

AUA

Connecting and developing
HE professionals



Netherlands
and
Belgium

study tour



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Welcome

The Association of University Administrators (AUA) is a membership organisation that helps to promote professionalism, enhances careers, and creates valuable networking opportunities within the higher education (HE) sector.

This report from our Study Tour to the Netherlands and Belgium should give our AUA members, and also those thinking of joining the organisation, a sense of how a group visit to universities in other countries supports professional development. We invite colleagues working outside the UK to contact us to discuss a future visit to your country.

If this is the first time that you have heard about the AUA's work within the UK HE sector, we should give you some background. It all began back in 1961. We trace our roots back to the first Meeting of University Academic Administrators in 1961. Fifty five years on we continue to be the UK's professional association for higher education administration and management staff.

Our aim is to promote excellence in higher education management and to be a champion for our sector. The organisation is run from an office based at the University of Manchester. We have members in over 150 higher education establishments throughout the UK. We also have our overseas members who use the resources the AUA offers to establish their own professional standing within their own areas.

International study tours are arranged, normally on an annual basis, by the AUA's International Higher Education Network both for the benefit of members and to strengthen international links between the AUA and overseas organisations. As detailed below, this study tour visited one university in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (University of Antwerp) and four in the Netherlands (the two biggest universities in Amsterdam, the University of Leiden, and TUD – Delft University of Technology).

When we discussed our impressions, at the end of our five day visit, we were impressed by the warmth of the reception we received at each university we visited. Colleagues in a breadth of roles from junior to senior had given up their time to express their views, and did so very freely. We did not see hierarchy and structure; we hardly saw security barriers of any kind. Nobody tried to explain the institution by reference to an organisation chart. We are very grateful for the warm friendship that was given to us by colleagues.

This feedback report was compiled by the Study Tour team to inform members of our Association, the organisations we visited, and anybody else who might be interested. We hope you find it stimulating and useful. Please write to us with any comments that you may have.



Historical Context

The Netherlands was, arguably, the first modern capitalist country in the world. In early modern Europe it had the wealthiest trading city (Amsterdam), the first full-time stock exchange, and 'boom and bust' cycles (just think about the speculation in tulip bulb trading).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was intense rivalry between the Netherlands and Great Britain, with both countries fighting to build empires, although the 'glorious revolution' of 1688 led to a long period of peace between Britain and the Netherlands. William III of Orange ('King Billy') and Mary II were crowned together in 1689. The new king of Great Britain was also Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch Republic.

By the late eighteenth century, the Netherlands was in economic and political decline but the 1815 Congress of Vienna, following the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte, added the southern Netherlands to the north in an attempt to create a strong country on the northern border of France. However, the Southern Netherlands (which had been culturally distinct for at least two centuries from the north) rebelled. The south gained independence in 1830, as Belgium, and Great Britain was the guarantor of this status.

German invasion of Belgium in 1914, as a route to France, brought Great Britain into what became known as the Great War (in which the Netherlands remained a neutral country). In World War II, the Nazi occupation of this region created a close sense of identity between the UK and its neighbours across the Channel.

Both Belgium and the Netherlands were part of the original trading association that eventually became the Common Market and then the EU. Both countries, like the UK, are constitutional monarchies with liberal political structures. In the UK, Belgium is seen as rather more conservative than the Netherlands, exemplified by the latter country having permissive legislation on a variety of social issues (it was, for instance, the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage). In contrast, Belgium did not permit women to vote on equal terms until 1948 (although widows of World War I soldiers were able to vote at the national level from 1921!).

Belgium is divided into two distinctive multilingual regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders to the north and French-speaking Wallonia to the south. We visited the University of Antwerp in the Flemish region. Policy making, and the funding of HE, is de-centralised in Belgium.

HE in the region

The four Dutch universities we visited were: the University of Amsterdam (UvA); the Free University of Amsterdam (VU); Leiden University; and, Delft University of Technology (TUD). The four universities are all part of the group of fourteen Dutch 'research intensive' universities (members of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands - VSNU). These universities face similar shared strategic challenges. VSNU includes the Dutch Open University which, like the Open University in the UK, operates in a mode that is very different from the others.

Fourteen research universities (the VSNU group) are accredited and funded by the Dutch government. Six offer the full range of disciplines (including UvA, VU and Leiden), but others are more specialised and three focus specifically on technical studies (TUD, the Technische Universiteit Eindhoven and Universiteit Twente). Wageningen Universiteit en Researchcentrum is

concerned mainly with food, health and agriculture and is funded by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. The other members of VSNU, not so far mentioned, are: the University of Groningen, Maastricht University, Radboud University Nijmegen, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Tilburg University, and Utrecht University.

Of the five institutions we visited, UvA is the largest (31,000 students in October 2014). University of Antwerp and TUD are both approximately two-thirds the size of UvA. The others, Leiden and VU, are larger than TUD and Antwerp. By UK standards, all the five universities are substantial institutions. It is certainly worth noting that all five would like to recruit more students from the UK. (Further information on all five universities is included in the Appendix to this report.)



