

Legal reforms in the Netherlands in relation to the European Area for Higher Education

Legislation to introduce a bachelor-master's structure in higher education from september 2002

- The programmes at universities will have to convert their traditional "one-cycle" programmes to bachelor- and master programmes. For the time being, "one-cycle" programmes may continue. Most university programmes will convert into a bachelor-master's structure in 2002 or in 2003. Studies in medicine and dentistry have not yet made decisions. However proposals are expected in autumn 2002.
- The programmes at the universities of professional education will be converted into bachelor programmes. In certain fields master's programme will be established. Universities of professional education do already offer post-experience master programmes which will now be officially recognised.
- An ECTS-compatible system of 60 credits will be introduced.
- Bachelor degrees require 180 credits in academic education and 240 credits in higher professional education.
- Master's degrees in academic education require a minimum of 60 credits depending on the subject. Degrees in engineering, in agricultural disciplines, in life sciences, in natural sciences and in dentistry require 120 credits, while degrees in medicine would require 180 credits.
- Access to academic master programmes is based on the entrance requirements determined by the institutions. In general students are admitted to the master's programmes on the basis of their having completed a relevant bachelor's programme. In fact the law specifies that every academic bachelor programme should give entrance to at least one academic master programme. In those cases where the master's programme doesn't correspond to the bachelor's programme, admission may be selective.
- To express the distinction between higher professional education and academic education BA, BSc, MA, MSc degrees will be characteristic for academic degrees. The traditional titles (doctorandus, meester of ingenieur for academic programmes and ingenieur, baccalaureus for programmes in higher professional education) will continue to exist and graduates will still have the option to choose between the bachelor and master degree and one of the traditional titles.
- A master's degree will be required for admission to doctoral programmes.
- Student aid and funding mechanisms will be adapted to the bachelor-masterstructure.

Legislation to introduce an accreditation system in higher education from august 2002

- Introduction of an independent accreditation body established by law. The accreditation body will have independent members, who have expertise in the field of higher education, professional practice and quality assessment. The members are appointed by the minister.
- The accreditation system will be based on the existing quality assessment system organised by the institutions themselves: self-evaluation and peer review.
- Accreditation of a programme will be a condition for funding, student aid and legal degrees at public and private institutions.
- Accreditation of a programme is granted for a period of six years. New programmes need to be pretested.
- A programme will be accredited either as academic or higher professional.
- Bachelor- and masterprogrammes will have to be accredited separately.

- The law specifies that accreditation has to take into account the following aspects of quality: the level of the programme, the content of the programme, the education process, the returns on education, sufficient facilities and an adequate quality assessment method.
- The accreditation body has to co-operate internationally in drawing up the accreditation protocol.

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