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## REPORT

### on HERE Study Visit to Amsterdam (Netherlands)

**Title: HERE Study Visit 2019 "Social Inclusion: University policies and practices"**

**Term: 25 - 26th of March 2019**

**Venue:** Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

**Programme and materials:** <https://supporthere.org/amsterdam2019>

#### **Event participants**

National experts on higher education reform of partner countries neighbouring the EU, representatives of national Erasmus + offices, experts from EU countries and partner countries, representatives of the host institution (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). In general, about 40 participants took part in the event.

#### **Participants from Ukraine**

Ukraine was represented by:

- Professor of the Department of System Analysis and Computational Mathematics of Zaporizhzhya National Technical University **Volodymyr Bakhrushyn**;
- Professor of Information Systems Department of Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics, member of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education **Iryna Zolotaryova**.

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### **Description and key information**

#### **Purpose of the event**

The purpose of the conference was to showcase how the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam addresses social inclusion and tackles the issues of access and retention.

The main problems, which were discussed, are:

- what is social inclusion and why it is need for universities and states;

- how social inclusion issues are solved at VU Amsterdam, what are the university's main activities in terms of target groups and their specific challenges, how the issues of social inclusion are reflected in the university's strategy;
- who and how develops and implements the strategy of social inclusion at the university;
- how the social inclusion issues links other strategic priority areas (research, internationalisation, outreach/third missions etc).

### **The work of the conference**

The visit began with welcome speeches and introduction to topic of Frans Sniijders, Director of VU Amsterdam's International Office; Filippo Luigi Saia, EACEA; Michael Gaebel, SPHERE Team.

Inclusive education in Netherlands is seen as an important tool for the consolidation of society. VU Amsterdam is research University and is in the TOP-200 of ARWU, QS and THE university rankings. Today, about 24.5 thousand students study here. Among them 2/3 study at bachelors and 1/3 at master's degree programs, about 4000 students are international. Annually about 450 doctoral degrees are awarded. The University implements about 50 bachelors, 90 masters and 30 doctoral programs. Bachelor's programs are mostly Dutch, but there are exceptions. In particular, a teaching on the program in mathematics is conducted in English. The university employs about 3500 staff, of which 2115 are academic.

The results of the previous survey of participants also were provided.

Then there was the Ice breaker/small group-exercise where participants presented themselves and their expectations for study visit.

### **Session 1: Presentation of the policies and strategies for access, retention and social inclusion in the Netherlands,**

Speaker: Jurgen Rienks, Netherlands House for Education and Research

Jurgen Rienks presented the review of educational system, policies and strategies for access, retention and social inclusion in the Netherlands. Neth-ER is an international non-profit association which represents Dutch academic community in Brussels in order for the Dutch knowledge community to optimally use European policy and instruments that Europe has to offer to the Netherlands. It unites 11 organizations including Association of Universities in The Netherlands (VSNU), Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, Dutch National Student Association, Dutch National Student Union.

The higher education system in the Netherlands consists of research universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. Research Universities implement 3-year bachelor's educational programs, as well as master's and doctoral programs. Graduates of 6-year VWO (Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs) schools have access to WO bachelor's programs at research universities. Graduates of 5-year HAWO (Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs) schools have access to 4-year WO bachelor's programs at universities of applied sciences. Graduates of both types of bachelor's programs can continue their studies in the magistracy both at research universities and at universities of applied sciences. Doctoral programs are available only at research universities.

All HEI, courses, students and pupils are registered in the Central Register of Higher Education programmes. Each student has a national student number, with related information about his results, as well as information which is need for the collecting of statistical data.

Since studying at the university is not free, there are two types of financial assistance available to students – loans and grants dependent on family income. Other factors that may help to attract representatives of under-represented groups are also taken into account. The state provides funding only for accredited study programs and only students of that programs may receive additional financial assistance. There are two ways in which the ministry can influence the work of the universities. The first is the General Agreement between the Minister and VSNU. The second is concluding performance agreements between ministers and individual universities. The main requirements of these agreements include improving the quality and effectiveness of educational and scientific activities, improving interaction with upper-secondary education, increasing of bachelor success rates and reducing of drop-out rates, creation of broad (cluster) bachelor and more specialized master's programs.

## **Session 2: Social inclusion as part of VU's institutional strategy**

Speaker: Dr. Marieke Slotman, Faculty of Social Sciences and VU Diversity Officer

Dr. Marieke Slotman told about social inclusion as part of VU's institutional strategy. It is aimed to train and educate students to deal with differences of Society and university community in gender, sexual orientation, nationalities, cultures, ways of thinking and religions. Also she characterised the structure and main tasks of Diversity office at VU Amsterdam.

