

The Development and Improvement of Higher Education Quality Guarantee in Netherlands

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Keywords: Dutch Higher Education Quality Guarantee System; External Guarantee; Meta Evaluation

Abstract: As a globally renowned leader in higher education, the Dutch higher education quality guarantee system has not only gained high recognition for its unique and comprehensive advantages, but also continuously revised and improved itself, becoming a benchmark for the quality guarantee system in higher education institutions in Europe and the world. Through the discussion in this article, it can be understood that the quality guarantee system of higher education in the Netherlands has gone through the early stages of full government responsibility, the mid-term establishment of internal guarantee departments within universities to be responsible for quality supervision, and finally the establishment of an independent external guarantee system. A three-in-one meta evaluation system is formed through external guarantee, internal guarantee, and government supervision. The government, schools, and external evaluation agencies complement each other, supervise each other, and improve the quality guarantee system of higher education in the Netherlands. The success of this system not only has great reference significance for the quality guarantee system of higher education in China, which is still in the exploratory stage, but can also be partially applied to the quality guarantee system in China universities.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century full of competition and challenges, with the universalization of education in the world, the role of higher education has been more widely valued and recognized. The Netherlands, a small country in Western Europe across the sea from Britain and surrounded by Germany and Belgium, is a leader in higher education with its highly developed capitalism. With a population of only 16 million and a total area of 41,800 square kilometers, equivalent to 6.5 Shanghai's total area, the European country is not very impressive in terms of economic size, political voice, and overall national influence, but when it comes to the quality of its higher education, global rankings of universities, and job recognition, the Netherlands can be said to be the leader. For a long time, the Netherlands' domestic investment and supervision in its higher education have contributed to its flourishing situation (Liu Xuedong, 2016)^[1]. As we all know, the heritage of a country is not directly related to the size of its territory or the strength of its military, but to how its education system benefits its citizens. The high quality of education in the Netherlands, whether it is compulsory primary and secondary education, or higher education for the

age of 18 and above, all reflect the strength of the country. A strong education makes a strong country. As a variable factor that directly affects a country, education affects itself, other countries, and even the whole world from time to time.

2. Background of Dutch higher education

As the recipient of secondary education, the entrance threshold of higher education and the corresponding admission principles are directly related to the results of students' secondary education. There are three ways to enter higher education in the Netherlands. The first, study comprehensive university entrance, Dutch name is wetenschappelijke onderwijs., short for WO education. At present, there are 14 universities in the Netherlands that meet such admission conditions, and these schools are highly recognized and ranked in the world (Li Tongming, 2012).^[12] Generally speaking, according to the comprehensive ranking of the British Times, since 2010, these universities have basically ranked in the world's top 200. In terms of total amount, Dutch universities are second only to the United States and the United Kingdom, which dominate the world's higher education circle for a long time. However, considering the large number of universities in the United States and the United Kingdom, Dutch universities are the elite of the elite in terms of output quality. This has been done in the world first. In the Netherlands, only secondary education is the VWO diploma (Dutch full name voorbereidende wetenschappelijke onderwijs) students, and the number of Dutch students holding VWO secondary school diploma is actually limited, accounting for about 30%. Therefore, WO education is aimed at the elite education of elite students in the Netherlands, which is small and refined. This can be compared to the training strategy of Japanese naval aviation in the Pacific Theater under the joint Fleet of Japan during the Second World War, commonly known as the elite soldier strategy, which cultivated soldiers who had absolute advantages in the early battle with the US army. The second type, higher vocational college entrance, is called hoger beroeps onderwijs in Dutch, or HBO education. This type of education targets a very large proportion of Dutch students, between 50% and 70%. If only from the name understanding, similar to China's vocational and technical personnel to train vocational colleges and universities are similar, but in general, HBO education institutions in academic research is inferior to China's 985,211, and most of the first class of colleges and universities, but in the application of vocational technology is stronger than most of China's vocational colleges and universities. Therefore, it should be an institution between Chinese universities and junior colleges (Westerheijden, 2018).^[12] HBO Education in the Netherlands accepts students with the HAVO diploma (hogere academische voorbereidende onderwijs in Dutch), which is one level less difficult and valuable than the VWO. You are also free to apply to HBO Educational institutions. Here, we can consider WO education as the highest level and only for VWO class students. The second level of HBO education is for both VWO students and HAVO students, in other words, students at the first level have multiple routes to higher education. However, lower-level students often have great restrictions on the choice of higher education (Hans van Hout, 2011).^[12] To paraphrase a common saying in China's college entrance examination model, what kind of high school they enter will be what kind of university. The third, international education, is called internationale onderwijs, or IO education. The object of this kind of education is very different from the first two kinds. From the name point of view, the translation of IO is international education, which corresponds to overseas students in general, and the IO education is often set up by private colleges, the tuition is high, most Dutch students generally will not consider. In addition, in terms of teaching language, IO is basically taught in English, and the subjects taught are generally business-related subjects, so all aspects reflect non-localization. IO education in the Netherlands, the students accepted are two groups of people, one is Dutch students, but they must hold VWO certificates, and the proportion of