Cross-border student recruitment

Various agencies in the Netherlands have made major efforts in recent years to recruit in the UK. Now there are more than 2,600 UK students on degree programmes in the country (2014-15 data). In 2014-15 this was slightly higher than the number of French students but about 10 per cent below the numbers from Italy and Spain. Germany provided the highest number (c24,000), followed by China (c7,000) and Belgium (c3,000). There are many more UK students who go on Erasmus exchanges to universities in Belgium and the Netherlands.

The figures for external student recruitment to 'our' five universities show the continuing importance of the EU (and it should be noted that when HEIs in the Netherlands state figures for 'international students' they include all non-Dutch nationalities). Dutch universities continue to recruit strongly in Germany, despite the zero charge for tuition for first degrees in that country. In the Flemish area in Belgium, for obvious reasons, the universities recruit significant numbers from the Netherlands. For example, the University of Antwerp has over 2,000 Dutch students (and less than 100 German students).

In our meeting at the University of Amsterdam we were told that the German recruitment to Dutch universities had, in some national discussions, been viewed as 'a problem'. For instance, it could be said that the Dutch taxpayer is financing the equivalent of a whole university for German students. This is like, on a much larger scale, the impact that EU mobility of 'exchange' students has on some UK universities (i.e. significant imbalance between import and export). However, it is clear that Dutch policy makers see the EU as, overall, of great benefit to Dutch HE. The influx of German students is 'a price worth paying'. The EU is a source of benefit to Dutch HE and the 'Bologna process' has been viewed very positively and has led to significant changes in the HE system.

Funding

The Dutch system is less influenced than the English by neo-liberal ideology although there are private institutions of various kinds. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science plays a major role in the funding of the VSNU institutions. Universities receive funding based on their performance, such as the number of first-year students enrolled and the number of Bachelors' and Masters' degrees awarded.

Historically, the VSNU institutions in particular have been comparatively well funded when total allocations are normalised (e.g. adjusted for the size of student populations). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) about 1.5 per cent of GDP was spent on tertiary education in the Netherlands in 2008, close to the average for OECD members. However, adjusted figures show that the spending per student was well above the US \$14,000 OECD mean (by around 20 per cent) and was matched only by the US, Canada, Switzerland and the high-tax Scandinavian countries.

More recent data for public investment in higher education in real terms, again from OECD, covering the five year period 2008 09 to 2013 14, shows significant erosion of the unit of resource as student numbers in public universities have grown. Over this period the student population of VSNU universities grew by 13 percent to approximately one-quarter of a million. Funding in real terms was relatively stable.

Resource pressures on Dutch higher education have intensified, with the student population in VSNU institutions rising by 3.5 per cent in 2013-14 alone, while teaching funds stayed constant. Dutch universities cannot counter this by increasing tuition fees, which are below €2,000 a year for full-time European Union undergraduates. This squeeze on resources provides the context for the decision of the Dutch government; see below, to withdraw maintenance grants and to introduce a loan system.

Direct state funding is the largest of the income streams on which institutions can draw. In addition, universities receive funding from the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), via specific research projects. This funding is for the most part distributed competitively. A third flow of funds includes the universities' other revenues, e.g. from contract education or research, donations, and grants from public bodies or the European Union. Finally, institutions receive funding from tuition fees paid by students.

One consequence of the reduction in government funding to Dutch universities, according to a 2013 paper produced at the Free University of Amsterdam (VU), is that the link between teaching and research can no longer be taken for granted ('Vision for Education' at VU University Amsterdam). "The standard amounts made available by the government and based on student numbers are not sufficient to allow every member of staff to devote a significant proportion of his or her time to research. This means that researchers must seek funding from other sources, usually by means of open competition."

Like UK HE, especially in our pre-1992 institutions, the Dutch research universities see the need for a close link between education and research. The 2013 VU paper refers to recruitment and selection of academic staff and the need to investigate the ability of candidates to combine education and research. "It is important that the two activities are mutually reinforcing, each serving to inspire and motivate the other ... to ensure that students are fully aware of the academic nature of their studies from the outset."





Convergence or contrast: the Netherlands and the UK

In 2015 there was an anti-government protest against the Dutch government's policies for HE. The leaders argued that the Netherlands was taking the same route as UK policy makers. "Dutch universities today find themselves at a crossroads". The choice is "between further privatization and democracy [and] ...those who question the starkness of this dilemma should think again, especially in light of recent British experience". The structural similarities, it was claimed, are striking: "in 1999 the Labour government of Tony Blair introduced tuition for university education, at the moderate level of £1000. Within little more than a decade, undergraduate tuition in the UK had exploded to nine times its original level". At the same time, "Blair installed broader structures of microbullying within universities, ostensibly for the purpose of assessment and quality control of teaching and research ... including citation counts of published work, teaching evaluations, numerical targets for the number of publications per year, etc. The Netherlands is a mere ten years behind the UK, but seems eager to catch up." (Nicholas Vrousalis, Robin Celikates, Johan Hartle, and Enzo Rossi published statements in Open Democracy, an internet 'journal'.)

