

Report 2016-2017

Taskforce The Future Is Diversity

Study Succes Bicultural Students



Universiteit
Leiden



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1. Introduction, background and collaborative events

In 2014, three large universities in the metropolitan western region of the Netherlands, the Randstad, joined forces to develop a systematic plan **to promote the study success** and transition to the labour market of their **bicultural students**. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Leiden University and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam all faced the challenge that the study success of bicultural students (especially those with a non-western migration background) was considerably below that of ethnic Dutch students, while over the past fifteen years the share of these students as part of the total student population had doubled. In addition, bicultural master's graduates are two to three times as likely to be unemployed as their ethnic Dutch fellow students.

At the same time, these are **the most talented and ambitious young people** from the Dutch migrant communities. The collaborating universities acknowledged the need to remove obstacles, recognize talents, and offer students adequate guidance and support to enable them to fully develop their potential.

The need for change is clear. Firstly, **too much talent remains unused**, and opportunities for innovation are missed. International research shows that businesses and organizations perform better with diverse teams. Academia, too, is beginning to acknowledge that diversity and quality are interrelated. The rapid internationalization and diversification of both staff and students calls for the right kind of action to bring this potential to fruition.

Secondly, our **increasingly diverse society needs highly educated, bicultural individuals** in administration, business life, and social organizations. They have the necessary competence with diversity to respond to and manage the diverse society of the 21st century. To reach the right positions, they need adequate study support and equal opportunities on the labour market. The Taskforce was established to develop the best support practices, and put them into practice. Our programme builds on the expertise obtained during earlier government campaigns (e.g. 'Studiesucces G5 2008-2011'), and by the Expertise Center Higher Education (ECHO).

Once a position paper was written, discussed and approved by the Executive Boards of the three universities and the Ministries of Education and Social

Affairs, and funding for the first year was secured by the Ministries, an intensive programme of working group meetings and collaborative events began. Activities were managed by Chief Diversity Officers (EUR, UL) and theme experts (VU).

Collaborative Events

- In March 2016 a **kick-off workshop** was organized in Leiden, where expert staff members of the three universities formed three working groups. The working groups were dedicated to: (1) setting up a database that would allow for comparisons between access, dropout and graduation rates of the three universities; (2) developing good practices to improve access, progression, and the transition to the labour market; (3) establishing a knowledge centre for all stakeholders.
- In May 2016 a **master class** was organized with US diversity expert James A. Banks, where the working groups presented the first stages of their work, and received expert feedback (Rotterdam).
- In September 2016, the **National Network of Diversity Officers** (LanDO) was launched at Leiden University, to serve as a platform for sharing knowledge in the field.
- In November 2016 a **symposium** on Inclusive Education was organized at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, where the university's experts presented their work in the field, and taskforce members could share their insights.
- In March 2017 members of the taskforce presented their findings during a **workshop at the Annual Conference of NADOHE**, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, in Washington, DC.
- In June 2017, **the report** on the first year's accomplishments of the taskforce was presented in Leiden, during a small symposium where the results were shared with the audience.

Over this period, a taskforce **website** was prepared and launched, featuring an online platform for sharing knowledge and experience.

2. Highlights Working Group Database

The Taskforce's ambition is to establish a level playing field for all students. To realize this, the current situation needs to be mapped, so that we find out whether and where inequality exists. For three universities (Erasmus University Rotterdam, Leiden University, and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) the working group compared access, dropout and graduation rates between students of various ethnic backgrounds, genders and pre-academic levels, at institutional and sector level. These comparisons were based on iCijferHO data as provided by DUO.

Findings

We conclude that there is a remarkable **lack of coherence** between institutions and sectors. The composition of the student body and the study success of the various student groups vary per institution and sector. For example: although in general ethnic Dutch students perform better than students with 'non-Western' migration backgrounds, this is *not always* the case. The only consistent result is that female students more often obtain diplomas than male students.

Apparently, **every sector or course programme has its own dynamics**. This suggests that educational contexts differ in the social, financial and intellectual resources they require, or in their ability to deal with – or compensate for – differences in students' resources. Inequality varies and materializes in a certain institutional context, **in interaction with this institutional (meso-) context**. This means that institutional figures are too generic to draw detailed conclusions and to draft plans for improvement.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance equality at the university at the level of course programmes.**
 - Individual course programmes should **study their 'local' environment**, e.g. by comparing them to other course programmes. Dialogues about good practices are indispensable here.
 - **Accessible bridging programmes** should be maintained or re-established, as students from non-mainstream groups (ethnic-minority background and/or lower educated parents) enter the university relatively often via alternative educational tracks.

2. Structural monitoring & administration

- Diversity and inclusion should be **monitored over time** (yearly or biyearly) at all university levels, including faculties and course programmes.
- For reasons of comparability and efficiency, a **national dataset** is required that includes data-relevant variables (including ethnicity/countries of birth) of all participating universities.
- In anticipation of stronger privacy legislation, **alternative ways to register** details on ethnic background should be considered and implemented, including thorough consent procedures.
- The same goes for the registration of **social class**/parental education.
- Note that the variable ‘ethnicity’ is only meaningful in combination with other variables such as migration background (immigrant generation).