## **Session 3: Widening participation in international activities and student exchange programmes**

Speakers: Ms. Sanne Boomsma, International Office, VU

Ms. Helena Gillespie, University of East Anglia

Ms. Sanne Boomsma and Ms. Helena Gillespie told about participation in international activities and student exchange programmes. In particular, they talked about participating in the Aurora Universities Network, Erasmus+ programs, etc. They also described the barriers faced by foreign students at the beginning of education and the means to overcome them.

#### **Session 4: Presentation of methodology for SPHERE study on inclusion and international credit mobility**

Speaker: Michael Gaebel, EUA

Michael Gaebel, EUA presented methodology for SPHERE study on inclusion and international credit mobility. He noted the main reasons for the underrepresentation of some groups in higher education. Among them there are: socio-economic background (family income, parents profession and education level, their professional and social status, etc.), gender (imbalanced participation of men and women among students and staff), disability, mature students, students with care responsibilities, orphans, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious minorities, people discriminated due to their gender or sexual orientations, people facing geographical obstacles (remote or rural areas, small islands, peripheral regions, urban problem zones, less serviced areas), war veterans, civil war victims, migrants, refugees, etc. He described the reasons of the importance of social inclusion in higher education and the problems associated with it as well as a European policy on these issues.

In his opinion inclusion in higher education can entail: widen participation, changes in learning provision (learning design and teaching, flexible learning offer etc.), inclusion in research (research teams which bring together diverse backgrounds), support of local communities and contribute to their integration, inclusive university culture, monitoring. National system level policies and approaches are quite different but usually include such measures as exemption from tuition fees or providing financial assistance for some categories of students.

#### **Session 5: Social inclusion in the classroom: The VU Mixed Classroom Approach**

Speaker: Dr. Thea van Lankveld, VU Learn! Academy

At the session the Mixed Classroom Approach to Social inclusion in the classroom was presented. This is one of the approaches used at VU Amsterdam to ensure effective education under conditions of diversity. It is aimed at the formation

and development of multicultural competence of students as well as considering their peculiarities when learning and using their strengths to improve the quality of education.

### **Session 6: Widening participation in pre-university college programmes**

Speaker: Dr. Gusta Tavecchio, Student Services

The second day of the study visit began with a plenary meeting devoted to the widening participation in pre-university college programmes. Dr. Gusta Tavecchio and four international students of VU Amsterdam who presented their points of view on this problem. One of the main goals is that students must be engaged, inspired and prepared. The main accents in this work are: academic preparedness, social integration, identity formation, social embeddedness, feeling of belonging, safe spaces.

### **Session 7: Inclusion policies for research: Improving (access to) the doctoral track and beyond**

Speaker: Dr. Sandra Hasanefendic, International Office

Then Dr. Sandra Hasanefendic, International Office of VU Amsterdam told about inclusion policies for research in the context of improving the doctoral track and access to it. She characterized the contingent structure of students on doctoral programs and measures to ensure inclusiveness of these programs. In particular, the University uses flexible PhD training, personal approach, bridging and pre-doc programs, academic English training, mental health support etc. Retention focus is employability and carrier development.

Further work was implemented in groups formed on a regional basis and discuss 1) what can be taken away/adopted for their systems and institutions 2) challenges is adopting policies and practices. Ukrainian participants work in the Eastern Europe group. Some common problems and challengers were mentioned: absence of national and institutional strategies, legislative limitations, lack of necessary statistical data, funding, the state of the economy and the labour market, limited use of opportunities offered by joint programs, mobility and distance learning. As a specific problem for Ukraine, the involvement in higher education of displaced persons and inhabitants of the occupied territories was mentioned.

At the final session, the results of the study visit were summed up.

Within the framework of the study visit the case-study on requirements of Ukrainian legislation on social inclusion in higher education was presented by Volodymyr Bakhrushyn. It was resumed that in recent years Ukraine has significantly advanced in the legislative provision of social inclusion in higher education. But there

are many problems that still need to be solved, and not all legislative norms are fully implemented in practice.

**The main learning outcomes of the conference are the following:**

1. Understand the process of defining and implementing university strategies for supporting access and retention for different groups and social inclusion.
2. Understand better the concept of social inclusion, its kinds, tasks and contexts of national policy that shapes it in the higher education sector.
3. Devise support for the development of innovative teaching practices that promote inclusive approaches.
4. Examine systems for student progression and tracking, and the possible university programmes and services that can support this.
5. Share interesting practices on engaging diverse students in international mobility.

**Conclusions and recommendations for Ukraine**

1. To develop the National Strategy for Social Inclusion in Higher Education, based on the principles of the EHEA, taking into account Ukrainian specific problems and aimed at consolidating of society and ensuring its sustainable development.
2. To develop amendments to legislation that would provide the opportunity to solve key problems of social inclusion in higher education.
3. To prepare guidelines for higher education institutions on goals and tools for ensuring social inclusion.
4. To promote the best practices of Ukrainian and world universities in social inclusion.

**Photos from the conference:**



