – aim for an agenda and commitment in support of internationalisation in VET.

7. Towards a more integrated support structure

The education sector as a whole should adopt a more unified approach abroad, with sectors and institutions reinforcing each other and using each other's networks. This ambition calls for a support structure that makes it possible to

seize opportunities that benefit the entire education system. As announced in my letter from 2013 on subsidy cuts, I aim to increase the degree of collaboration between organisations that support internationalisation in education. This has resulted in concrete steps towards a merger between Nuffic and the European Platform. In my view, this is a highly positive development which will result in improved efficiency levels and, above all, in improved outcomes. I regard this merger as a significant first step towards the creation of an integrated 'house of internationalisation' – a support structure for the internationalisation of the entire education sector – from primary education through to academic education. The allocation of resources earmarked for supporting VET (see Chapter 6) should be seen in this light. I will also integrate the synergy with the embassy network and the Netherlands Business Support Offices (NBSOs) in this development. Nuffic, the European Platform and CINOP will continue their collaboration for the purpose of implementing the Erasmus+ National Agency.

The Neso network created by Nuffic is an important component of the required support structure. In 2013 it was decided to reduce the budget for the Neso programme.²⁹ However, this also created space for a new approach. The new structure has given the Neso network more focus in the selection of countries and activities, to ensure consistency with the practical needs of the education sector. Several Neso offices will have to close or slim down, but others will be able to actually intensify operations, such as the office in India. The cuts have also resulted in more intensive collaboration with the embassy network. Indeed, in several countries the Neso office will be physically accommodated within the embassy. In order to help the offices implement this reorganisation and take up various new tasks, a non-recurring grant of € 2 million has been made available, to be distributed in equal shares in 2015 and 2016.³⁰

In this connection, also in view of the Dutch EU Presidency in 2016, I will continue supporting the representation of the institutions for research and education in Brussels over the next few years. The Netherlands House for Education and Research (Neth-ER) has proved to be a valuable initiative to ensure the early involvement of knowledge institutions in new European education and research policies and to stimulate participation in the associated EU programmes.

8. From vision to policy: an overview of instruments

Opportunities to promote internationalisation in education can be found in a joint approach, inbound mobility, outbound mobility, the international classroom and international partnerships. At the same time it is important for the Dutch institutions to safeguard the quality of their own activities. Despite the huge differences between VET and higher education in terms of their respective points of departure and policy spearheads, they also share common ground which will be used to maximum advantage. The VSNU / Vereniging Hogescholen and the MBO Raad have drawn up ambitious vision statements which assign considerable responsibility to the educational institutions themselves. I endorse this approach and will hold the institutions to account over these ambitions. From organising English language courses for lecturers to optimising the utilisation of Erasmus+

²⁹ Implementation of subsidy target for education and research, reference 495275, 30 May 2013.

³⁰ Budget agreements for 2014, letter to Parliament 11 October 2013.

funds, institutions will have to get to work at the international level. This calls for targeted extra efforts and for the full integration of internationalisation in institutional policy: *mainstreaming* internationalisation. This marks the beginning of a new phase in Dutch educational policy.

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The government will stimulate and facilitate these ambitions. Below is a summary of the most important aspects covered by this letter:

- The launch of an ambitious scholarship programme aimed at positioning Dutch higher education abroad, attracting international talent and stimulating outbound mobility among Dutch students;
- Facilitating transnational education and eliminating obstacles to joint and double degrees;
- Joint action by the government, the business community and knowledge institutions during foreign trips and trade missions;
- A powerful roll-out of the 'Make it in the Netherlands!' action plan, highlighting strategic recruitment and retention;
- Stimulating international and intercultural experience through the mobility window, the international classroom and enhanced information services;
- An ambitious policy agenda for the Bologna Process, the European Union and countries outside the EU, for example during the Dutch EU Presidency in 2016;
- Encouraging Dutch VET and higher education institutions to benefit from the opportunities offered by Erasmus+;
- Working towards an integrated support structure for the internationalisation of education, major milestones being the merger between Nuffic and the European Platform and continuation of Neth-ER.

Internationalisation makes people smarter, more creative and more enterprising. The world is open to pioneering thinkers and doers at institutions, among lecturers and among students. It is my ambition to challenge them to further explore that world and seize the opportunities presented by internationalisation.

Also on behalf of the Minister of Economic Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation,

the Minister of Education, Culture and Science,

Dr J. Bussemaker