As a team, we would not want to connect with a political position. However, we did find much in the Dutch universities that we visited to be in welcome contrast to some features of UK HE. As indicated below, research evaluation is conducted in different ways. Students do not have to take out large loans to acquire degree qualifications. And the culture of the universities, so far we could see in just four brief visits, appears more open than in the UK. In various ways the system seems to be more collaborative than competitive.



Tuition fees and student support

Tuition fees are not set by the individual institutions in either Belgium or the Netherlands. They are set by the government with parliamentary decision, and remain very low in comparison with British fees (approaching 2,000 Euros in Netherlands and less in Belgium). However, there have been some significant changes to student support that impact on Dutch undergraduates.

In 2014 the Netherlands' government introduced a bill to convert student grants into loans, freeing up €1 billion from the state higher education budget, 20-30 per cent of the saving will continue to provide support for students from low-income families. The remainder is to be ploughed back into the higher education system to improve quality. The new system, introduced for the 2015-16 academic year, replaces maintenance grants with loans. In the new system, students will start to repay their study loans once they earn more than the minimum wage. The loan, with a fixed interest rate, will be repaid over 35 years. (www.duo.nl/particulieren/international-student/student-finance/how-does-it-work.asp)

Student unions, together with an organisation of students and staff called 'The New University', took part in the national day of action in February 2015 to protest against government plans. One group occupied a building in the University of Amsterdam (UvA). A group of younger faculty members working in Humanities at Leiden and UvA aimed to provide leadership and a 'manifesto'. UvA initially took a hard line but has subsequently moderated its position and reached agreement on a number of issues.

THEME 1

The Internationalisation of Higher Education

Colleagues were very well informed about international debates and probably knew more than we did about the European Association for International Education (EAIE). The dialogues we held were, to a large extent, just as they might have been in any UK university. On reflection, how could it not be like that?



This is a topic, by its very nature, that is discussed internationally at conferences and in journals. The debate is primarily in English. The EAIE provides a common forum. At the core of the subject is a common concern with the impact of globalisation. Furthermore, as a group visiting from another country, we were invariably hosted on our visits by colleagues from the International Office (or similar title).

Leiden, our first stop, has a multi-national student body (like the other universities that we visited). Here, 10 per cent of the students are international and they come from 110 nationalities. The presentation, given by the Head of the International Relations Office, began with the University's ambitions and made the point that these ambitions are only achievable through international action. At Leiden we heard a presentation from the International Office that could have been from a UK Russell Group university. The student dimension put academic standards of admission at the top of the list, but also included orientation, support (especially housing), careers and alumni relations.

For all the universities on our tour, the meaningful benchmarks are, for the most part, international. For example, it would make no sense for anybody to suggest that the ambition of Leiden University should be limited to comparison with other institutions in South Holland (just as it would be absurd to suggest that University of Aberdeen only wishes to be seen in an East of Scotland perspective).

In small countries, with languages that are not widely used externally, internationalisation of HE is crucial for the vitality of the university (through networks, academic research, setting of standards, building of cultural communities, and recruitment of staff and students to strengthen the campus). We found, in the universities we visited, a comprehensive approach to internationalisation. Characteristically this was approached by the institutions in our meetings through socio-cultural discourse, rather than through economic analysis. Generally speaking, the financial cost/benefit analysis sat in the background.

Research (discovery and dissemination) is, by its very nature, international: 'Science Without Borders'. Leading universities in small countries cannot possibly take any other view. Therefore all aspects of research production and management have to be international; funding, staff recruitment (and PhD admission), authorship, facilities, publication, and impact. Through experience and predisposition, everyone we met understood this. And they all commented on it. For example, about 50 per cent of all recruitment of senior academic staff at the University of Antwerp is from outside Belgium.

The universities we visited also view teaching and learning through an international lens. At TUD we met Anka Mulder, Vice-President for Education & Operations. She was very persuasive about the way in which the on-campus learning opportunities can be extended to a vast international audience through the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). In this way the international reputation of TUD is enhanced through an educational provision that has to meet the highest international standards. There should be a feedback loop that impacts positively on the on-campus provision.

At the start of the academic year Dr Mulder has to give presentations to new students. In September 2014 her address, 'The Future of the Engineer', contrasted two approaches to university education. In some places "today's students are taught with yesterday's knowledge, for a future nobody knows". But university education must avoid "teaching you what we ourselves have learnt ... we have to evaluate our education constantly and think about what future engineers will need".

"Creativity has been called the number one skill for the 21st Century. In a world that is changing so fast that it is hard to predict more than ten years ahead, we need new ideas, new ways of thinking to address the big issues facing civilization. So creativity is one of the things we try to train you in. ... In your career, you will be working together with people from all over the world, in many fields of expertise. You will not be bound to the country where you were born or the city where you had your education, but you will go where your knowledge, job, and interests take you. Where will you be in 2050? That I do not know. It might be Delhi, it might be Dallas. But your future starts today, in Delft."



Anka Mulder's philosophy is to work within networks to enable the excellence of the education at TUD to reach as many people as possible. "We can't do that on our campus [because of the obvious limitations] so we use MOOCs." Now TUD has 75,000 participants registered for its MOOCs. Reputational gains are a powerful motivation for this development. TUD has joined a network of about 30 top universities and schools from all over the world (the edX initiative that includes Harvard). "This means that the degrees of our students increase in value."

