

Diversity Monitor 2017

**Enrolment, dropout and graduation at three universities
(EUR, VU and UL)
A synthesis.**

Report of the Taskforce 'The Future is Diversity'
Working Group Database

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Executive Summary

Issues of diversity and inclusion have received a lot of attention lately. A relevant question is to what extent the educational system (and higher education in particular) can be emancipatory for those coming from non-mainstream groups, such as students from lower-class and/or with certain ethnic backgrounds. And is it able to provide equal opportunities for all groups? The ambition to have a level playing field starts with mapping the current situation to find out whether and where inequality exists.

This research project provides such maps. For three universities (Erasmus University Rotterdam, Leiden University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) we compared access, dropout and graduation rates between students of various ethnic backgrounds, genders and pre-academic levels, on the institutional and sector level. These comparisons provide information for faculties and course programs to learn from each other and to enhance equal opportunities in their programs. This exploratory research was carried out in the context of the Taskforce *The Future is Diversity*, a cooperation of the three universities, based on 1CijferHO data as provided by DUO. This report contains a synthesis of the detailed reports of the separate institutions.

We conclude that there is a remarkable **lack of coherence** between institutions and sectors. Student compositions and study-success of the various student groups vary per institution and sector. For example: although in general ethnic Dutch students perform better than students with ‘non-Western’ migration backgrounds, this is *not always* the case. And although students with VWO backgrounds in general seem better prepared for succeeding at the university than students who enter the university via other educational tracks, this is *not always* the case. What is interesting: overall, gaps between groups *differ by institution and sector*. The only consistent result is that female students more often obtain diplomas than male students. Apparently, **every sector (and probably every course program) has its own dynamics**. This suggests that sectors and programs vary in the skills and other resources they require, and in their ability to deal with differences in skills and resources between students. Clearly, **inequality varies** and materializes in a certain institutional context, **in interaction with this institutional (meso-) context**. This means that institutional figures are too generic to draw detailed conclusions and to draft plans for improvement.

We formulate the following recommendations:

1. Enhance equality at the university at the level of course programs.

- Individual course programs should **study their ‘local’ situations** to develop and implement tailor made interventions, where enhancement of equality is needed. Comparisons between course programs and dialogues about good practices are

indispensable here (although for privacy protection it is not possible to have detailed numerical overviews of smaller course programs).

- **Accessible bridging programs** should be maintained or reestablished, as students from non-mainstream groups (ethnic-minority background and/or lower educated parents) relatively often enter the university via alternative educational tracks.

2. Implement structural monitoring and administration

- Diversity and inclusion should periodically be **monitored over time** (for example on a yearly basis) on all university levels, including faculties and course programs.
- For reasons of comparability, **close cooperation and coordination** is required between the researchers at the various universities in order to align analyses and definitions.
- In anticipation of stronger privacy legislation, **alternative channels to register** details on ethnic background should be considered and implemented, including thorough consent-procedures.
- The same goes for the registration of **social class**/parental education.
- Note that the variable 'ethnicity' is only meaningful in combination with other variables such as migration background (immigrant generation)

*Note of caution: In line with privacy legislations, these data should be stored safely and treated with great care. They should be used only on **aggregate levels**, not on individual levels, and only used for **research purposes** that aim to contribute to a **reduction of inequality**.*

3. Carry out additional analyses and research

The findings raise important new questions that call for further research:

- How does the **institutional meso-context** influence study success of various student groups? (This requires qualitative research, in combination with quantitative analyses on the meso-level that include contextual variables about the educational arrangements at the level of course programs).
- Can we **disentangle** the effects of the various demographic characteristics (including class background) and institutional (meso-)characteristics?
- What can we learn from **other universities/HBO's**, also from the international perspective?
- To what extent are the **Master-programs** level playing fields?

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The educational context of diversity and equal opportunities

Issues of diversity and inclusion have received a lot of attention lately. Relevant societal questions are if the educational system is a level field for all pupils and students, and to what extent the educational system in general, and higher education in particular, can be emancipatory for those coming from non-mainstream groups, such as students from lower-class and/or certain ethnic groups, and can provide equal opportunities for all groups.

