

Rotterdam University

Rotterdam University (Hogeschool Rotterdam) is one of the major Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands: over 28,000 young people study for a bachelor's or master's degree. Rotterdam University is a multi-sectoral institution specializing in the sectors: Arts, Media & Design, Education (teacher-training colleges), Behaviour and Society, Health Care, Economics and Business Administration, and Engineering and Technology. Nearly all professional fields are represented in the University's programmes.

Rotterdam University will see to it that the knowledge offered to the student is always based on highly topical concepts and perceptions. Students are taught how to deal with real-life issues which are relevant to their study programmes. The best way to do so is to have the students tackle real-life issues taken from professional practice. Doing so will add to the students' personal development, causing the students to make their own, personal decisions.

Rotterdam University attempts to support this as much as possible by offering tailor-made programmes.

Rotterdam University prepares students for a profession in a multicultural society, a global economy and on an internationally oriented labour market. The study programmes combine a sound foundation of knowledge and skills with an intensive orientation on practice. At Rotterdam University, a final thesis is specifically tested for the extent of innovation to the student's future professional area. This element is highly valued. Taking a study programme at Rotterdam University results in highly trained professionals well prepared for further careers.

Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Rotterdam University has been conferred the status of a recognized and funded institution and all programmes are registered in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO).

The quality of the certificate that students receive from Rotterdam University is guaranteed through participation in the national system of legal regulation and quality assurance, which is closely monitored by the The Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO). The level of programmes offered at Rotterdam University meets the 'Dublin Descriptors'.

In addition, the quality of the separate programmes is guaranteed through an internal system of quality assurance, both at the level of school or institute and its individual study programmes. This system concurs with the NVAO's accreditation criteria and with the University's own criteria for quality assurance. The Board of Governors monitor the quality of the schools and institutes, and of the programmes offered by arranging regular staff meetings on Planning and Control.

Outside in, Inside out

Rotterdam University, being the centre of expertise that it is, is inextricably linked with the City of Rotterdam and closely involved in the economic and social developments of the Rotterdam region. All study programmes of Rotterdam University clearly address issues that are relevant to the region. The students of Rotterdam University are often asked to participate in numerous projects requiring a multidisciplinary approach, at the instigation of companies and social organizations. At the same time, Rotterdam University uses the hands-on experience of its partners to enrich its theoretical instruction. This is the essence of the university's view on education: outside in - inside out. Gaining knowledge from professional practice and applying knowledge in practice. A win-win cycle of knowledge, beneficial to all parties involved.

The Rotterdam Educational Model

All programmes at Rotterdam University are based on a singular view on education: the Rotterdam Educational Model. Its basic principle is that students acquire competencies to be able to adequately handle issues arising in their future professional practice. Knowledge and skills are always related to the professional area of practice of a starting professional.

All programmes include three learning tracks:

- **Knowledge-driven track:** subjects aimed at acquiring knowledge, theoretical concepts and skills, including lectures, seminars, training and practicals.
- **Practice-driven track:** subjects in which the search for practical solutions to real-life problems is derived directly from professional practice, such as practical training, on-the-job training and graduation projects.
- **Student-driven track:** the focus of this part of the educational model is on the individual student. Based on their learning objectives and the competencies they aim to acquire, the students choose their own subjects, such as deficiency programmes, optional modules and minors.

As study progresses, students can increasingly steer their own course and better prepare themselves for their own future professional practice. All students are offered study counselling throughout their entire study.

The Netherlands has a binary system of higher education, i.e. there are two types of programmes: research-oriented education (wetenschappelijk onderwijs, WO), traditionally offered by research universities, and higher professional education (hoger beroepsonderwijs, HBO), traditionally offered by hogescholen, or universities of applied sciences. In this description, the Dutch abbreviations WO and HBO will be used.

Primary and secondary education

Children are allowed to begin school at the age of four, but are not legally required to do so until the age of five. Primary education lasts eight years (of which seven are compulsory), in the last year of which pupils are advised as to the type of secondary education they should pursue.