It was widely assumed in the universities we visited that the current student generation will be graduating into a global economy. Consequently, policy makers give serious thought to how to integrate an international perspective into the curriculum, and it is usual to find dedicated teams working systematically to ensure that international experience is part of the undergraduate programme. At the University of Amsterdam, for example, the University aims to ensure that at least one quarter of all students go abroad for part of their studies. Outward student mobility, as in the UK, has become a strong feature of the Internationalisation of HE.

Finally, in this section, the role of international partnership merits comment. Even the leading universities of small countries find it difficult to be challenging excellent universities in bigger systems. It is fully rational response to look for international partners.

Both Leiden and the University of Amsterdam (UvA) are part of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). This association has 21 members, including five from the UK and one more from each of the Netherlands and Belgium; nearly half the members come from the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium. In addition, UvA is part of U21 (the only member from the Netherlands).

All the universities that we visited had strategic partnerships for both research and teaching. The University of Antwerp is part of nine Erasmus Mundus programmes. The Free University of Amsterdam (VU) has strategic alliances in South Africa and Indonesia, co-ordinated by the Centre for International Cooperation.



THEME 2

The impact of research and changes in research funding on the HE sector

Given the character, status, and mission of the five universities, academic research was always prominent in our discussions. All the universities we visited have strong 'track records' in research.



From the early 1980s, universities in the Netherlands had to do "good" research to maintain their research budgets. Today, as in the UK, Dutch funding councils allocate public research cash for projects on the basis of competition, with grant applications assessed by external peer review. Lump sums are also awarded based on the number of doctoral completions.

Dutch research performance, evaluated through international comparisons, is very good. According to a report on scientific indicators published by the Dutch education ministry, the annual output of research papers amounted to some 30,000 (those that listed at least one Dutch author), with an average of 73 publications in international scientific publications a year per 100 researchers - twice the global average. These papers make up 2.8 per cent of the world's research publications, despite the Netherlands accounting for just 0.8 per cent of the population of the 18 major research nations.

Universities receive research funding from the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), via specific research projects. This funding is for the most part distributed competitively. Other flows of funding include contract research and, very significantly, grants from the European Union. All five universities on the Study Tour put significant resources into Research Support offices.

An external peer review process known as the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) has similarities to the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF). However, there is much more flexibility compared with REF in the UK. Scientific and societal "impact", research policy and management are taken into account, but the results of the SEP, which runs on a rolling six-year cycle, are not used by the government or a central funding body to distribute cash. SEP allows institutions to gauge the quality of the research they produce. Universities themselves often decide to reward high-performing departments with extra funding. (www.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/standard-evaluation-protocol-2015-2021)

Research assessments are organised by each institution, and the institutional board is responsible. Nationwide comparative evaluations by discipline are possible, but the institutions involved have to agree explicitly to organise their assessments in a coordinated way to realise this. In contrast to performance based funding systems, the Dutch system does not have a tight coupling between assessment outcomes and funding for research.



Periodically, as in the UK, SEP is revised and in 2014 there were some significant changes. Paul Wouters, the Director of a research centre at Leiden, has written about how evaluation systems creating constraints for the development of knowledge. He welcomes the latest changes to the SEP which will give more emphasis to the societal impact of research and less emphasis on the number of publications. (www.cwts.nl/people#sthash.8RvUtMxx.dpuf)

The status of PhD students in the Netherlands was of interest to the Study Tour team. The Dutch universities issue employment contracts to PhD candidates and this provides status and security, an income, and access to social benefits. The practice applies equally to Dutch students and those with other EU nationalities, but for those from countries outside the EU the position is more complicated for visa reasons. The University of Amsterdam, for example, treats these international PhD students as 'Academic Visitors'.

In 2014 the Dutch government proposed to change the system so that up to 2,000 PhD candidates would receive bursaries as students rather than wages as employees. This would have saved substantial sums for the big universities but, according to PNN (Promovendi Netwerk Nederland, the organisation that represents PhD candidates), would have damaged the status of the role even if the net impact on individual incomes was not substantial. In June last year, there was a parliamentary majority for an experiment with bursaries for PhD students but this has been slow to develop. So far, only two universities (not on our tour) are participating.

From a single case, we cannot say anything about research policy in the Flemish universities in Belgium. However, the University of Antwerp presented itself to us as an institution that is very concerned with producing research that is considered to be excellent by international standards. Quantitatively, researchers at the University produce more than 2,500 peer reviewed publications each year and they supervise more than 200 PhD completions annually. It is also interesting to note that about 25 per cent of the budget of the University is spent on research.

In recent years the University of Antwerp has reviewed research using a discipline-specific eight-year cycle of assessment (two disciplines are evaluated each academic year). The research assessment exercises use the methodology laid out in the Dutch Standard Evaluation Protocol.

During site visits at the University of Antwerp international peer review panels assess:

- quality;
- productivity;
- economic, societal, cultural and technological impact;
- viability.

Reports include suggestions, as appropriate, to the Faculty, Research Council or University Board on how to better organise the research area that has been reviewed.