such groups is very least. The second is overseas students, whose admission standards are generally based on the students' GPA and IELTS and TOEFL scores in their previous countries. Such students account for a high proportion. To sum up, WO and HBO are the three entrance channels of Dutch higher education, which account for a larger proportion and have greater reference significance. The third WO is quite different from the first two because it is mainly targeted at foreigners. However, these three entrance channels are like the troika, enabling the Netherlands to navigate the road of higher education.

3. Characteristics of Dutch higher education

3.1 Wide entry and strict exit

Compared with the college entrance examination mode in which thousands of soldiers pass through a single wooden bridge in China, there is no national unified examination after the completion of secondary education in the Netherlands, so as long as you have the corresponding diploma, you can apply for the corresponding colleges and universities, so in terms of the difficulty of being admitted by schools, the entry threshold in the Netherlands is not so high. However, after entering colleges and universities, we will find that the higher the level of colleges and universities, such as WO institutions, the higher the comprehensive academic requirements, the examination requirements, the homework requirements, the amount of study materials read per semester, and so on. In addition, WO students have only three years of study, which is shorter than the four years in the United States and China, and this means that students are required to have a higher level of comprehensive understanding (Wang Lidong, 2008).^[2] Generally speaking, the number of Dutch students who can successfully complete their degree studies within the specified time is not high, and many people need to complete it through extended study, and there are many people who drop out and start again. Rigorous graduation rates ensure the high quality of students and at the same time guarantee the excellence of the academic attitude of the faculty, the direct participant in higher education.

3.2 Cultural diversity and inclusiveness

In Dutch universities, people of different skin colors, different religious beliefs, and different sexual orientations can be seen. They are not only students, but also faculty. This compares with our country colleges and universities will be very different landscape. In our country, the traditional understanding generally holds that the average university lecturer and professor should be in a straight face, take teaching cultural knowledge as a priority task, and should keep a sense of distance with students apart from teaching in class and guiding student writing of paper or academic project support. In the Netherlands, it is common to see students and professors get together after class for the purpose of drinking coffee and having dinner together to discuss not only academic but also life topics, and the sense of distance between students and teachers is relatively small. Both of them are direct participants in higher education and enjoy equal status (Song Xin, 2012).^[4] Teachers will not be unreasonably harsh on overseas students because of personal bias and favoritism to local students. Let's take Chinese and German students as an example. These two countries have the highest proportion of foreign students in Dutch universities. German students in science and engineering, and Chinese students in business are generally higher than Dutch students. To sum up, the tolerant and inclusive environment in Dutch higher education has created respect for people and equal treatment for knowledge givers.