Recent research exposed mechanisms in the educational system that reproduce inequality and hamper emancipation. The Inspectorate of Education concludes that the inequality in the educational domain increases, and that not only children's talents, but also their class background determine their chances; increasingly so (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2016). As an example, it describes that pupils' secondary-school advice is partially influenced by their parents' education level. Furthermore, the Inspectorate concludes that, on a structural basis, students from 'non-Western' background and male students have lower graduation rates compared to students with no migrant background and female students, and selective bachelor and master course programs (for example *numerus fixus* programs) are less accessible for students from 'non-Western' background and students with lower educated parents (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2017). Probably, also the new grant-program (*leenstelling*) heightens barriers for access of specific groups in disproportionate ways. Another example is the lack of financing for bridging programs (*schakelprogramma's*) (ResearchNed 2017), which impedes the switch between HBO and university. This step is particularly relevant for students with ethnic minority backgrounds, as they relatively often follow alternative, less 'straight', educational trajectories (Crul et al. 2012, SCP 2016, Wolff 2013). These young people benefit from opportunities to switch between educational levels, and to 'stack' them (*stapelen*). The report of the UvA Diversity Commission showed that, at least at the University of Amsterdam, there is much to improve with regard to equal opportunities and inclusion (Wekker et al. 2016). As mentioned, not only parental education level and ethnic background matter. Over time, a gender gap has emerged. Girls do consistently better in school than boys, although men keep an edge at the job market (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2015).

The ambition to have a level playing field starts with mapping the current situation and understanding whether, where, and – if possible – why inequality exists. This report is a first attempt to provide such maps. It is the result of an exploratory research, carried out in the context of the Database working group of the Taskforce *The Future is Diversity*, a cooperation of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), Leiden University (UL), and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU).

Goals of the Working Group: comparative monitoring

The Database working group set out with two goals. The first is to map and compare the situations at the participating universities in order to further understand processes of educational inequality, providing input for the development of possible measures to enhance equal opportunities (in terms of access and study success) between different student groups. The second goal is to provide a format and a baseline measurement that can be used for future, yearly monitoring.

Within the working group, the three universities first have decided on a common operationalization of study success and diversity, and on the students to be selected for the analyses. All three universities used the most recent 1cijferHO datasets, which contain actual student information and are supplied to every university by DUO. These institutional datasets have a similar structure for every institution, and hence provide a sound basis for comparison. The analyses at all three institutions were conducted with the same program (SPSS), with similar syntax.

This document contains a synthesis of the results of the separate universities as described in the institutional reports of the Erasmus (Meeuwisse et al. 2017) and the VU (Slootman 2017). Although there is no institutional report for Leiden University, this synthesis does include some figures that are based on the Leiden 1cHO data.¹ For the details, we refer to the graphs in the institutional reports. These reports provide figures on student composition and study success, based on full-time university Bachelor students of cohorts that enrolled between 2006 (VU) or 2008 (EUR and UL) and 2015. They present figures, institution-wide and per domain ('sector'), on:

- student enrolment,
- dropout rates after 2 years of study,
- graduation rates after 4 and 6 years of study.²

The tables on student composition and study success, enable us to compare groups that embody (some) dimensions of diversity. Diversity is understood as variations in:

- gender,
- ethnic and migration background,
- previous education level.

The conceptualization of diversity is limited by the form of the registered data. This is particularly unsatisfactory with regard to the lack of class-background/parental education level. Such information would enable us to disentangle mechanisms that are related to ethnicity from class background, a factor that greatly impacts processes of social inequality.

¹ UL figures were provided to the authors by Roel Hogervorst, Leiden University

² The reports also presents figures on refugee students. However, because numbers are small, these are not included in the synthesis. Nor do we recommend repeating these analyses in future reporting.

Please, be aware that the figures only present *descriptions* of the situation. When differences exist between categories of people, their demographic characteristic (such as gender or ethnic background) is *not* to be taken as an explanation per se. Rather, such differences direct the immediate research agenda: we need to discover the causes and mechanisms that explain these differences.