It was clear to members of the Study Tour team that, at all the universities we visited, the reputation and the international league table position of the institution was a matter of critical importance to institutional managers. All the presentations we received included information about the positioning of the university on the international league tables. Whatever the measurement system used, institutional performance in research is crucial.

The presentations by all four Dutch universities included emphasis on what unites the research-intensive universities. Rather than stressing difference and distinctiveness, what came over very powerfully was the need to 'stick together' to convince the wider world of the strength of research in Dutch HE.

The importance of Amsterdam, and its urban region, should not be understated in assessing research production. The presence in Amsterdam of two large universities, two university hospitals and various other knowledge centres provides an opportunity for collaboration and the creation of a world-class research centre. VU and UvA are pooling resources in various educational and research fields. By 2025, they intend to deliver all their masters programmes in joint Graduate Schools.



THEME 3

Managing Student Employability

The Netherlands and Belgium are advanced, knowledge-based economies with high HE participation rates. Employers seek work-ready (or at least developable) graduates. Students and their parents are increasingly concerned about their future careers; we were told that the "student voice" has brought real change in this regard.





The Dual System

Both countries operate a dual system in education where students are separated into academic or vocational pathways, in contrast to most of the UK where the grammar/secondary modern school split has been long abandoned (though the debate and its effects on, widening participation, for example, still linger).

Though the systems differ as to when and how they stream students (see diagram), much of the separation happens within the school system. This is part of the reason why Dutch and Belgian universities do not select on entry, as much of the selection has effectively happened earlier.

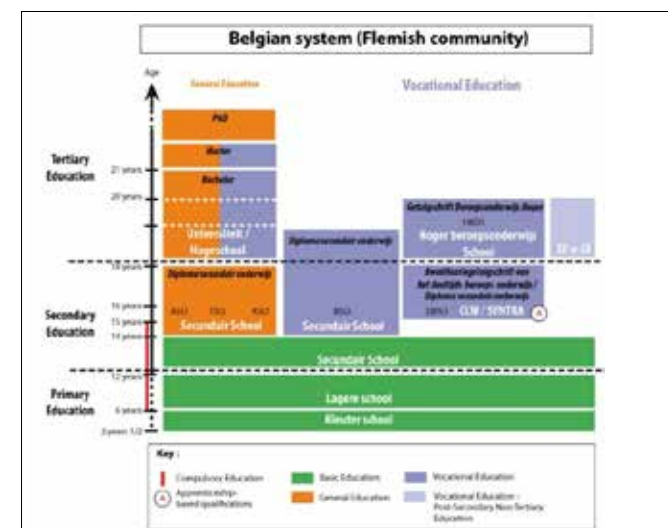
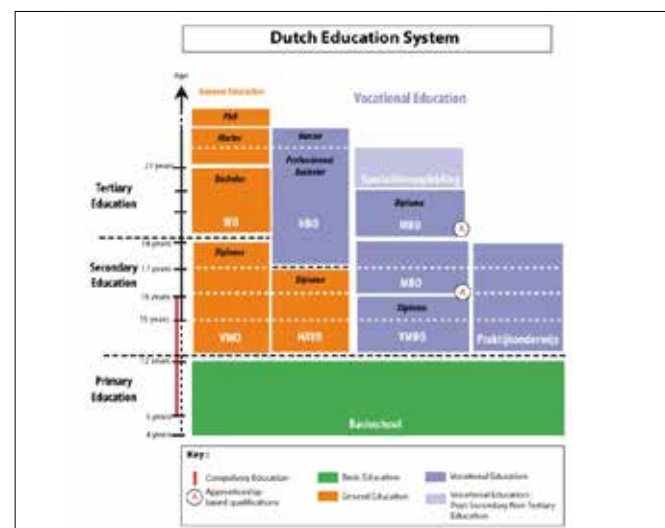
Dutch and Flemish Education in Overview (from <http://mavoieproeurope.onisep.fr>)

In addition both systems have two types of HEI: academically-oriented Universiteit/Universities, and vocationally-orientated Hogeschool/Universities of Applied Sciences. Both types of university award bachelor degrees and are viewed as 'distinct but equal'. That said, the vocational HE sectors typically does not engage in research or award PhDs.

There are also 'ladders and bridges' between the streams in both systems, such as bridging courses. Therefore it is possible to complete a vocationally-orientated bachelors and after a bridging course, start an academic master's elsewhere.

Across the two HE systems, the academic-vocational split at bachelor's varies. In the Netherlands it was reported as about 1:3, in Belgium it was reported as closer to 1:1.

Though all of the HEIs we visited were academic universities they were able to provide useful information on their vocational HE sector.



Employability narratives

Research by Gerbrand Tholen has looked at how employability narratives differ between the Netherlands and the UK as a result of the differing education structures. In short, it argues that Dutch university students view it as building social capital in an absolute sense such as broad skills and experiences, whereas UK students take a more instrumental view based on credentials and relative position.

Though this may be a disguised effect of social class and the streaming that dual system enacts, it is quite possible that students with already strong social capital would view the world differently from those who do not. It is unclear whether the research looked at the mind-set of students in the vocational HE sector when formulating this analysis. The students we did meet in the Dutch universities were clearly of the former mind-set.