Secondary education, which begins at the age of 12 and is compulsory until the age of 16, is offered at several levels. VMBO programmes (four years) combine general and vocational education, after which pupils can continue in senior secondary vocational education and training (MBO) lasting one to four years. The two programmes of general education granting admission to higher education are HAVO (five years) and VWO (six years). Pupils are enrolled according to their ability, and although VWO is more rigorous, both HAVO and VWO can be characterized as selective types of secondary education. The VWO curriculum prepares pupils for university, and only the VWO diploma grants access to WO. The HAVO diploma is the minimum requirement for access to HBO. The last two years of HAVO and the last three years of VWO are referred to as the tweede fase (literally, second phase), or upper secondary education. During these years, pupils focus on one of four subject clusters (profielen), each of which emphasizes a certain field of study in addition to general education requirements. Each cluster is designed to prepare pupils for study programmes at the tertiary level. A pupil enrolled in VWO or HAVO can choose from the following subject clusters: 1) Science and Technology (Natuur en Techniek) 2) Science and Health (Natuur en Gezondheid) 3) Economics and Society (Economie en Maatschappij) 4) Culture and Society (Cultuur en Maatschappij).

Senior secondary vocational education and training (MBO)

Senior secondary vocational education and training (MBO, secundair beroepsonderwijs) is offered in the areas of economics, technology, health, personal care, social welfare and agriculture. MBO programmes vary in length (one to four years) as well as in level (1 to 4). Graduates of VMBO programmes are eligible for admission to MBO, and completion of MBO programmes at level 4 qualifies pupils for access to HBO.

Higher education

Higher education in the Netherlands is offered at two types¹ of institutions: research universities (universiteiten) and universities of applied sciences (hogescholen). Research universities include general universities, universities specializing in engineering and agriculture, and the Open University. Research universities are primarily responsible for offering research-oriented programmes (Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs, WO). Dutch research universities provide education and conduct research in a wide range of disciplines: language and culture, behaviour and society, economics, law, medical and health sciences, natural sciences, engineering, and agriculture.

Universities of applied sciences include general institutions as well as institutions specializing 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. Universities of applied sciences are primarily responsible for offering programmes of higher professional education (Hoger Beroepsonderwijs, HBO), preparing students for particular professions. These tend to be more practically oriented than programmes offered by research universities. In addition to lectures, seminars, projects and independent study, students are required to complete an internship or practical training (stage) which normally takes up part of the third year of study, as well as a final project or a major paper in the fourth year.

Since September 2002, the higher education system in the Netherlands has been organized around a three-cycle degree system consisting of bachelor, master and PhD degrees. At the same time, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was adopted as a way of quantifying periods of study. The higher education system continues to be a binary system, however, with a distinction between research-oriented education and higher professional education.

The focus of degree programmes determines both the number of credits required to complete the programme and the degree which is awarded. A WO bachelor's programme requires the completion of 180 credits (3 years) and graduates obtain the degree of Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science (BA/BSc), depending on the discipline. An HBO bachelor's programme requires the completion of 240 credits (4 years) and graduates obtain a degree indicating the field of study (for example, Bachelor of Engineering, B. Eng., or Bachelor of Nursing, B. Nursing). The (Dutch) title used before 2002, appropriate to the discipline in question (bc., ing.) may still be used.

Institutions offer WO master's programmes requiring in most cases the completion of 60 or 120 credits (1 or 2 years). Some programmes require 90 credits (1.5 years) or more than 120 credits. In engineering, agriculture, and mathematics and the



The Dutch education system continued

exceed expectations

natural sciences, 120 credits are always required. Graduates obtain the degree of Master of Arts or Master of Science (MA/MSc). The (Dutch) title used before 2002, appropriate to the discipline in question (drs., mr., ir.) may still be used. An HBO master's programme requires the completion of 60 to 120 credits and graduates obtain a degree indicating the field of study (for example, Master of Social Work, MSW).

