

Internationalising with ambition

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Children and adolescents are growing up in a globalising society. People increasingly encounter information in different languages and they meet people from foreign countries and from diverse backgrounds in their daily lives. Increasing numbers of people engage in social environments in which there are different expectations on how to behave. Events in one's own town, village, or country can increasingly not be comprehended without knowledge of the world beyond.

Changes in society pose challenges to the education system, but also offer opportunities. Against this background, the Education Council of the Netherlands has previously advised that internationalisation should be an integral part of education. Presently, societal developments call for further consideration of the manner in which and with what purpose education could be internationalised.

Changes in society call for a comprehensive vision on internationalisation

Internationalisation of education already takes shape in several forms within the Dutch school system: in the form of mobility, the teaching of foreign languages, the international content of curricula, and more specifically in the form of internationally oriented education concepts. Nevertheless, a comprehensive vision on internationalisation for the school system as a whole is lacking. The government formulated a vision on internationalising higher education – and to some extent vocational education and training – in the summer of 2014. Primary and secondary education were not addressed, though. Moreover, a vision on internationalisation across the various educational sectors is also desirable.

At the request of the deputy minister for Education, Culture and Science, the Education Council of the Netherlands has addressed the question what the ambition for the internationalisation of Dutch education should be and what this ambition entails in terms of the intended approach to internationalisation. In this advisory report, the Council provides stepping stones towards the development of a comprehensive vision of the system.

Advice: Aim for everyone to leave the education system 'internationally competent'

In the Education Council's view, Dutch education could be internationalised more ambitiously. We should aspire to ensure that all young people leave the education system 'internationally competent' in order to enable them to function effectively in a globalising society and in international contexts. Being internationally competent enhances people's chances on both the national and international labour markets. It is therefore important that everyone should become internationally competent, irrespective of their level of education or career choices.

All domains of education – qualification, socialisation, and subjectification – have international dimensions. The Education Council presents a classification of aspects of being internationally competent, which distinguishes between general aspects and aspects specific to a profession. In both cases, aspects of being internationally competent encompass an international orientation and knowledge, and relate to reflection on international issues and to cooperation and communication (e.g. comprehension of foreign languages) in respect to international contexts. What these aspects entail exactly should be determined in cooperation with schools and other relevant stakeholders within the education system.

Becoming internationally competent does not happen by itself. Education plays a major role in enabling pupils or students to become internationally competent. It is a part of the general task of education to prepare children and adolescents for society.

According to the Education Council of the Netherlands, the current approach to internationalisation does not guarantee that everyone becomes internationally competent. Although many schools do meet their tasks allowing their pupils or students to become internationally competent, internationalisation of education tends to be approached from a narrow scope and in a fragmented way. Not all pupils and students are offered sufficiently internationalised programmes. Many primary schools lag behind. In secondary schools, specifically internationally oriented concepts such as bilingual education are mainly applied in preparatory university programmes and much less in preparatory vocational programmes. If schools engage in internationalisation, they often focus on some aspects of being internationally competent (e.g. a foreign

language or international knowledge) or on specific activities (e.g. study trips abroad or international projects) without embedding those activities in the general programme and without regard for the transparency of the intended learning outcomes. Connections between various sectors of the education system with regard to international dimensions need to be improved.

Furthermore, some crucial conditions are flawed. Teachers and lecturers are not always sufficiently internationally competent themselves. Many schools depend on incidental subsidies to fund their internationalisation efforts and activities. Course materials adapted to internationalised education or suitable for becoming internationally competent are not always available. Above all, it is a matter of getting your priorities straight. The Education Council argues that education should have a higher ambition in terms of internationalisation.

Recommendation 1: Embed internationalisation in existing programmes and teaching

To achieve the proposed ambition, internationalisation efforts should be approached in a comprehensive way. Internationalisation is about strengthening the international dimension of education, and all aspects of being internationally competent should be prominent. Internationalisation should be treated as an integral part of teaching and learning environments. While mobility remains of great significance, this calls for primacy of so-called 'internationalisation at home' or 'internationalisation of the curriculum'. Mobility remains of great significance, but should be embedded in more internationalised study programmes 'at home'.

Internationalising with ambition calls on schools to develop a clear view, formulating that view in policy documents and translating it to practice in their curriculum and teaching methods. By doing this, they will be able to closely knit internationalisation with other learning goals and curriculum components. Schools are also expected to monitor the development of their pupils or students in terms of becoming internationally competent and to account for their internationalisation efforts. Schools are advised to widen their scope regarding internationalisation when designing curricula and teaching methods. They should relate more to their pupils' or students' life outside of school and utilise opportunities in the school's surroundings more.

Schools' internationalisation efforts can be supported by specifying and extending international competences in compulsory core goals of education, exam programmes and qualification files, as elaborated in Dutch education laws. Coordination between the various sectors of the Dutch education system (primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education) is called for. Primarily, this is up to schools themselves. The government might consider ensuring coordination by instituting cross-sectoral, continuous tracks for English and 'orientation on the world'.

Recommendation 2: Widen the scope of internationalisation by extending internationalisation efforts to all education sectors and all school types and by stimulating internationally oriented programmes and teaching concepts

Internationalisation should be undertaken in all sectors of the education system and for all school types within these sectors. The Council strongly advocates an increase in efforts towards internationalisation in primary education and in (preparatory) vocational education.

While all schools should contribute to the development of pupils or student to becoming internationally competent, part of the population should reach a higher level of attainment. This goes for pupils and students both in the vocational education track and in the higher education tracks of secondary education. Many schools in the Netherlands already offer specifically internationally oriented programmes or teaching concepts, such as bilingual education. The government should stimulate the introduction of such concepts in parts of the country or in parts of the education system where they are not being offered yet, but where there is a desire for internationalised education. The government should allow for regional differences in the aspects that schools emphasise while internationalising their teaching and their programmes (for instance, which foreign languages are offered). A legally recognised international exam profile for secondary education should be introduced in order to prevent disruption of internationalised/bilingual tracks due to national examinations in Dutch.

Recommendation 3: Improve conditions for successful internationalisation

Finally, the Council calls for attention on several crucial conditions for effective internationalisation. To make progress on internationalisation will require an investment in international orientation and didactic skills relating to internationalised teaching of teachers and lecturers, not just in their initial training, but also in their additional and continuing training as well as their informal on-the-job learning. More structural financing of internationalisation activities could provide a considerable stimulus. Schools should be able to fund teaching efforts necessary to becoming internationally competent from their structural budget, and school boards are expected to use part of that budget for internationalisation efforts. Schools should not be dependent on incidental resources, such as short-term project subsidies granted through competitive systems. As for mobility and specifically internationally oriented concepts, the government might consider extending stimulating measures such as subsidy programmes. Finally, the Council advocates investments in developing and distributing teaching materials suitable for internationalised education.