Employers appear to recruit graduates from the academic and vocational HE sectors for different posts and for different qualities (the 'professional' bachelor's being focused more on associate professional roles).

Interestingly, employers in both systems view the master's degree as the natural exit point for university (academic) graduates. This likely arises from the pre-Bologna situation where the bachelor's and master's degrees were combined: employers just continued with their previous recruitment pattern (notwithstanding the question whether the additional human capital developed in the master's was relevant to the positions they were hiring into).

The main effect of the Bologna split has been to allow students to circulate in the system between bachelor's and master's, either to a different university or discipline. This was seen as a positive outcome for student flexibility and choice since, as noted elsewhere, both systems are managed holistically so not all universities will be active in all specialist areas for reasons of critical mass.

Careers Services

Our discussions in the Netherlands highlighted an excellent example of how the student voice brings about real change. All of the universities we visited are in the process of developing careers support for their students, in response to student feedback and their own student councils.

Up until recently, student career development was undertaken under their own initiative with student organisations playing an active role. Though the student body has generally high social capital, the increasing competition in the job market is making itself felt. Universities have focused on giving general advice and skills classes.

'Transition' (from HE to work) has become an established part of the discourse.

As one HEI noted, the vast majority of the contact-time the students have during their studies is with the academic staff; so the academic staff have to be behind this and give consistent messages in support of it. As in the UK, there are disciplinary differences. Pure humanities academics may find an employability narrative to be instrumental and counter to their values, whereas in science, technology, engineering, maths (STEM) business or clinical subjects such linkages are culturally more in line with the ethos of the discipline.

In both systems, the vocational Hogeschool were reported to have mature career services, given their employer-facing mission.



Industrial experience

In the UK system, the benefits to students gaining relevant work experience in their studies is well documented. As such many UK universities offer support to help students with this. In some subjects, it is an essential part of the course (e.g. clinical placements). The question is whether the dual system impacts upon this provision.

Dutch universities reported that this was something that they are seeking to develop further. As their mission has been more purely academic, it wasn't seen until recently as something that was a priority. Again, students have been the driver for enhanced support. Employers were reported to have given clear signals that they are now seeking this experience.

At TU Delft, aside from a growing central provision, some faculties have developed their own support. For example, Aeronautical Engineering master's have a mandatory internship of at least 3 months where 80 per cent go abroad.

The Belgian university system, perhaps due to having a wider academic sector, was again reported to have established support in place both centrally and in some faculties.

The ways in which students gain work experience varies, so there is no single model. The usual approach, however, is to build up a portfolio of experiences in vacations. Some universities reported that students could gain European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits in some cases. In both systems, it was reported that there was strong student demand for out of country work experience, particularly in Germany and the UK, but also more widely overseas. Students again saw these as invaluable in building their social capital.

That said, the common UK model of the one-year sandwich placement is not common in either HE system. Their student and HEI funding systems, though flexible in other ways, are not setup to incentivise this. One impact this has is that Dutch and Flemish students who wish to secure work experience in the UK find it difficult to fit in the UK model, especially in Engineering and IT where the sandwich model is the norm. Even in TU Delft, students were reported to struggle to justify internships of more than 6 months to professors; some take one year positions with motor sports companies in the UK, and suspend their studies.

Industrial experience was reported to have historically been a feature of vocationally-orientated HEIs in both systems and in many cases a required aspect of the course by government and professional bodies. As such they were reported to have mature support arrangements for students seeking industrial experience.



Additional Points to Note



Through British Eyes – an English student at TUD

Jade Appleton, a first-year Master's student at TUD, speaks about her experiences and motivations

I am studying a master's in Urbanism following a 'year out' after my architecture degree at Bath. I worked for that year at an architecture practice in London.

I had always wanted to study in another country, and Delft really stood out to me for a number of reasons. It has a great reputation and has courses taught in English. The culture in the Netherlands really appealed to me, and it is easy to travel from there to other European countries.

Another reason was also the lower cost (much cheaper than staying at home). I pay 1951 Euros per year for the two-year master's.

I do not speak Dutch but I am trying to learn, however it is very hard as everyone here speaks English really well.

I am the only British student on my course but I have met a few (about five) students who are doing the architecture track. There are other British students studying master's at Delft, but I don't think it is that well known for British students. I heard about it because a friend from Bath had taken an exchange

semester at Delft. It was thanks to her that I looked into studying at Delft.

My teachers are mainly Dutch, but there are some from outside the Netherlands. Most of the teachers are completing their PhDs and teaching classes at the same time.

I don't know much yet about placements here, but people have told me that it is very easy to take a semester out and do an internship for a while, and resume studying when you want to. I don't think that universities in UK are flexible like this.

I may end up working as an urban planner or designer.... I hope ...

The best bit about studying here is the international culture of the University. There are people from all around the world, all with differing experiences and meeting them has been the highlight of my time here.

I would absolutely recommend this University. The facilities offered here are incredible, and being here has opened up so many opportunities to me and I have been able to meet and study with people from across the world.