3.3 Strict assessment and employment of teachers

Compared with the traditional domestic cognition, the scope of teachers' selection should be directly selected from the students who graduated from normal universities. China, US and UK all agree on this. But the Netherlands does not have specialized teacher colleges, so where do college teachers come from? Generally speaking, the corresponding teacher candidates need to complete the corresponding professional study in the corresponding institutions of higher learning, obtain the corresponding degree, and then go to the special education department to receive special training, after passing the training assessment, they can go to the institutions of higher learning to teach. Generally speaking, teachers have at least a master's degree, and many are doctors and postdocs (Hans van Hout, 2011). In addition, compared with the in-service teachers in most domestic colleges and universities, the in-service teachers in the Netherlands are under greater pressure. Within the specified time, the corresponding assessment should be completed, as well as the publication of papers and bachelor's research, and the assessment will be carried out in the cycle of teachers' in-service, which virtually encourages teachers to always have high demands on themselves, preventing them from being cancelled and leaving the campus if they fail to pass the assessment.

4. Development of quality assurance system in Dutch higher education

Dutch higher education is world-renowned, 14 comprehensive universities have been very stable in the rankings, all thanks to the Netherlands' sound higher education quality assurance system. At the same time, as one of the four recognized models of education quality assurance, the Dutch model also has its own distinctive characteristics and advantages.

4.1 The emergence of education quality assurance system

During the Second World War, the Netherlands was under the rule of Nazi Germany as an occupied country, and after the end of the second World War in 1945, the country was in ruins, and several old universities that had been forced to shut down during the second World War were reopened. Since everything was starting over, the first thing to be solved was the most important condition for running a school: the source of funds. The government played the role of funding, and considering that most of the European countries at that time were directly the recipients of the Marshall Plan of the United States after World War II, the Dutch government invested a lot of the money provided by the United States and its own funds in schools and elites (Hans van Hout, 2011). At that time, the population of the Netherlands was small, and most of the young people in the society were only exposed to secondary education, so the admission of higher education was completely free of tuition. For the first few decades, this completely government-owned management of education was very effective. But gradually, with the increasing number of schools in the Netherlands, the following problems arose, which contributed to the emergence of the later education security system.

4.1.1 Lack of government funds and poor quality of education

By the 1970s and 1980s, the number of colleges and universities in the Netherlands, especially HBO colleges and universities, reached dozens. Faced with more and more colleges and universities, the Dutch government felt powerless, and the amount of government funding was less and less, leading to problems in school enrollment, which indirectly affected the psychological state of teachers in schools. As a result, the quality of students graduating also fails to meet the requirements of society, causing social criticism (Yan Fang, 2016).^[5]

4.1.2 Comprehensive universities and vocational and technical universities are completely independent in running schools and lack cooperation

At that time, WO and HBO University were not like the current operating model, and the two were completely independent in the training of students, and the technical talents were incompatible with academic talents, which led to the fact that the graduated students were often not competent in their work. At the same time, the admission standards of these two types of schools are completely restricted, and there is no room for flexibility, resulting in students in need cannot choose the content they want to learn (Yi Aisong, 2013).^[9]

4.1.3 The completely centralized management of the government is not realistic enough

The Netherlands is an old capitalist country in Western Europe, but it retains the traditional constitutional monarchy in European culture. In the early days after World War II, government education was justified, but any system that lasted too long was bound to cause problems. After all, not everyone in the government understands education, and if you run schools the way you run a country, you will not be able to follow the principle of specialization. Moreover, the government's energy is limited after all, so the government also realized that it is not feasible to be solely responsible for education by itself (Wang Lidong, 2008).^[2]

4.2 Development stage of education quality assurance system

The early government fully centralized management of higher education institutions has many drawbacks, which leads to the subsequent development of the quality system, which is mainly divided into three stages.

Before 1985: Gap period

Before 1985, Dutch higher education was fully regulated, guaranteed and managed by the government, and there was no authoritative national quality assurance system for higher education, but this stage also laid the foundation for the subsequent development of the system.

