Promising practices

Increasing the quality of entrants to primary teacher education in the Netherlands

Country category: Netherlands

Teacher education pathway category(ies): Selecting the most suitable candidates into ITE programmes

Stakeholder category(ies): policy makers; researchers

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in the Netherlands on 6-10 March 2017.

The OECD review team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Michael Day (University of Roehampton), Kjetil Helgeland (OECD) and Danielle Toon (Learning First) – identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising practice 2.
Increasing the quality of entrants to primary teacher education in the Netherlands

Context

Research on the predictive value of academic and other initial teacher education (ITE) selection criteria – such as essay writing, interviews, reference letters, psychometric tests and standardised test results – on teacher quality is relatively scarce and shows mixed results (Byrnes, Kiger and Shechtman, 2003[1]; Jacobowitz, 1994[2]). In effect, an ITE programme may not be highly selective, but may still do an excellent job in preparing teacher candidates (Feuer et al., 2013[3]). For example, the introduction of certification mechanisms, degrees earned or years or substantive features such as opportunities for grounded practices are important for teacher candidates (Darling-Hammond, 2017[4]; Jenset, Klette and Hammerness, 2017[5]).

The strategy of providing more quality filters, rather than rely only on academic results, for the selection into initial teacher education (ITE), has been pursued by a number of countries undergoing reform of initial teacher preparation (ITP), including the Netherlands. The goal of implementing quality filters explicitly addresses the narrowness and unintended results that accompany the use of academic criteria as the principal selection criteria into ITE, which has been challenged by policy makers (OECD, 2014[6]). One of the main reasons is that the raise of the requirements for entering into ITP systems does not automatically change the social status of the teaching profession. Capable young students that can choose to go into high status occupation are not likely to go into ITP as long as teaching is socially perceived as easy to get into, while young people that might have been highly motivated to pursue a teacher career can become discouraged to enter the profession. As a result, there is a risk to attract people who could not get into more demanding professions, but who are not the one with the best qualifications or the highest motivated (OECD, 2011, p. 236[7]).

With regard to the implementation of quality filters to improve the recruitment of primary teachers, the Netherlands has been pursuing measures to:

- filter out potential recruits lacking the subject knowledge and in particular literacy and numeracy skills, to make strong teachers.
- attract higher qualified recruits to teaching.

Which quality filters are used to improve the recruitment of teacher candidates?

Measures to filter out potential recruits lacking the subject knowledge and, in particular, literacy and numeracy skills, to make strong teachers

In 2016, a National Expert Group was formed to develop practices to improve the selection of recruits to primary education. Currently, all recruits to primary ITE must
Meet knowledge-level criteria in history, geography, nature and science. At the end of the first year of primary ITE, all students must pass literacy and numeracy tests. Interviewees reported to the OECD review team that these tests have both improved the quality of recruits to programmes and also reduced drop-out from history, geography and nature and science programmes: one HBO (Universities of Applied Sciences) reported that the drop-out rate was reduced from 50% to 25%. According to those interviewed, the introduction of testing has had a particular impact on students from senior secondary vocational education (MBO), many of whom are from low socio-economic backgrounds. The HBOs are looking at ways to provide support to those trainees with the potential to make strong primary teachers so that they achieve the required standards.

**Measures to attract higher qualified recruits to primary education by offering more lateral routes to teaching**

In the Netherlands, universities have played only a small role in training primary teachers, and there have been few options for university graduates, compared to HBOs, to enter primary teaching. Further, although ITE programmes have been traditionally provided by HBOs, a growing proportion of teacher candidates have been accessing ITE through senior secondary education (HAVO) or middle management training (MBO4 diploma). Currently, out of the 15% of the students in the academic/scientific high school track (VWO), only a few opt to study primary ITE at an HBO (Error! Reference source not found.).

**Figure 1. Routes to primary education teaching qualification in the Netherlands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry requirements</th>
<th>ITE programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-university education (VWO) diploma</td>
<td>Primary Teacher training University of Applied Sciences (HBO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior general secondary education (HAVO) or middle management training (MBO 4) diploma + Admission test (since 2015)</td>
<td>Bachelor level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration: 4 years (240 ECTS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-university education (VWO) diploma or completed first year of University of Applied Sciences (HBO)</td>
<td>Academic primary teacher education (ALPO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nominal: 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combination of educational/pedagogy and teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed University of Applied Sciences (HBO) or University (WO) education and aptitude test</td>
<td>Lateral-entry trajectory teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum duration: 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always in combination with appointment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


More generally, the Ministry of education has implemented alternative pathways to incentivise and attract more and more diverse groups of teacher candidates (Cedefop, 2016[9]). For example, there are lateral-entry places offered in which the teacher candidates is assessed to determine if we can start teaching right away, while receiving part-time training. Other measures include:
• Encouraging universities and HBOs to co-operate around creating and delivering joint Bachelor of Arts (BA) primary ITE programmes, which award the student with a BA from both institutions. Students have to either achieve a VWO diploma or complete the first year of HBO.
• Educational minors at Universities that entitle graduates from a regular bachelor to enter a reduced second-degree teaching license.
• Special pathways encouraging second career teachers, such as aptitude test based certifications or non-government funded ITP programmes tailored for second career teachers.

Why is it a strength?

The OECD review team in its review of the Netherlands on 6-10 March 2017 noted that this practice:
• Promotes diverse pathways to ITE while maintaining and improving the quality of entrants. The implementation of alternative and flexible routes to teaching for experienced professionals and university graduates addresses the pressing issue of attracting more and better candidates to ITE. Stronger entry requirements for initial teacher education programmes at primary level appear to be reducing dropout rates and increasing the quality of candidates.

How could it be improved?

The OECD review team noted:
• There are still limited opportunities for attracting academic candidates into primary teaching. Although the minister recently approved a primary programme at one academic university (University PABO), the general lack of programmes for primary teaching at the university level may decrease the number of academic students attracted to primary teaching.
• There is scope to increase the use of available lateral routes to teaching. Few candidates pursue these paths in primary, but more in MBO and secondary. Expanding university postgraduate programmes for primary teaching would open up a large pool of potentially high quality recruits.

For more information