Conclusions and results

Before formulating our main conclusion, we want to emphasize the added value of the cooperation of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), Leiden University (UL), and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) in the Database working group of the Taskforce *The Future is Diversity*. This cooperation made it possible to compare access, dropout and graduation figures, not only on the level of institutions, but also – and perhaps more importantly – on the level of sectors. Comparing outcomes on this level provides very useful indicative information³ for faculties and course programs to learn from each other and to improve equal opportunities in their programs. This comparison is not possible with data of only one institution.

Main conclusion: the relevance of the institutional context

The main message is that in comparing institutional data we observe **a remarkable lack of coherence**. Student compositions in terms of ethnic- and migration background, gender and previous education strongly vary per sector. The figures also show that inequalities in terms of study success differ per sector and institution. Although we observe trends, there are always settings that defy these trends. Generally, students with a ‘non-Western’ backgrounds show an arrear compared to ethnic Dutch students. However, the size of the gap strongly varies between sectors, and in some cases there is no gap at all. At most of the sectors at the VU, for the last cohorts, the Dutch-born students with ‘non-Western’ backgrounds – the so-called second generation – equally often obtain diplomas as the ethnic Dutch students. Furthermore, the relevance of ethnic background is nuanced by the finding that study-success also depends on duration of residence in the Netherlands. Like other research has shown (ECHO 2013), for students with immigrant backgrounds, Dutch-born students in general do better than foreign-born students.

Generally, students who entered the university via the pre-academic VWO track have higher study-success than those who followed alternative educational tracks. Nevertheless, some sectors show that this does not necessarily have to be the case. For example, in various sectors students who entered the university with a HBO-P level have higher graduation rates than students who came via VWO, whereas in other sectors they show considerably lower graduation rates. The most consistent trend is the observation that female students do better than male students. Nearly without exception, in all years and all sectors, female students more often obtain diplomas than male students; regardless whether we look at female- or male-dominated domains. This is in line with the results of other studies (e.g. ECHO 2013, CBS 2015).

³ Information is only indicative because the 1CijferHO-data can vary from data from the institutions themselves, for example due to differing enrolment definitions.

To illustrate these observations, we present figures on enrolment and graduation 4 years after initial enrolment in the bachelor, for fulltime students in various starting years (cohorts of two years are combined) by ethnic background. First, we look at enrolment by analyzing the composition of the first year student population. In figure 1 EUR, UL and VU are compared. Although at each university the largest group are ethnic Dutch students, followed by second-generation students of ‘non-Western’ descent with a Dutch previous education, EUR turns out to be the university with the smallest share of ethnic Dutch students. UL is the university with the smallest share of second-generation students of ‘non-Western’ descent.