1985-2002: 18 milestone years

The year 1985 was a milestone in Dutch higher education, as it was the year that the Dutch government published an important educational white paper, "Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality" clearly states that quality evaluation is the responsibility of colleges and universities themselves, and quality control mechanism is an important means of self-regulation for colleges and universities. The government should give colleges and universities enough rights to ensure their own quality, and promote cooperation among different colleges and universities to improve the effectiveness of the education system (Ji Feifei, 2010).^[7] The promulgation of this decree means that the Netherlands has officially entered into a modern quality assurance system. At that time, the system first proposed that the internal quality assurance should be responsible for the institutions of higher learning themselves, and the external quality assurance should be responsible for two external professional organizations (Yang Weidong, 2011).^[3]

2002-present: Expansion of the system

In this year, the Dutch education security system added a new quality assurance system component on the basis of the original internal and external quality assurance: meta-assessment, whose essence is the re-evaluation of the internal and external quality assurance results, but the objects implemented by the meta-assessment are somewhat different from the previous two (Yan Fang, 2006).^[5] The emergence of this assessment is more significant, because most of the educational quality assurance in the world also has internal and external quality assurance. Therefore, the emergence of meta-assessment brings novelty to educational quality assurance and strengthens the reliability of quality assurance results.

5. Improvement of the quality assurance system in Dutch higher education

5.1 Internal quality assurance system

Strictly speaking, the quality assurance of Dutch universities is not carried out internally and externally. As mentioned earlier, *Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality*, published in 1985, was a milestone that marked the beginning of the government's delegation of power to universities to take responsibility for quality assurance. At that time, it was divided into two stages. The first stage: from 1985 to 1987, higher education quality assurance began to carry out internal quality assurance. In this process, colleges and universities, as both the subject and object of quality assurance, carried out internal evaluation of courses and teachers in colleges and universities by example (Sheng Zhengfa, 2013).^[6] Compared with the subsequent development of external quality assurance system and meta-assessment system, internal quality assurance is relatively easy to operate, and the operation process, implementation and result analysis of this guarantee are consistent in most countries in the world. But for the Netherlands, the establishment of an internal quality assurance system is a crucial first step, without which there is no follow-up.

5.2 External quality assurance system

After the establishment of the internal quality assurance system in 1985-1987, the Netherlands entered the second step: the construction of the external quality assurance system. This external quality assurance can be simply referred to as the same industry evaluation system. First of all, there are two organizations responsible for the external quality assurance system. The first one is the Association of Dutch Universities, referred to as VSNU, which is mainly responsible for the quality assessment of comprehensive research universities and international education universities. The second is the Association of Higher Vocational Education Colleges, referred to as HBOR, which is mainly responsible for the evaluation of higher vocational universities (Ji Feifei, 2010). First, both agencies have something in common: they are for-profit organizations, independent of the government and self-financing. But these two organizations have a direct relationship with who is being evaluated. Specifically, they are funded by research universities and vocational colleges, respectively. In other words, the evaluator needs to be supported by the person being evaluated. This model is similar to the relationship between China's discipline inspection Commission and the central government. The Netherlands Association of Universities is mainly responsible for the evaluation of academic quality of universities, and later also involves the evaluation of scientific research. However, higher vocational universities are not research-oriented, so the evaluation content of higher vocational education association is only academic quality (Wu Chenliang, 2013). In general, the two responsible bodies of the external quality assurance system, although the division of labor is clear, but there are also problems. Since the funds of the evaluation institutions come directly from the evaluated institutions, we can be sure that the two will cooperate due to the interest relationship, thus reducing the effectiveness of external quality assurance. However, as a whole, the combination of internal and external quality assurance has further standardized the effectiveness of higher education quality assurance.

5.3 Evaluate the quality assurance system

First of all, the meta-assessment system was not established after the establishment of the external quality assurance system, as early as 1987, with the introduction of external quality assurance by the Dutch University Association and the Association of Higher Vocational Education Colleges, a body led by the National Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Inspectorate of Higher Education, or IHO, was born. Its main function is to re-evaluate the certification results of the former VSNU and HBOR, including irregular supervision, guidance, and spot checks of

