

Background Information: Higher Education System in the Netherlands



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Higher Education System in the Netherlands

I. General Characteristics

Population	
Total population (I.I.2013) (million) ¹	16.78
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) ²	498.4
Population Structure (2013) (share of total population %) ³	
0-14 years	17.2
15-24	12.2
25-49	33.5
50-64	20.3
65 years and older	16.8
GDP	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 ⁴	131
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) ⁵	-0.7
Education (2012) (All levels) ⁶	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	4,220,103
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	793,678
Tertiary Education	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	34.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	44.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) ⁸	1.3

2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

Higher education in the Netherlands is mainly provided by two types of institutions – research universities (*universiteiten*) and universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*). The research universities in the Netherlands focus on fundamental research and offer research oriented degree programmes (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs, wo*). They include universities, open universities, and engineering and agricultural universities. There are also university colleges

¹ European Commission. (2013). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.

² Eurostat. (2013). *Population density*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00003&plugin=0>

³ Eurostat (2013). *People by age group*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00010&language=en>

⁴ Eurostat. (2013). *GDP per capita in PPS*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0114>

⁵ Eurostat (2013). *Real GDP growth rate*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0115>

⁶ Eurostat (2014). *Students by ISCED level, age and sex*. Retrieved from http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_en1r1t1&lang=en

⁷ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

⁸ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 232. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

offering only Bachelor programmes for selected students. The third cycle (Doctoral level) qualifications are offered only at the universities.

Unlike research universities, the universities of applied sciences emphasise practical training and offer professional higher education programmes (*hoger beroepsonderwijs, hbo*). Their primary goal is to provide students with practical experience and skills to prepare them for specific professions. Therefore, in addition to lectures and seminars, students also complete an internship or work placement during their study programme. The universities of applied sciences specialise in one of the seven *hbo* sectors: agriculture, engineering and technology, economics and business administration, health care, fine and performing arts, education (teacher training), and social welfare.

3. Study Structure

Since 2002, higher education system in the Netherlands has adopted a three-cycle system consisting of Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral programmes⁹. Higher education attainment and student's performance are measured in European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. According to the Dutch Law, 60 credits represent one year of full-time study.

First cycle qualification (Bachelor)

- A *wo* Bachelor degree requires 180 ECTS credits (three years of full-time studies) and graduates obtain the degree of BA (Bachelor of Arts) or BSc (Bachelor of Science) depending on the discipline.
- A *hbo* Bachelor degree requires 240 ECTS credits (four years of full-time studies) and graduates obtain the degree in their respective fields e.g., Bachelor of Engineering (B.Eng.) and since 2014 also the degree BA or BSc depending on the discipline..

Second cycle qualification (Master)

- A *wo* Master degree requires 60 to 120 ECTS credits (one to two years of full-time studies) and graduates obtain the degree of MA (Master of Arts) or MSc (Master of Science) depending on the discipline.
- A *hbo* Master degree requires 60 to 240 (architecture) higher education credits (one to four years of full-time studies) and graduates obtain the degree in their respective fields e.g., Master of Social Work (MSW) and since 2014 also the degree MA or MSc depending on the discipline.

Third cycle qualification (Doctoral)

- The minimum study duration for a Doctoral degree is usually four years.
- The completion of a Doctoral degree (Dr) requires an independent research written and publicly defended.

⁹ The education system in the Netherlands. Retrieved from <http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/documenten/onderwijs-1/432-higher-education-in-the-netherlands-1/file>

4. Admission Requirements^{10 11 12}

Admissions to the first cycle research oriented programmes (*wO*) are based either on the pre-university school-leaving Diploma (*vwo diploma*) or on successful completion of the first year of *hbo* programme, although in case of the latter the university may demand additional requirements. The requirements for admission to the first cycle higher education professional programmes (*hbo*) include the completion of either a *vwo*, *hbo* or a level *4-mbo* Diploma. In principle there is no selection, the school-leaving diploma is sufficient. Some courses are subject to quota (numerous fixus) which means that there is a restriction on the maximum number of first year students that can be admitted to that course. This can happen when the number of students applying exceeds the joint capacity of all the institutions to provide a particular course (national quota) or when there is sufficient capacity within the sector but insufficient capacity within individual institutions (institution quota). Universities (*hbo* and *wO*) and university colleges with a numerous fixus may select students based on school leaving grades, motivation, and tests.

The requirement for admission to a Master programme includes a relevant Bachelor degree awarded by an *hbo* institution or university. Doctoral applicants must hold a Master degree.

5. Enrolment Levels

Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (ISCED 5A, 5B and 6, ISCED 97) in the Netherlands between 2003 and 2012. The enrolment levels in Tertiary Type 5A, 5B, and 6 have steadily increased over the years.

6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees¹³

Higher education in the Netherlands is not free of cost. The tuition fee can be either statutory or non-statutory. Statutory fees are fixed by the government every year and apply to students who meet the nationality requirements (for 2014-2015 this fee was 1,906 Euro). The statutory fee also applies to students who, after graduating, wish to obtain a second Bachelor or Master degree in either health care or education and whose first degree is not in one of these fields. Students who do not meet these requirements pay non-statutory fees. The institutions determine the non- statutory fee which varies from one institution to another. The maximum tuition fee that the university colleges can charge is five times the amount of the statutory fee. Generally, the tuition fee at the university colleges is twice the amount of the statutory fee.