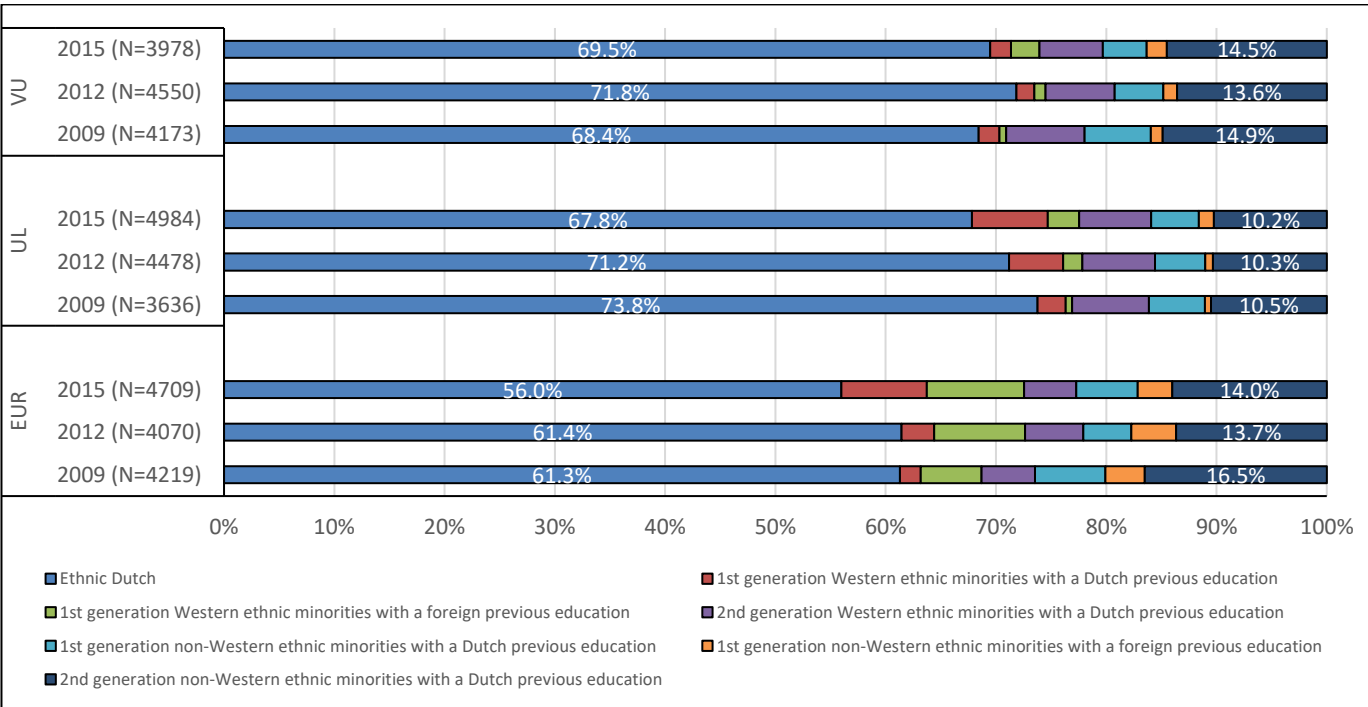


Figure 1. Enrolment fulltime bachelor students by ethnic background, cohort and university

In figure 2 EUR, UL and VU are compared for the Law sector. Not only the composition of the student populations differ between the institutional and sector level (for example: compare VU-total and VU Law-sector), on the sector level we also see big differences between universities. At VU, the share of ethnic Dutch students is smallest (they were a minority in the cohorts 2009 and 2012) while the share of second generation students of non-Western descent with a Dutch previous education is largest. In contrast and by far, at UL the percentage of ethnic Dutch Law students is highest, while the percentage of second generation students of non-Western descent with a Dutch previous education is lowest compared to EUR and VU.