3. Carry out additional analyses & research

- How does the **institutional meso-context** influence the study success of various student groups? Can we **disentangle the effects** of the students’ various demographic characteristics?
- What do we learn from **other universities/HBO’s**, also international?
- To what extent are the **Master’s-programmes** level playing fields?

3. Highlights Working Group on Interventions to Improve Access

An inclusive learning environment can only emerge when **the learning career is seen as a continuous process**, which calls for a coherent chain of interventions that needs to be monitored and improved in its entirety. There is no a single decisive intervention that could secure inclusion. This is the point of departure of the Working Groups Interventions to Improve Access, Progression and Transition to the Labour Market.

With this principle in mind, the Working Groups started to make an inventory of the existing interventions in this field. For the sake of this pilot, they then selected the interventions they would first begin to compare, improve, implement and evaluate.

The Working Group Access critically considered the interventions to support talented bicultural students in making the transition from secondary school to university. Two interventions were selected:

- (1) the programmes preceding the first academic year;
- (2) the collaboration between universities and secondary schools to facilitate the transition.

Findings

1. Two of the three universities have several years of experience with **summer schools or pre-academic (development) programmes** that are also, or exclusively, aimed at prospective bicultural or first-generation students. The results are **ambivalent**. Erasmus University Rotterdam observed that the positive effects of the pre-academic programme (2011-) began to weaken after a few months. In addition, the costs of the programme are high.

In 2014, after three years, the Vrije Universiteit discontinued the Summer Course that was specifically aimed at first-generation students. The intervention was successful, but the positive effects did not seem to measure up against the efforts and costs; the scope was considered too small. However, now that the programme has ended, **another benefit** comes to light: the programme allowed talented bicultural students to form a community. Apart from the fact that a welcoming, well managed **learning**

community is an effective contribution to creating an inclusive environment (good practice U.S., e.g. UCLA), the community served as a pool for bicultural candidates for committees and other management functions. Research suggests that this experience is an advantage during the transition to the labour market. For this reason VU is considering continuing the Summer School, with an adapted format.

2. All universities have developed forms of **collaboration with secondary schools**, to improve their accessibility. The aim is to attract more talented bicultural and first-generation students, and to facilitate the transition. This intervention seems **more effective** than stand-alone pre-academic programmes. One of the aims is to implement some elements of the pre-academic programmes within secondary schools. In addition, bicultural students can, in collaboration with teachers, teach secondary school classes, and thus act as role models.

Recommendations

1. Ensure integration within the total chain of interventions

The most successful interventions to improve access will **integrate** pre-academic programmes and collaboration with secondary schools.

2. Adopt a sustainable, small-scale approach, with an eye to community building

- To be effective, these interventions will adopt a small-scale approach (by faculty), secure good organization, adequate resources, and a firm commitment to the project.
- Pre-academic programmes will follow a generic approach, and ensure daily evaluations. The effects on **academic community building** need to be included in the final evaluations. Collaboration with secondary schools will include collaboration with neighbourhood and parents.

4. Highlights Working Group Interventions to Improve Progression

To improve the progression of bicultural students, the Working Group aimed specifically at interventions that intend to improve the inclusivity of the institution itself: teacher trainings in inclusive teaching. All three universities have ample experience with these training courses, and the exchange of good practices leads to a wealth of recommendations. In addition, the Working Group discussed ways to evaluate the effectivity of the trainings.

Findings about training

1. All universities testified to problems attracting enough participants for their training courses. They reported an apparent **lack of a sense of urgency**, and a general lack of time. If the faculty board explicitly encouraged participation, more teachers registered for the training.
2. A training programme that consists of one single course or of short, sessions of only a few hours in rapid succession seems **not to lead to sustainable change**.
3. In two universities, participants were especially positive about that part of the training in which bicultural and first-generation students shared their **personal experiences** with exclusion and inclusion.
4. While the training aims at improving the teacher's ability to create an inclusive, supportive classroom for all, it may have the additional effect of encouraging intercultural competence among the students. To obtain this affiliated goal, **this intervention can be complemented** with activities to revise the curriculum, and to improve its diversity, and its global, intercultural scope. As stated above, interventions are most effective when they are part of a chain. It would therefore be advisable to integrate intercultural competence in the final learning objectives of the department.

Recommendations about training

1. Create programmes rather than single courses

Develop long-term training programmes on the creation of inclusive learning environments, including follow-up (e.g. peer consultancy). Develop these programmes for teams of teachers.

2. Create a sustainable context for trainings

Ideally, training courses will be integrated in the BKO and SKO programme. In addition, training programmes are available for all teacher teams. Participating in these is self-evident and possible; work load will not be an obstacle. Adequate funding will be available, and the management actively encourages participation.

3. A training course should also aim at broadening the teachers' lived experience and insight

Sharing students' experiences can be a good way of gaining a personal, lived insight into what exclusion and inclusion in the classroom really are, so that a teacher will be able to develop the necessary sensitivity to create a truly inclusive learning climate. Transmitting skills is not enough. Participants reported the need for both practical tools, and more awareness.

