Student persistence, dropout and success in Dutch higher education

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Success & dropout high on agenda

**Lisbon strategy:** competitive economy
- more highly skilled graduates and employees

**NL** 50% target: increase access and completions
Similar targets in the UK and Sweden

Complaints about high dropout rates and long duration of study
National policies to stimulate study success

Open access with limited numerus fixus programs

Decentralised selection: own criteria to select students for limited group (1999)

Selection for limited high quality programs (2005)

Funding in HBO based on: students, degrees, duration

Funding in WO based on: fixed amount, graduates (50%), new entrants

Student financing: substantial tuition fees; performance related grants
Average duration: in months; fulltime students

**WO**: 64 months = 5,3 years for 4-year programs

**HBO**: 52 months = 4,3 years for 4-year programs
Successful completions HBO:
after 4, 5, 6, 7, 8+ years

40% completes after 4 yrs, 57% after 5 yrs, 70% in total
Successful completions WO: after 4, 5, 6, 7, 8> years

25% completes after 4 yrs, 35% after 5 yrs, 67% in total
Dropout rates fulltime HBO: after 1, 2, 3 or 4 years

15% drops out in 1st year, 23% in total
7% drops out in 1st year, 14% in total
For individual programs it is 30%; 21% change subjects
Important dropout/success factors

**Student characteristics**
- female and younger students are faster
- non-native students take longer
- preparatory training matters in terms of grades and courses
- those who repeated a year in sec. educ. take longer
- motivation and aspiration counts
- a structured, continuous, consistent study approach pays off
- working does not matter, unless more than 15 hrs a week ...

**Program characteristics**
- more focused study blocks instead of many different courses
- clear and structured programs
- interaction with teachers
- intensive supervision leads to earlier dropout
- teaching modes with active participation help
- provide more attention to good students
- spread examinations in the year, quick follow-up chances ...
Motivations for dropout/ success

Student perspective
- study is disappointing, not interesting, too difficult, too theoretical, no future prospects and different as expected
- studying unsatisfying: difficult to concentrate, too much energy, many other things to do and bad time management
- being a student expected different: student life no fun, not comfortable in class, prefers a job and prefers other city
- problems with program, courses, results, future prospects
- personal circumstances: finances, family support, ... 

Educational organisation
- program too difficult or too easy, missing pre-knowledge, missing right skills
- future perspective: to professionally oriented, too theoretical, changing one’s mind, bad future prospects
- atmosphere and organisation of studies: institution unpleasant, not “my type” of students, contacts with teachers, supervision, educational organisation ...
Policy recommendations

Pre higher education stage
- close relations to sec. schools: content, didactics, study load, ...
- realistic information
- exchange staff between HE and SE
- selection, but with care: don’t waste talent (assessments)
- pre-higher education activities: summer camps, cooperative projects
- ...

First-year and older students
- provide teaching in smaller but intensive blocks
- lot of face-to-face contacts and active study methods
- students also should learn to divide things in smaller blocks
- additional clarification classes & training sessions / tasks
- spread tests equally through the year
- intensive student supervision
- create good social atmosphere
- ...
Thank you for your attention!