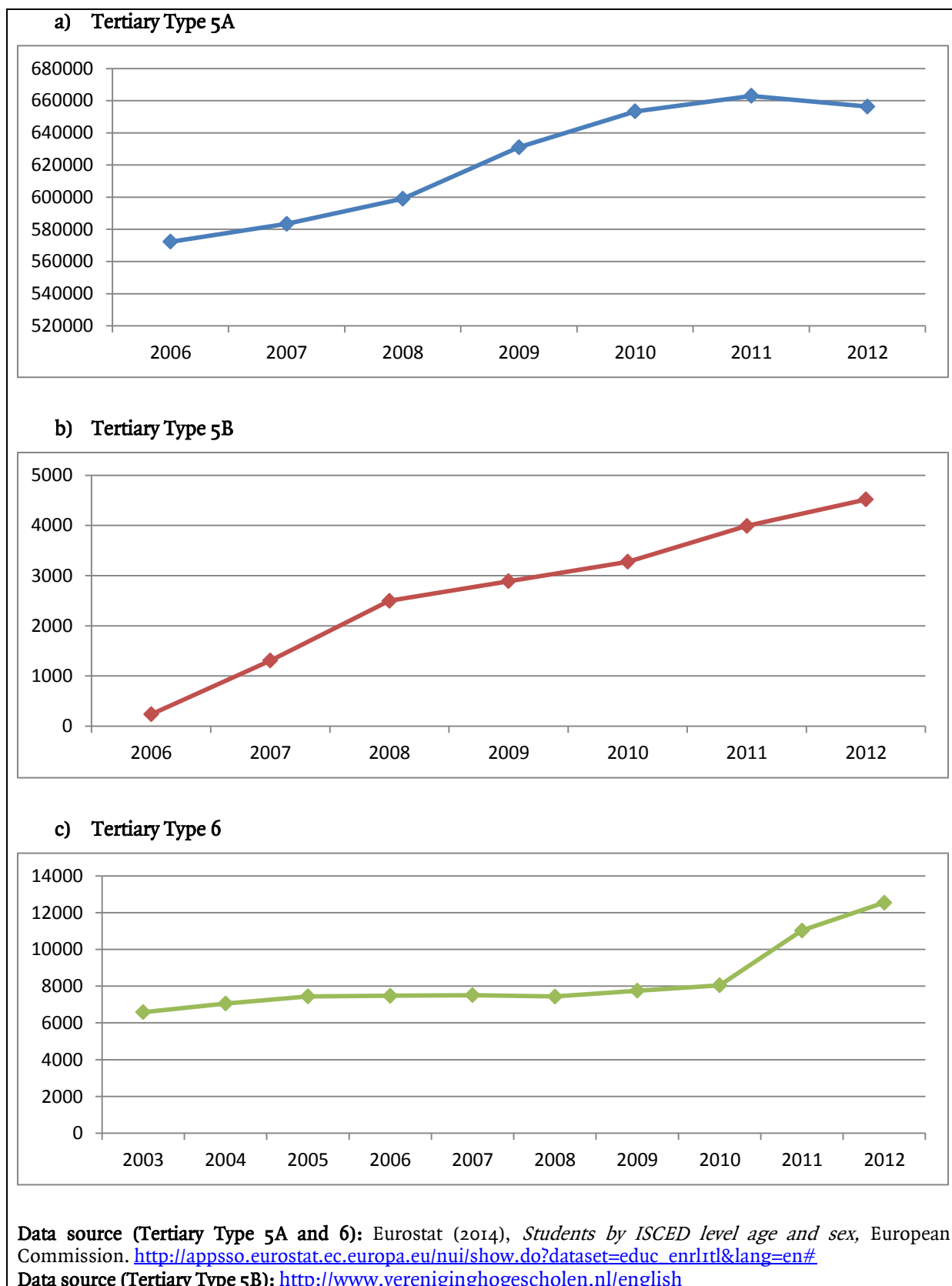
¹⁰ Eurydice. (2014). *Bachelor*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Bachelor>
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Bachelor>

¹¹ Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Second_Cycle_Programmes

¹² Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Third_Cycle_%28PhD%29_Programmes

¹³ Eurydice. (2014). *Higher education funding*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Higher_Education_Funding

Figure 1: Trends in enrolment levels



7. Financial Support for Students¹¹

Students who enrol in full-time higher education before their 30th birthday are eligible for financial support. From 1/9/2015 the system of study grants and loans will change in the Netherlands.

- The current basic grant for all students in higher education will be abolished and the current possibility to take out study loans from the government will be expanded. Interest rates are low and repayment is income contingent i.e. individuals earning below the minimum wages are exempted from the loan repayment, individuals with incomes above the minimum wages have to repay a maximum of 4 % of their incomes. The maximum time limit for loan repayment is 35 years.
- There is and will be an income related ‘supplementary’ grant which will increase for students with parents from lower income groups.
- All students get free public transport during weekdays or weekends.
- For most programmes of study, students are entitled to four years of student finance. Students eligible for Dutch student finance who want to pursue all or part of their studies abroad can apply for financial assistance.

8. Note on the Dutch data provided for EUROSTUDENT V

The Netherlands have a long tradition surveying students in the national student monitor. The EUROSTUDENT questions are all incorporated in a much longer questionnaire. According to the national survey, some questions are asked in more detail but a lot of effort is done to make the indicators comparable. One of the indicators concerns the definition of impaired students. In the national survey students could choose out of an extensive (and longer) list of possible impairments than in other countries, resulting in a higher share of students with impairments. As for the results itself, the students were interviewed in 2013, before a major reform in in the grant system. What this means for future results remains to be seen.

This report is based on the following sources:

Eurydice. (2013). *Overview Netherlands*. Retrieved from

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Redirect>

Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education. (2013). *Higher Education System in The Netherlands*. Retrieved from <http://www.nuffic.nl/en/library/higher-education-system-in-the-netherlands.pdf>.