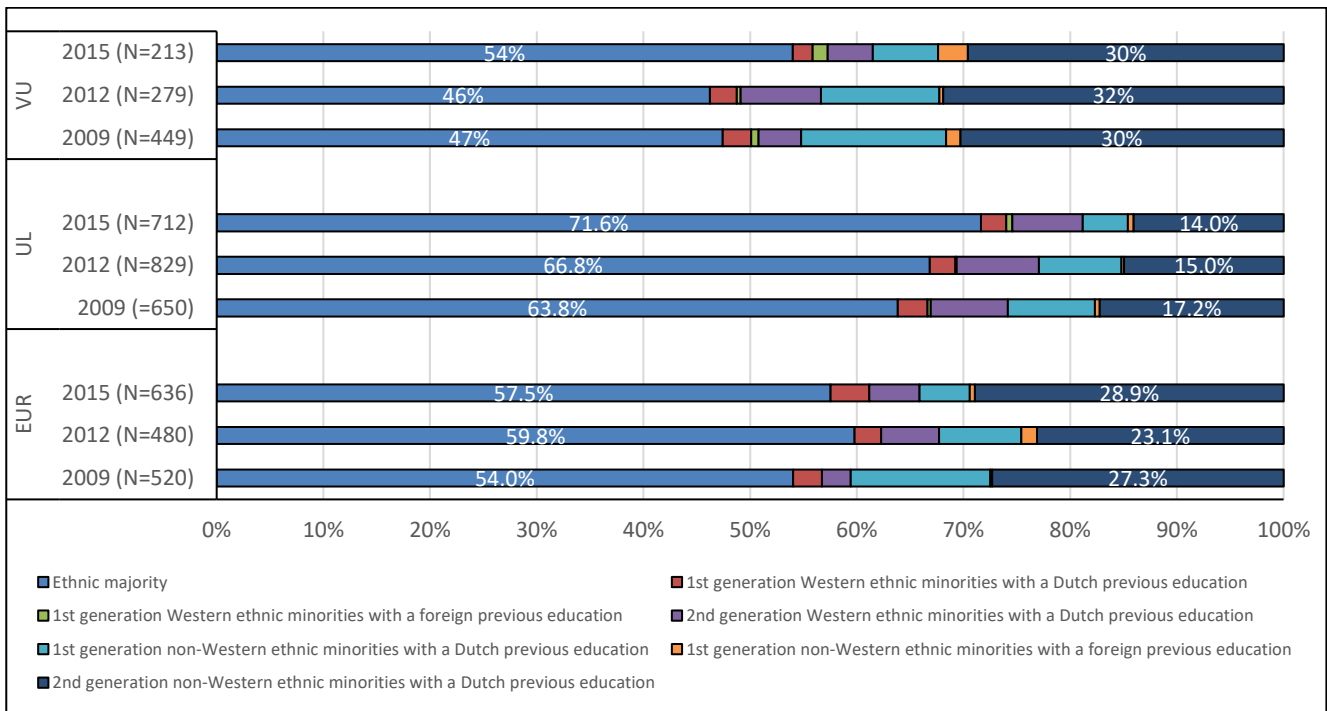


Figure 2. Enrolment fulltime bachelor students at the sector Law by ethnic background, cohort and university

For the graduation rates we compare ethnic Dutch students and Dutch-born students with ‘non-Western’ migration backgrounds. Figure 3 presents graduation rates on the institutional level. These are the students who obtained their bachelor diploma within four years after their first enrolment (those who switched between course programs are excluded here), for the cohorts that started in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Graduation rates

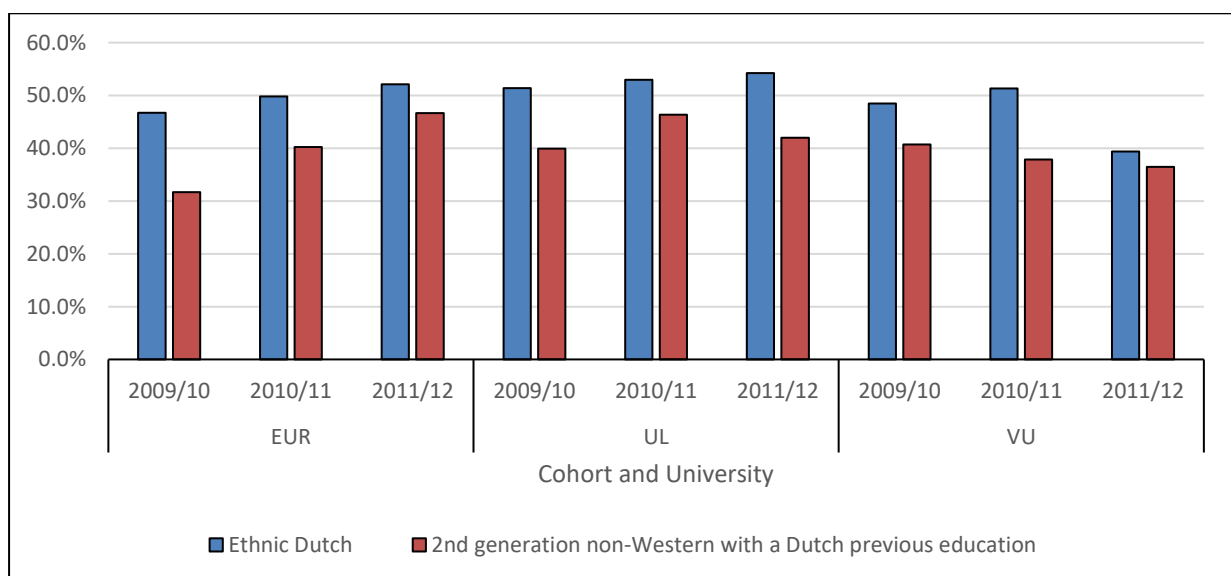


Figure 3. Graduation rates, 4 years after initial bachelor enrolment, by ethnic background, cohort and university