The third cycle of higher education, leading to a doctor's degree, is offered only by research universities. All research universities in the Netherlands are entitled to award the country's highest academic degree, the doctoraat, which entitles a person to use the title of doctor, abbreviated to dr. The process by which a doctorate is obtained is referred to as the promotie. The doctorate is primarily a research degree, for which a dissertation based on original research must be written and publicly defended. The minimum amount of time required to complete a doctorate is four years.

Requirements for Admission to Higher Education

For access to WO bachelor's programmes, students are required to have a VWO diploma or to have completed the first year (60 credits) of an HBO programme. The minimum access requirement for HBO is either a HAVO diploma or a level-4 MBO diploma. The VWO diploma also grants access to HBO. For access to both types of higher education, pupils are required to have completed at least one of the subject clusters fulfilling the requirements for the higher education programme in question. A quota, or numerus fixus, applies for access to certain programmes, primarily in the health sector, and places are allocated using a weighted lottery. Potential students older than 21 years of age who do not possess one of the qualifications mentioned above can qualify for access to higher education on the basis of an entrance examination and assessment. The only access requirement for the Open University is that applicants be at least 18 years of age.

For access to all master's programmes, a bachelor's degree in one or more specified disciplines is required, in some cases in combination with other requirements. Graduates with an HBO bachelor's degree may have to complete additional requirements for access to a WO master's degree programme.

Credit System and Grading Workload is measured in credits. Since 2002, a student's workload is measured in ects credits. According to Dutch law, one credit represents 28 hours of work and 60 credits represent one year of full-time study. The grading system has been the same for several decades: the scale is from 1 (very poor) to 10 (outstanding). The lowest passing grade is 5.5; 9s are seldom given and 10s are extremely rare; grades 1-3 are hardly ever used.

Accreditation and Quality Assurance

A guaranteed standard of higher education is maintained through a national system of legal regulation and quality assurance. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for legislation pertaining to education. As of 2002, responsibility for accreditation lies with the NVAO. According to the section of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act dealing with the accreditation of higher education, all degree programmes offered by research universities and universities of applied sciences will be evaluated according to established criteria, and programmes meeting those criteria will be accredited, i.e. recognized for a period of six years. Only accredited programmes will be eligible for government funding, and students will receive financial aid and graduate with a recognized degree only when enrolled in, or after having completed, an accredited degree programme. Accredited programmes will be listed in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO) and the information will of course be available to the public. The NVAO plans to review all study programmes before 2009. Before that time, all programmes registered in CROHO that have adhered to the quality assurance regulations in the past, are considered to be recognized by law.

In addition to accreditation of degree programmes, the Netherlands has a system by which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science recognizes higher education institutions by conferring on them the status of either *bekostigd* (funded) or *aangewezen* (approved). *Bekostigd* indicates that the institution is financed by the government. *Aangewezen* indicates that the institution does not receive funds from the government and has to rely on its own sources of funding. Regardless whether a degree programme is offered by a 'funded' or an 'approved' institution, it must be accredited and registered in CROHO to be considered recognized.

According to legislation regarding accreditation, institutions are required to write on degree certificates the date the degree programme in question was granted accreditation. At this stage, only a few programmes have actually been accredited. Because accreditation is an ongoing process, it will be important that people who review Dutch degrees make sure that a programme was accredited at the time the degree was awarded. Once accredited, the validity of the accreditation of that particular degree is of course permanent.

¹ The higher education system also includes a third branch, with a relatively small number of students, known as *internationaal onderwijs* (IO), or international education. IO offers advanced training courses originally designed for people from developing countries whose jobs require highly specialized knowledge. Problem-oriented courses and programmes of various types, including master's programmes, are offered in a wide range of specific fields. The emphasis can be either on research or on the practical application of knowledge. Courses are given in English and last from a few weeks to two years. With one exception (the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague), the institutes of international education do not offer PhD programmes themselves but have concluded agreements with Dutch universities which enable their students to pursue doctorates. Admission requirements vary according to the course in question, but in most cases a bachelor's degree or its equivalent is required for admission to a master's degree programme, and a master's degree for admission to a PhD programme. An additional requirement is work experience. International education is subsidized by the government, which finances the institutes and provides scholarships for students.

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and the Dutch education system



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