Student admission to University

In the Netherlands only 15-20 per cent of school students take the high school leaving certificate that is needed for admission to a research university in the WO sector. The majority of students take qualifications which give direct access to Universities of Applied Sciences but not to research universities. The Dutch secondary education system, like HE, has parallel 'academic' and 'professional' tracks.

In the UK, there are also different kinds of schools and many different pre-HE qualifications. However, participation in the main 'academic' pre-HE qualification system (A levels) is approximately twice what it is in the Netherlands. This is one reason, but not the only reason, why those universities in the UK that are equivalent to the VSNU sector admit selectively. For most courses Dutch (VSNU) universities are not selective although the number of selective courses is growing.

Compared with the UK, universities in the Netherlands have a very different approach to admissions issues. Generally speaking, applicants who pass appropriate pre-HE examinations are admitted and then 'challenged' to prove they can cope with a university education in their chosen subject. The first year at a Dutch university is generally seen as a probationary period.

In effect, Dutch universities usually make 'unconditional' offers. The offer of a place is binding for the institution, it is made relatively soon after application, and is conditional only on passing school-leaving examinations at matriculation standard. If applicants choose a course without Numerus Fixus (a quota) it is possible to receive an offer within four weeks of applying. If the course is subject to Numerus Fixus there will be a longer timescale. Medical programmes, and associated subjects such as Psychology, figure prominently in the 'capped' list. Many courses with a fixed entry number still use a lottery process to decide who will be allocated a place, if applications are significantly higher than places available. (http://www.studyinholland.co.uk/numerus_fixus, accessed 8 December 2015)

The admissions system is clearly one reason for the steady erosion of the unit of teaching resource in the universities. There have been calls, both from the HE sector and from politicians, for the system to be changed, as there have also been in the UK. In both countries established practice would seem to be remarkably resilient.

The use of English in HE

Throughout the world, academic research is often published in English, and co-authorship with colleagues from English-speaking countries is common in Belgium and the Netherlands. English is widely used as the language of instruction in the 'second cycle' (Master's) in Dutch HE but even in the first cycle there are now around 200 programmes taught entirely in English and many more that include a significant English language component. There are more than 2,100 English-taught study programmes and courses. (www.studyfinder.nl, linked to www.studyinholland, is the only database that offers a complete overview of all programmes taught in English.)

Maastricht University has the most extensive provision in English. Almost all programmes are taught and examined in English.

In the Flemish universities there is a more restricted use of English, partly because of the protection given to Dutch in multi-lingual Belgium. All programmes that are taught in English at the University of Antwerp are 'second cycle'.



Institutional Alliances

The presentations by all four Dutch universities stressed the ways in which the research-intensive universities co-operate. Rather than stressing difference and distinctiveness, what came over very powerfully was the need to 'stick together' to convince the wider world of the strength of Dutch HE.

There appear to be many ways in which Dutch universities collaborate effectively. One example referred to above, in the section on Research, is the development of joint Graduate Schools by the two major universities of the capital city. Another is the alliance between Leiden, TUD and the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The three universities now work together in numerous areas following the creation of a 'Strategic Alliance' set up in 2012. (<http://www.leiden-delft-erasmus.nl/en/home>)

University Colleges

During the last two decades, many small US-style liberal arts colleges have been set up on campuses in the Netherlands. Tuition fees at these colleges are significantly higher. Such colleges also break the standard Dutch model by selecting highly motivated students who are keen to have a broad cross-disciplinary undergraduate experience. Taught solely in English, BA courses allow students to study multi-disciplinary programmes. While many universities link many of their courses to the workplace (the 'employability' agenda), university colleges (and their students) do not favour such an approach.

University Colleges may not even be physically part of the 'parent' university (the Leiden University College is located in The Hague). Amsterdam University College is a collaboration between VU University Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam.

D:Dream at TUD

Students who go the Delft University of Technology (TUD) for a Master's in Aerospace Engineering, or one of the other Engineering programmes, have the chance to join the Nuon Solar Team which builds electric cars powered by sunlight. We visited the building where it is based (D:Dream). Students get some support (and a building) from the university but have to raise most of the finance from external sponsors.

Student teams, in their own time, build cars, bicycles and boats, even robots, and enter them in international competitions. The Nuon Solar Team, wholly composed of TUD students, recently won the Bridgestone World Solar Challenge in its Nuna8 solar car. This race across Australia was hotly contested by teams from many nations. Solar Team Twente, also from a technological university in the Netherlands, came second.

On the last day of the race, Nuna8 managed to keep ahead of Twente, reaching speeds of close to 100 km/h (62 mph) as it approached Adelaide's Victoria Square. After 2,998 kilometres only a few minutes separated the pair. Nuon surged ahead to claim a second successive World Solar Challenge, and its sixth in the event's history, with a total time of 37 hours, 56 minutes and 12 seconds.