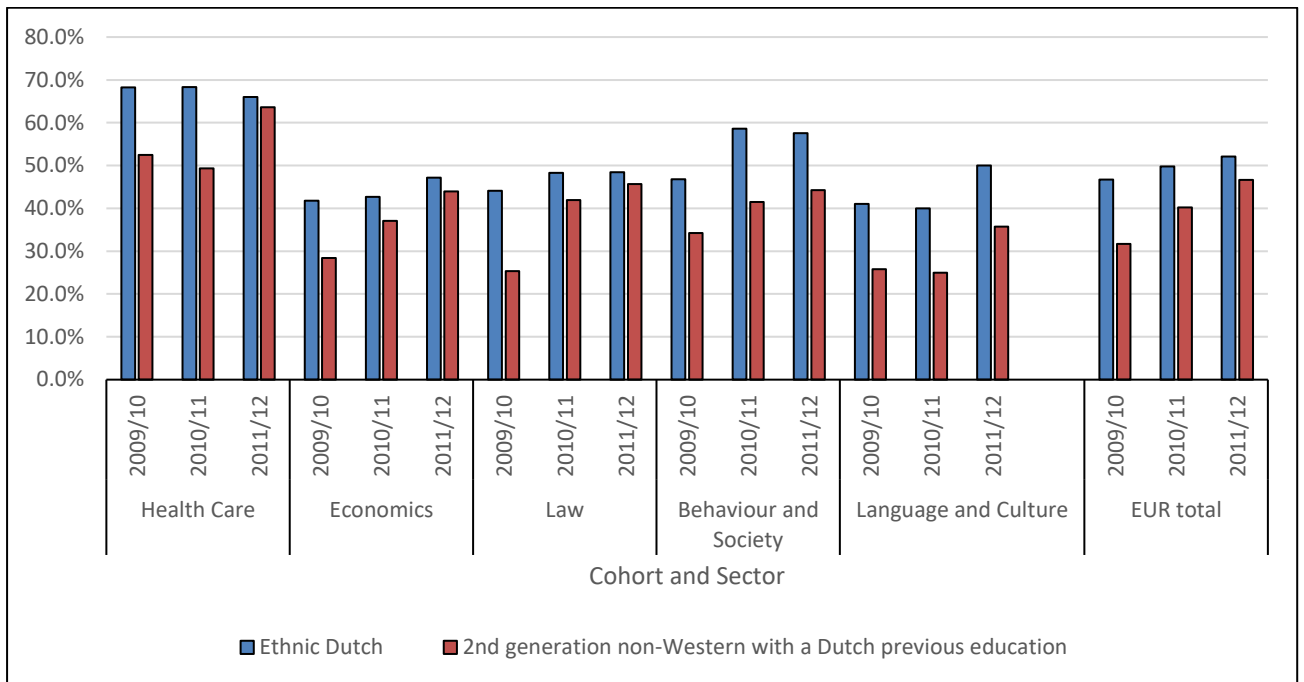


Figure 4. Graduation rates, 4 years after initial bachelor enrolment at Erasmus University Rotterdam, by ethnic background, cohort and sector

and gaps in graduation rates between groups differ between universities, and also between cohorts. Figure 4 shows the graduation rates at the EUR for different sectors. Graduation rates of ethnic Dutch and Dutch-born students of ‘non-Western’ descent strongly vary between sectors and between cohorts. In most cases the gap seems to diminish over time, although this does not apply to all cases. Consequently, there is not one consistent gap between the two ethnic groups, which warns us not to take the institution-wide figures as a basis for specific measures to tackle inequality.

