Sino-Dutch VET job shadowing program

21 schools, 40 teachers watch and learn

A perfect showcase for internationalising vocational education training
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About

Nuffic
We are Nuffic: the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education. From primary and secondary education to vocational and higher education and research. Our ambition is for every pupil and student to gain international experience. With this in mind we encourage everyone to expand their limits. Nuffic. Meet the world.

MBO Raad
MBO (Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs) is the abbreviation for secondary vocational education and training (VET) in the Netherlands. VET is the main supplier to the labour market and is often regarded as the ‘foundation of the economy’ and the ‘backbone of society’. Approximately 40% of the Dutch working population has completed a vocational course to at least a secondary vocational training level.

Colophon

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It was about four years ago, when the idea of cooperation first came up. Up until then, it was common for universities to organise exchanges – or other forms of cooperation. But why not organise this for vocational education institutes as well? We started to make plans. The idea of job shadowing seemed a perfect instrument to get to know each other. Negotiations between the Ministries of Education of China and the Netherlands started. Two years later, we found our partner: Jiangsu – a province known for its high ambitions on vocational education. What’s even more: some of our Dutch vocational education schools already worked together with schools in Jiangsu. It was a perfect match.

Today, we want to thank everyone involved in this job shadowing program – schools, teachers and policy makers.

We couldn’t have turned this into a success without your support and enthusiasm.

With this magazine, we hope to give you an overview and impression of our job shadowing program. What stood out, what are the lessons learned, and what’s our next step?

Two job shadowing visits shouldn’t mark the end of our collaboration, however. We’re convinced that it’s the start of a long term partnership between Jiangsu province and the Netherlands.

Sabine Amft, Nuffic
Manfred Polzin, MBO Raad
Background, goals & results

involved vocational schools

10 11

participants

staff members or teachers

19 21

sectors

Healthcare
Hospitality & Tourism
Agriculture & Horticulture
Creative Industry & IT

days abroad

China

The Netherlands
Our goals
Turning VET into a first class education choice through permanent innovation and close collaboration with the labour market are challenges both our countries are facing. The goal of this job shadowing program is to learn from each other, to create an unforgettable experience and to develop a sustainable partnership on several levels. China offers VET on the largest scale in the world, whilst the Netherlands is committed to position itself as a leader and innovator in vocational education. It's a perfect match.

Results
During the visit, participants shared information on organisational processes at school as well as on educational programs. Participating in this job shadowing program has created the opportunity for both, Dutch and Chinese schools to explore and promote cooperation and joint initiatives. Sharing working practices and didactics appears to be a strong instrument, leading to mutual understanding and quality improvement. All necessary ingredients to lay the foundation for a follow up of this program. During the 2016 visit to China, Dutch teachers and their Chinese colleagues have confirmed their commitment to cooperate. Both parties consider various types of cooperation to be promising. An exchange for teachers for example, to promote development of educational programs, or to design new courses. Other options are exchanging teachers and students during summer schools and digital collaboration.

In common
Vocational education in China focuses primarily on the transfer of knowledge, resulting in a rather high level of knowledge among Chinese students. Dutch participants were interested in different types of learning systems and eager to share the more 'hands on' approach of the Dutch VET system with their counterparts. Despite the differences in didactics and the language barrier, most teachers concluded that vocational education courses in China and the Netherlands have more in common than they expected. A key to successful cooperation is to understand the role of culture. Cultural differences have an impact, but improving our level of knowledge of each other's culture can contribute to building international competencies.
Dutch delegation in China

Representatives of ten Dutch vocational schools in healthcare, hospitality & tourism, agriculture & horticulture and creative industry joined the job shadowing program. In 2016, they visited a series of vocational schools in China. The Dutch delegation was interested in several issues, e.g. college management, curriculum development and teaching methods.
What did you think?

21 Chinese teachers visited the Netherlands, 19 Dutch teachers visited China: a lot of experience was gained. What stood out the most? These are some views expressed by the participants.

‘Different, but also similar’

“Last year, we visited the Nanjing Institute of Tourism and Hospitality. It’s nice to see that things can be different, but similar at the same time. We witnessed several activities during a project week and I recognised a lot. We can really do things together, and we’re already thinking of summer schools and exchanges for students and teachers.”

Odyle Smits - de Roos, MBO Amersfoort

‘Learning by doing’

“This is not my first visit to the Netherlands. As a student, I worked here, in the Chinese garden at the World Expo. In the past two decades, our college and our Dutch partner organised many exchanges and mutual visits. Still, this job shadowing program has been a great opportunity to gain more knowledge on vocational education training. I took classes in floriculture and landscaping and design at Wellant-college. We visited a local company and talked about internships. What stood out, was the fact that vocational education training in the Netherlands focuses on practical skills of students. Colleges and industry work closely together, allowing students to learn by doing. This way, professional skills improve quickly.”

You Weizhong, Suzhou Polytechnic Institute of Agriculture

‘No standard programs’

“My particular interest lies in software development. I was impressed by the way you incorporate software into projects. Speaking of which, it was interesting to learn that at vocational schools in the Netherlands, courses like algebra and English are incorporated in projects as well. We are used to standard programs, but students here have the freedom of learning by doing.”

Zhang Yili, Nanjing Vocational Institute of Industry Technology

‘Draw upon this experience’

“This week, I attended classes at MBO Amersfoort. We also visited travel agencies, learned new things on management of internships and got to see some of the assignments students have during their training. I thought the assignments were quite impressive, we can draw upon this experience to improve our internships.”

Lu Limin, Nanjing Institute of Tourism and Hospitality

‘Keep investing’

“At the end of the job shadowing program, we can look forward to further cooperation. Two agreements were signed, more will follow in the future. For the benefit of our students, let’s work together. At this moment, we have established several agreements with schools in Nanjing, Suzhou. We aim for 6% of our students to have studied abroad by 2019. That means 1000 students who gain international experience. Going abroad is easy. However, if we want to build sustainable international partnerships, we must keep investing.”