4. Interventions should be made-to-measure

A training course is best tailored to the specific needs of a faculty or, preferably, institute or department.

Findings about evaluation

The evaluations that were carried out at Leiden University within the context of the Taskforce (see the figure in the appendix on the website) confirm the above findings and recommendations. The evaluation of the relevant two-hour training module in the BKO programme indicates that beginning teachers appreciate the training (7.7 on a scale of 10); they gained higher awareness of the issues.

However, most do not yet feel equipped to teach a diverse group of students. A more extended training combined with peer consultancy was seen as desirable. 12 out of 14 wanted to participate in a follow-up training. 9 out of 12 wanted to participate in a peer consultancy session with other teachers.

Recommendations about evaluation

1. Integrate an impact assessment in the regular training programme

2. Measure the actual effect on teaching and learning

Develop an evaluation method that measures the actual changes and adaptations in the teaching and learning practice, and on the way in which both students and teachers experience inclusion. Combine interviews and focus groups. This will only be possible if there is a regular training programme in place, so that interviews with teachers and students can be planned beforehand.

3. Use evaluations of teachers' experiences to improve the programme

5. Highlights Interventions to Improve Transition to the Labour Market

This Working Group concentrated on designing a new method to improve recruitment and selection procedures, so that a more diverse group of applicants is selected. This method, Caleidoscoop, is based on an existing online training course that allows users to distinguish between the criteria necessary, helpful, or not necessary for performing a certain job (Aguinis et al., 2009). In addition, the Working Group added another set of instructions that would help to avoid candidates being selected who closely resemble the selection committee members. This resulted in a list of 60 criteria.

On the basis of this method, the Working Group embarked on a pilot with management and consultancy company Accenture. An existing starter's function was the point of departure: Junior Business Consultant. The pilot was run with 25 students from the three participating universities, who were interested in the feedback this trial application procedure would offer. 14 of them were bicultural students (or newly graduated). During a career event at the VU, on 19 May 2017, feedback was offered, and the results of the pilot were presented.

The Working Group intends to do a second pilot. The newly developed instrument will ultimately be integrated in the Knowledge Centre (see chapter 6).

6. Highlights Working Group Knowledge Centre

The Working Group aims at establishing a new Knowledge Centre, which will serve as a platform for sharing scientific knowledge, knowledge gained from practice, and insights for effective policies. These forms of knowledge will help to create more effective interventions aimed at the whole chain: from secondary schools to the top of the business world and social organisations.

The Knowledge Centre broadly shares the same goals as the Taskforce:

1. It aims at narrowing the gap in study success between student groups, and offering equal opportunities on the labour market.
2. It aims at creating an inclusive learning and working environment for students and staff.
3. In addition, it aims at collaborating with all stakeholders to acquire and share knowledge.

To establish the Knowledge Centre, the Working Group works in close partnership with ECHO. ECHO has a strong track record in developing interventions and advising both institutes of higher education and companies. By collaborating, this expertise is combined with the knowledge of evidence-based interventions and expertise within the universities, and with the knowledge gained from the database (Working Group Database) A website is under development to promote visibility.

Findings

The Working Group has mainly focused on the transition to the labour market. Universities have not yet taken on the full responsibility for this step in the learning and career process of bicultural students. In addition, adequate data for effective action are not yet available. To be able to obtain the necessary information, and develop effective interventions, it is advisable to focus on separate faculties. For the Taskforce, the Working Group has focused on the Law faculties of the three universities.

The Working Group, ECHO, and the three universities will continue to develop the Knowledge Centre, and seek funding to realize their aims.

7. Deliverables and recommendations

The four most important deliverables are:

1. The design of a **database** that is an excellent tool to include data from other universities too. This information is invaluable as the foundation for the continuous improvement of all interventions.
2. The foundation of a valuable **inter-university collaboration** in the field of access and progression.
We recommend both sustainable intra-university and inter-university collaborations. The latter could well be organized around regular, half-yearly open working conferences.
3. New interventions and collaborations in the field of the **transition to the labour market**: the Knowledge Centre and the website will grow into a useful platform to improve a field that needs our collaborative efforts.
4. **New networks**
The Taskforce established new networks and new national and international collaborations that will prove essential to an evidence-based, effective policy to improve the performance of bicultural students. These include:
 - close collaboration with our expert US partners in NADOHE
 - launch of the new national network of academic diversity officers, in close collaboration with VSNU (LanDO)

Recommendations for the future

1. The Taskforce will continue as a **dynamic network organization**.
2. Universities within the network will **collaborate around the issues that interest them most** (access, progression, etc.), in varying partnerships; these collaborations will be led by one of the most committed partners. The aim is increased, shared expertise.
3. The **database** will be one of the sustainable, shared projects.
4. **Collaboration** with a range of stakeholders within the academic and corporate world and with other relevant organizations and ministries is to be continued (e.g. networks, the Knowledge Centre).

For further information:

See the appendices on the website The Future Is Diversity (launched summer 2017).

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