Appendices

Itinerary

- 


Tuesday 10th November
Leiden University
- 


Wednesday 11th November
Free University of Amsterdam (VU)
University of Amsterdam (UvA)
- 


Thursday 12th November
Delft University of Technology (TUD)
- 


Friday 13th November
University of Antwerp


The Study Tour Team


- 


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Beth Beasant,
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HEI Profiles

Leiden
Leiden University, established in 1575, is proud of its status as the first Dutch university. Founded by the first William of Orange as a part of the rebellion against Spanish rule, the University claims a heritage of freedom and a tradition of unfettered scientific research. Leiden quickly became a major centre for European scholarship. (<http://news.leiden.edu/news-2015/four-short-films-about-four-centuries-of-freedom-at-leiden-university.html#sthash.7IO4kHK7.dpuf>)

Three centuries later, on 26 November 1940 after an address by Professor Rudolph Cleveringa protesting against Nazi anti-Semitism, a packed hall sang the Dutch national anthem. Cleveringa, the Dean of Leiden University's Faculty of Law, had spoken against the dismissal of his Jewish colleague, E.M. Meijers, Professor of Private Law. On the orders of the German Nazi occupying forces, all Jewish staff were to be relieved of their positions at the University. A student strike resulted and prompted the Nazis to close Leiden University. Professors Cleveringa and Meijers were both imprisoned during the war but both survived and returned to Leiden University when it reopened in September 1945.

Now the University has seven faculties in the arts, sciences, medicine and social sciences, and operates a campus in The Hague. There are over 5,500 staff members and 25,800 students.

VU
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the "Free University", was founded in 1880 as a private institution. "Free" refers to independence from both the state and organised religion (although VU was founded to serve a protestant minority). Since 1970 the University has received government funding on a parity basis with public universities. (<http://www.vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/mission-and-profile/history>)

At first the University was only open to Reformed Christians (Calvinists) and was entirely financed by their fund-raising efforts and donations. Since the 1960s, however, VU has been open to everyone although it still retains a tradition of Christian standards and values.

VU has fifteen Faculties (including Humanities, Theology, Law, Economics, Science and Medicine). There are approximately 3,000 academic staff and 24,000 students.

UvA (University of Amsterdam)
The University of Amsterdam has its origins in the Athenaeum Illustre which was founded in 1632 by the city authorities in Amsterdam. The Athenaeum remained a small institution until the 19th century, with no more than 250 students and eight professors, and was mainly engaged in medical education. The University of Amsterdam grew from this organisation becoming the Municipal University of Amsterdam in 1877. At this time it was given the right to grant doctoral qualifications. This gave the University the same privileges as national universities while being funded by the city of Amsterdam.

The University's municipal status brought about expansion and the relatively early addition of the Faculties of Economics and Social Sciences. In 1961 the national government made the University a national university, giving it its current name. Funding was now provided by the national government instead of the city and the appointment of professors was transferred to the Board of Governors. (www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/uva-profile/mission-and-identity/history/history.html)

UvA is a comprehensive university with seven large faculties. It is the largest of the five universities that we visited with more than 30,000 students. The University does not have a separate campus but is housed in old and new buildings scattered throughout the capital. The majority of UvA's buildings lie in the heart of Amsterdam; the only faculties outside the centre are Science, Medicine and Dentistry (the latter Faculty is jointly run with VU).

TUD (Delft University of Technology)
The city of Delft received its Charter in 1246 and became a key base for the House of Orange in the 16th century. By the time the first William of Orange took up residence in 1572, Delft was one of the leading cities of Holland. William was the leader of growing national Dutch resistance against Spanish occupation (the Eighty Years' War).

TUD was founded as a Royal Academy in 1842 by the Dutch King. Originally its task was to train administrators to serve in the Dutch colonies. In 1986 the Delft Institute of Technology officially changed its name to Delft University of Technology. (<http://www.tudelft.nl/en/about-tu-delft/history>)

TUD has eight Faculties. In addition to the five Engineering Faculties there are Faculties of Applied Sciences, Architecture and the Built Environment, and Technology, Policy and Management. There are over 2,000 PhD candidates distributed through the Faculties.

This is the most focused of the Dutch institutions that we visited and, consequently, it is also the smallest (around 21,000 students). About one-third of the student body is studying at Master's level (on two-year courses).

The institution was originally located in the old centre of Delft but this changed in the second half of the last century with relocations to a separate university neighbourhood. Now all university buildings are outside the historic city centre of Delft.

University of Antwerp
Universiteit Antwerpen is one of six universities in the Flemish part of Belgium. Whilst the university was created in 2003 following the merger of three institutions, there is a historical lineage that goes back 160 years and more.

There is an agreement, recognised by international treaty, that the six Flemish universities in Belgium should be associated with the Dutch universities for quality assurance. An independent accreditation organisation, the NVAO, approves programmes of study and grants institutions the right to issue degree qualifications. It oversees all quality assurance and assessment activities.

'UAntwerp' is a comprehensive institution with an evolving structure. There are approximately 20,000 students.

The Middelheim campus, where we held our meetings, was once the Colonial University of Belgium. This institution, which trained students to go work in the Belgian Congo, was founded in 1920 and closed in 1961, a year after the independence of Congo.

About the AUA

The Association of University Administrators exists to advance and promote the professional recognition and development of all who work in professional services roles in higher education, and to be an authoritative advocate and champion for the sector. Established over 50 years ago, the AUA is an inclusive membership-led professional body with more than 4,500 members both in the UK and around the world.

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