

1. Introduction

1.1 Purposes of the OECD Review

This Country Note on the Netherlands forms part of the OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. This is a collaborative project to assist countries in the design and implementation of tertiary education policies that contribute to the realisation of their social and economic objectives.

The tertiary education systems of many OECD countries have experienced rapid growth over the last decade, and are experiencing new pressures as the result of a globalising economy and labour market. In this context, the OECD Education Committee agreed, in late 2003, to carry out a major thematic review of tertiary education. The principal objective of the review is to assist countries in understanding how the organisation, management and delivery of tertiary education can help them to achieve their economic and social objectives. The principal focus of the review is upon tertiary education policies and systems, rather than upon the detailed management and operation of institutions.

The project's purposes, methodology and guidelines are detailed in OECD (2004a).¹ The purposes of the review are:

- To synthesise research-based evidence on the impact of tertiary education policies and disseminate this knowledge among participating countries;
- To identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practices;
- To facilitate exchanges of lessons and experiences among countries; and
- To identify policy options.

¹ Reports and updates are available from www.oecd.org/edu/tertiary/review

The review encompasses the full range of tertiary programmes and institutions. International statistical conventions define tertiary education in terms of programme levels: those programmes at ISCED² levels 5B, 5A and 6 are treated as tertiary education, and programmes below ISCED level 5B are not. In some countries the term higher education is used more commonly than tertiary education, at times to refer to all programmes at levels 5B, 5A and 6, at times to refer only to those programmes at levels 5A and 6. An additional complication is presented by the practice, in some countries, of defining higher education or tertiary education in terms of the institution, rather than the programme. For example, it is common to use higher education to refer to programmes offered by universities, and tertiary education to refer to programmes offered by institutions that extend beyond universities. The OECD thematic review follows standard international conventions in using tertiary education to refer to all programmes at ISCED levels 5B, 5A and 6, regardless of the institutions in which they are offered.

The project involves two complementary approaches: an *Analytical Review strand*; and a *Country Review strand*. The Analytical Review strand uses several means – country background reports, literature reviews, data analyses and commissioned papers – to analyse the factors that shape the outcomes in tertiary education systems, and possible policy responses. All of the 24 countries involved in the Review are taking part in this strand. In addition, 13 of the tertiary education systems have chosen to participate in a Country Review, which involves external review teams analysing tertiary education policies in those countries.

The Netherlands was one of the countries that opted to participate in the Country Reviews and hosted a review visit in April-May 2006. The reviewers comprised an OECD Secretariat member, and academics and policy-makers from Australia, the United States, Finland, and the United Kingdom. The team is listed in Appendix 1.

1.2 The Participation of the Netherlands

The Netherlands' participation in the OECD Review was co-ordinated by Marlies Leegwater of the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW). Jos de Jonge and Jurriaan Berger of EIM prepared the Country Background Report (CBR) (OCW, 2006a) for the OECD Review (details are provided in Appendix 2).

² The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) provides the foundation for internationally comparative education statistics and sets out the definitions and classifications that apply to educational programmes within it.

The review team is grateful to the authors of the CBR, and to all those who assisted them for providing an informative and policy-oriented document. The CBR covered themes such as the background and content of tertiary education reforms; the structure of the tertiary education system; the role of tertiary education in regional development, the research effort of the country; the shaping of labour markets; and the challenges faced in resourcing, governing, achieving equity in and assuring the quality of the tertiary education system.

The Netherlands CBR forms a valuable input to the overall OECD project and the review team found it to be very useful in relation to its work. The analysis and points raised in the CBR are cited frequently in this Country Note.³ In this sense, the documents complement each other and, for a more comprehensive view of tertiary education policy in the Netherlands, are best read in conjunction.

The review visit took place from April 24-May 2 2006. An itinerary is provided in Appendix 3. The review team held discussions with educational authorities and relevant agencies and visited institutions of tertiary education in the country. Discussions were held with representatives of Ministries such as education and finance; tertiary education institutions; student organisations; representatives of academic staff; the business and industry community; and officials responsible for quality assurance. This allowed the team to obtain the views of key stakeholders in the system concerning the strengths, weaknesses, and policy priorities regarding tertiary education in the Netherlands.

This Country Note draws together the review team's observations and background materials. The present report on the Netherlands will be an input into the final OECD report on the overall project. The review team trusts that the Country Note will also contribute to discussions within the Netherlands, and inform the international education community about developments in the Netherlands that may hold lessons for their own systems.

The review team wishes to record its grateful appreciation to the many people who gave time from their busy schedules to assist in its work. The review team is grateful also for the informative and frank meetings that were held during the visit, and the helpful documentation provided by our hosts.

³ Unless indicated otherwise, the data in this Country Note are taken from the Netherlands Country Background Report.

This Country Note is the responsibility of the review team. While the team benefited greatly from the Netherlands CBR and other documents, any errors or misinterpretations in this Country Note are its responsibility.

1.3 Structure of the Country Note

The remainder of the report is organised into ten chapters that focus on key issues within the scope of the review. Chapter Two provides a brief context and background of tertiary education in the Netherlands, Chapter Three reviews the governance of the tertiary system and its institutions. Chapters Four and Five examine the financing of the tertiary system and questions of equity, respectively. Chapter Six considers the linkages between tertiary education and labour markets in the Netherlands. Chapter Seven examines the role of tertiary education in research and innovation, while Chapter Eight examines policies and practices with respect to assuring and improving the quality of tertiary education. Issues of internationalisation of tertiary education are examined in Chapter Nine. Chapter Ten offers a brief conclusion. This is followed by a set of appendices.