



International Education in the Netherlands

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- SUMMARY FINAL REPORT -

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Summary

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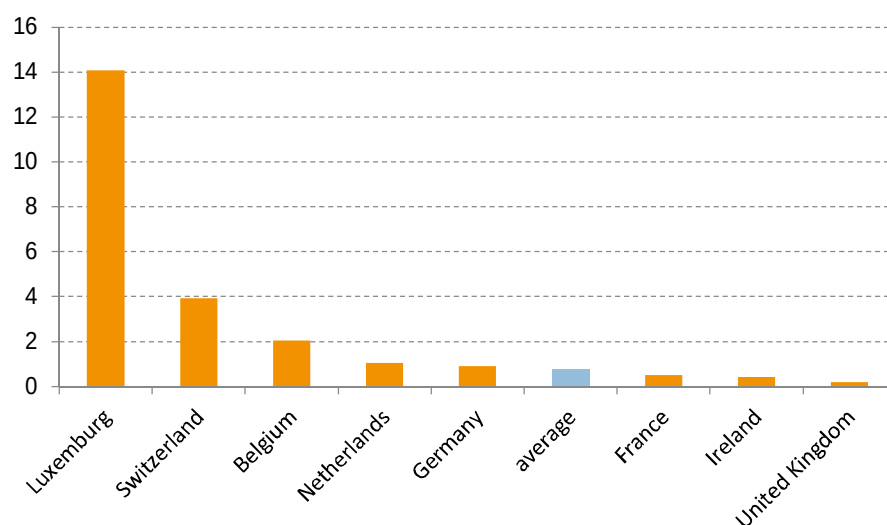
In the first half of 2016, Regioplan Policy Research conducted a study into international education in the Netherlands that was commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and The Ministry of Economic Affairs. The main questions answered in this study are:

1. How does the supply of international education relate to the demand for it in the Netherlands and in a number of neighbouring countries?
2. What are the nature and extent of the bottlenecks in international education?
3. What are the consequences for the competitiveness of the Netherlands?

Compared with that of other countries, the Dutch business climate is often regarded as favourable. Reasons why international companies are interested in our country include its stability, its good relations with other countries, the education level of its population, its geographical location and its excellent infrastructure. The first question this study aims to answer is the extent to which this positive picture is also true for the supply of international education in the Netherlands.

With regard to quantitative characteristics, international education in the Netherlands can measure up to international education in its neighbouring countries: participation in international education in the Netherlands is just above the average (with 1.1 pupils per thousand inhabitants), the supply of curricula is relatively broad, and the school fees of the international schools in the Netherlands are generally lower than in neighbouring countries.

Figure 1 Number of pupils in international education per 1000 inhabitants, by country (2015)
(sources: ISC; CIA The World Factbook)



The very strong growth in pupil numbers that has occurred in recent years is specifically 'Dutch'. The number of pupils enrolled in international education in the Netherlands has increased by half in recent years. This growth is much higher than in neighbouring countries.

In the Netherlands, there are four types of international schools:

1. government-funded Dutch schools with an international education department. In the Netherlands, these schools form the largest group among the schools offering international education.
2. private international schools;
3. foreign national schools;
4. schools associated with embassies.

The study focused on the first three types of schools, and includes 36 international schools (only main locations were counted).

In 2016, these international schools in the Netherlands together provide education to nearly 19,000 pupils. About half of these pupils go to a government-funded international school. Pupil number growth occurs most frequently in government-funded schools, but other international schools also witness a growth. The majority of international schools expect the number of pupils to increase further. This brings us to the question to what extent bottlenecks occur in international education in the Netherlands.

The international schools in the Netherlands can hardly cope with the growing demand, as evidenced by the fact that half of them have waiting lists. However, expanding the number of places is not always easy and the new places are often filled quickly. Compared with neighbouring countries, the pressure on international education in the Netherlands is relatively large.

Most of the children on the waiting lists are on waiting lists of international schools in the regions of Amsterdam and The Hague. These are also the regions where most international schools are located and jointly attract the most pupils.

The continued growth is mainly caused by (anticipated) developments in (international) business in the regions. As the pupil population of international education in the Netherlands largely consists of pupils who do not have Dutch nationality (84%), the development of the number of foreign expats in a region largely determines the development of pupil numbers in international education in the Netherlands.

The bottlenecks experienced by international schools in the Netherlands, are to a large degree related to the increase in pupil numbers and the occurrence of waiting lists: the school lacks sufficient capacity to take on new pupils and encounters problems when it wants to expand (financial headroom, accommodation). Some schools, moreover, report that the school building does not meet its own standards or is unsuited to offer certain services (such as sporting facilities). Incidentally, the latter does not only apply to schools with a waiting list; several other schools are not satisfied with the facilities either.

Especially the government-funded schools relatively often mention bottlenecks. In addition to growth-related problems, several government-funded schools also mention bottlenecks with regard to the recruitment of foreign teachers.

The most urgent problem is the shortage of places in international education. Parents with children at an international school sometimes encountered this shortage to their cost: fifteen percent of the parents who participated in our survey said that the current (international) school in which their child is enrolled was not the school of their first choice. In the (broader) Amsterdam region this applies to even 25 percent. Often, the reason is that at the school of their first choice there was no place available for their son or daughter.

The expectations that parents have of the international schools vary largely. When selecting a school for their child, both content-related (curriculum, the composition of the school) and practical aspects (costs, distance to school) are taken into account. In weighing the pros and cons, parents give priority to the more substantive aspects.

Nearly forty percent of the parents experienced bottlenecks in their search for an international school. Parents particularly mention the limited choice (of schools), the costs and the waiting lists. Parents of foreign nationality do not experience bottlenecks more often than families in which at least one of the parents is of Dutch nationality. Parents in the Randstad¹, excepting the Rotterdam region, encounter bottlenecks more frequently than average in finding an international school for their child.

¹ Urban agglomeration of Western Holland.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the parents are of the opinion that their expectations of the international school came true to a (reasonably) high degree. The distance and travelling time to the school are reasonable according to most parents.

The last main question concerns the consequences for the competitiveness of the Netherlands. The availability of international education plays an important role to more than half of the parents in their decision whether or not to accept work in the Netherlands. This is especially true for parents of foreign nationality. Employers also observe that, especially when recruiting for senior positions, the presence of international education can make a difference.

Companies and organisations attach great importance to a broad and diverse availability of international schools in the region. If the children can attend a good and suitable school, this has a positive effect on the home situation and therefore on the performance of the employee. Therefore, they are worried by the shortage of places. Even though the availability of international education does not play a decisive role in the employers' choice to settle in our country, companies do take it into account. All this justifies an active attitude of the national government towards international education in the Netherlands.

Based on what parents say on the subject, the Netherlands has a well-functioning and affordable range of international education which attracts a growing number of pupils. This growth creates an increasing pressure on international schools in the Netherlands. Therefore, we recommend the following:

1. Increase the options, for example by stimulating the establishment of a number of new international schools, by helping to solve, where possible, the difficulties encountered by existing international schools that want to expand, and by experimenting with innovative schools that fall between regular and international education.
2. Monitor developments in the number of non-Dutch internationals in the Netherlands by region in order to timely determine whether the supply of international schools in the region is sufficient.
3. Build bridges between relevant parties at the regional level if there is a cause to strengthen the supply of international education in the region.
4. Organise knowledge exchange between municipalities about their experiences with international education, in order that municipalities can learn from each other.
5. Prevent parents from having to pay 'double' registration fees.



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