Job Wolfslag, ROC Mondriaan

‘Encourage students to ask questions’

“My Chinese colleagues were surprised to learn that at school, we encourage students to ask questions on how and what they learn. We encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning process. It was nice to see they want to learn as much as possible during this visit, for example how things are organised and what students focus on during their training. We definitely see possibilities for further cooperation.”

Anneke Brandsma - de Vries, Landstede
Sino-Dutch job shadowing program: the return visit

In May 2017, 21 Chinese teachers visited the Netherlands. Visits were made to Dutch schools, offering programmes in healthcare, hospitality, agriculture and design.
Official partnerships

During the closing ceremony of the Sino-Dutch job shadowing program, official partnership agreements were signed by Cibap, SintLucas, Suzhou Art & Design Technology Institute and Changzhou Higher Vocational College of Arts.

‘Let’s continue to cooperate’

Two years ago, the agreement on Sino-Dutch cooperation was signed. Its goal: improving knowledge and understanding of each other’s vocational system and its institutes, as well as developing sustainable cooperation within the vocational sector. The job shadowing program turned out to be a success. Specific plans were made for further cooperation. Even official partnership agreements were signed by vocational schools in the Netherlands and China.

‘New methods of teaching’

“Despite the fact that the Netherlands is a small country – the Jiangsu province is twice its size – it has a very strong economy. The world top-500 of businesses contains 14 Dutch companies, like Shell, which is impressive. The Netherlands is unique in education as well: vocational institutes and research universities offer high quality. Partnerships between educational institutes and industries are common, especially when it comes to vocational education. In China, we’re looking at new methods of teaching and the Netherlands is a source of inspiration. At the moment, there are 9,000 Chinese students in the Netherlands. For Chinese students, the Netherlands is the 9th largest destination. Working together is the logical outcome.”

Qingyu Meng,
Embassy of the People’s Republic of China
‘A lot of potential’

“The dialogue between governments and educational departments in China and the Netherlands exists for some time now. Chinese students have already found their way to Dutch universities. This job shadowing program has uncovered a lot of potential. We will continue our cooperation with vocational education institutes in China, in particular our partnership with the department of education in Jiangsu province. Exchange of ideas on how to improve secondary as well as higher vocational education is key. This job shadowing program has come to an end, but I already look forward to our future cooperation.”

Marcelis Boereboom, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

‘Proposals for the next step’

“In 2015, the Jiangsu Provincial department of education and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands signed a memorandum of understanding. Its purpose was to create a mutual understanding of the principles and practices of vocational education, and to improve educational cooperation and exchanges of students and teachers. On behalf of the Jiangsu education department, 12 faculty members of more than 10 colleges and schools participated in this program. It’s a rare opportunity for teachers in VET to come to the Netherlands. This program made a deep impression on us, about VET in the Netherlands, management, student care, partnerships between schools and industries and internships. We were highly inspired, it was a rewarding experience. We can learn a great deal from each other and we are convinced that future cooperation will be successful. Many of the participants have come up with proposals for the next step, to create more diverse programs and courses.”

Yan Zhongchao, Head of the Jiangsu delegation

‘This is a new beginning’

“I firmly believe that international cooperation will contribute to a mutual understanding between people. Together we educate the professionals and specialists of the future. Cooperation is mutual beneficial. We share a common challenge: raising the status of vocational education training, in order to make vocational education an attractive choice. We should be proud: according to policy makers and economists, VET plays a key role in economic stability. We fully support the Made in China 2025 Strategy, which represents high quality, sustainability and care for the environment. Our goal is to incorporate these values into our VET system worldwide. Working together is key. The job shadowing program is a beautiful example of how to start a fruitful cooperation. This closing event is not the end. We’ve only just begun.”

Paul Oomens, MBO Raad
Sabine Amft: “This pilot is really putting flesh on the bones of what we have been discussing for months. The outcome is a fruitful cooperation between vocational education institutes in both China and the Netherlands. In the beginning, we didn’t exactly know what to expect. But the teachers involved have turned it into a great success. Despite the cultural differences, vocational teachers – Chinese and Dutch – speak a similar ‘language’, because they share their passion for their profession, whether it’s in horticulture, healthcare or IT.”

Manfred Polzin: “Seeing the teachers at work, reminds us of why we’re doing this. International experience is enriching. The Chinese teachers were surprised by the fact that at vocational schools in the Netherlands, we take integrated courses: subjects like maths and English are integrated in the course. There’s no fixed curriculum, courses are practice-based. We can also learn a lot from them. It’s inspiring to realise you can achieve your goals in so many different ways. There are certainly differences, but smaller than we expected.”

Peter Mulder: “For years, both the Chinese and Dutch Ministries of education have shown an interest to cooperate in developing vocational education. When it comes to tourism and hospitality, the Netherlands is keen to partner with China. This project offers a lot of possibilities for internationalising vocational education. There are good grounds for continuing our cooperation: I’m thinking of curriculum development and collaboration with industries. Job shadowing has been a perfect instrument. Now it’s time to deepen and strengthen our collaboration.”

Freddy Weima: “Our role was to initiate, but it’s up to the schools and teachers to expand the partnership. And so far, it looks promising. A lot of job shadowing partners have found each other and are already making specific arrangements. If sustainable partnerships between schools is the result of this job shadowing program, then we have succeeded in our goal. This is a perfect showcase of internationalising vocational education, and of Sino-Dutch relations.”

The Sino-Dutch job shadowing program has come to an end. Have we accomplished what we aimed for? What’s our next step?