both. Then this operational method of re-evaluating the evaluation results is also called meta-evaluation, and the higher education inspection team is also called meta-evaluator (Xu Gang, 2007).^[8] The establishment of the meta-assessment system is actually a good supervision of VSNU and HBOR, because it has been mentioned before that these two external quality assessment institutions are essentially the umbrella of institutions of higher learning. Once the interests collude, the assessment results will be greatly reduced. As the IHO is an official organization affiliated to the government and not for profit, it actually represents the central government and has absolute authority. Therefore, using IHO as a meta-evaluator can not only constantly urge VSNU and HBOR to exercise self-discipline and set an example, but also communicate with internal quality system evaluators: universities, as well as external quality system evaluators: The two institutions work together to ensure the quality assurance system of higher education through internal, external, and meta-assessments (Chu Westerheijden, 2018).^[11]

5.4 Changes of external quality assurance system and meta-assessment quality assurance system

According to the above mentioned content, the construction and development of the quality assurance system took place from 1985 to 2002. After 2002, the Netherlands adjusted the responsible objects of external and meta-assessment, and the new adjustments were as follows: The IHO no longer plays the role of the original meta-evaluator, and the new meta-evaluator is the Netherlands Certification Organization, referred to as NAO, later renamed the Netherlands and Flanders Certification Organization, referred to as NVAO (IHO, 2013). In the past, VSNU and HBOR no longer act as external quality assurance assessment bodies, and this function is carried out by QANU, the Dutch University Quality Assurance Association appointed by NVAO. In general, the change of the new security system is mainly due to the diversity and integration of education in Europe. Because of the increasing number of foreign students coming to the Netherlands, universities also need to open many new subjects and increase the workload. NVAO is mainly responsible for the evaluation and certification of university courses and degrees. At the same time, NVAO is not directly involved in the evaluation, but authorizes the institutions with NVAO external evaluation qualifications to evaluate universities, among which QANU is also the most important external quality assurance evaluation institution (Liu Xuedong, 2016).^[10] Combined with the above points, it can be seen that the quality assurance system of the Netherlands is a process of constantly improving and improving itself according to the national conditions and environment, which reflects the characteristics of keeping up with The Times and improving.

6. The enlightenment of higher education in our country

6.1 Establish an external quality assurance system indirectly guided by the government

Due to historical reasons, higher education has developed late compared with the Netherlands itself, and the political system of our country has essential differences with European countries, so there is still a lack of quality assurance. One of the most obvious places is that our Ministry of Education belongs only to the central government, and has the final decision and veto power on the quality of education. In real life, the quality assurance of colleges and universities can only be done step by step, and the autonomy of colleges and universities can not be applied flexibly. Even some private colleges and universities, in addition to obtaining funds, can only fully obey the local provincial and municipal education bureaus in terms of quality assurance. Therefore, the external quality assurance system of universities tends to be delayed and unprofessional. As can be seen from the example of the Netherlands, the government should change its role from direct participation to indirect participation, adapting to market needs and the international situation.

6.2 Use the supervision system to strengthen the internal quality assurance system

Compared to the difficulty of external quality assurance, internal quality assurance should be relatively easy. However, at present, some colleges and universities in China, especially higher vocational colleges, have imperfect evaluation of teachers and corresponding disciplines, and many teachers do not fully understand their own subjects. It is often counterproductive to teach junior college students with teaching methods that deal with undergraduates. At the same time, due to the unclear positioning of many vocational colleges for students, many professional disciplines are not suitable for the relatively first-level junior college students to learn, so it has caused the general situation that students are not willing to listen to the disciplines taught. Therefore, colleges and universities should start from their own, and refer to the supervision of foreign schools to carry out irregular assessment of their own school teaching to find problems and better benefit students and society.

7. Conclusion

By summarizing the whole thesis, it can be seen that the quality assurance system of Dutch higher education has experienced from imperfection to perfection, from single management to multi-institutional supervision and management. The system is established in the special background of the Netherlands, which fully shows the characteristics of Dutch higher education, such as democracy, freedom and gradual progress, reflecting the importance of teachers, schools and students. The quality assurance of higher education in the Netherlands currently adopts the trinity supervision system of external quality assurance, internal quality assurance and government supervision, which has practical reference significance for our country.

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