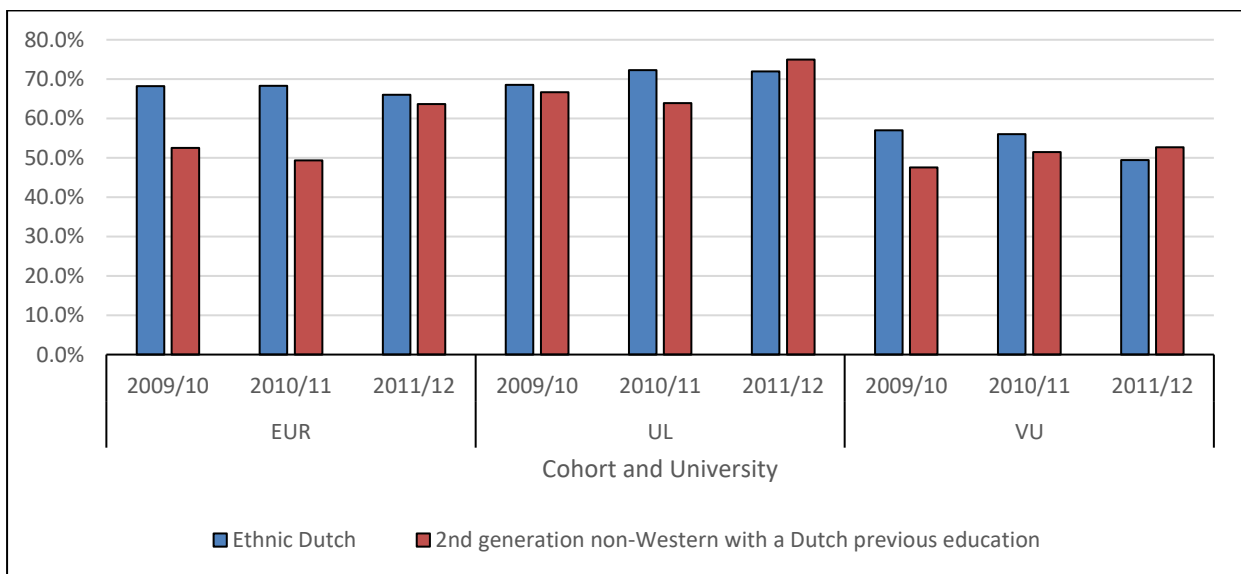


Figure 5. Graduation rates 4 years after initial enrolment at the Health Care sector, by ethnic background, cohort and university

In Figure 5 graduation rates at the Health Care sector of the three universities are compared. For this sector, again we see differences between ethnic groups within universities, but also between universities. Remarkably, in cohort 2011/12 ethnic minority students of 'non-Western' descent have (slightly) higher graduation rates than ethnic Dutch students at UL and VU. This is contrary to the general pattern.

The figures indicate that, in terms of graduations rates – despite visible trends – study success of groups and gaps between groups differ per university and sector, and that it may even differ (per cohort) which student groups are most successful. Probably, this also differs per course program; which is the level at which the educational arrangements are given shape. That **every sector (or course program) has its own dynamics** means that institutional figures are too generic to draw detailed conclusions and to draft plans for improvement. It is important that course programs study their own figures and if necessary broaden their scope by looking at figures of other course programs. It is on the level of course programs that we can learn what works best in creating level playing fields. It is not possible however for small course programs to study the numbers in much detail, for reasons of privacy protection.

These results do not mean there is no inequality. What we *can* conclude is that **inequality varies**; that inequality is not something that is ingrained in certain demographic characteristics such as specific ethnic backgrounds. Instead, inequality materializes in a certain institutional context, **in interaction with this institutional (meso-) context**. Apparently, some educational contexts require different human, social, financial, intellectual resources than others, or are better able to deal with – and compensate for – differences. It is a next step to further zoom in on these contexts to discover what mechanisms create level playing fields. What is the effect of the educational arrangements: the scale of teaching, test forms, selection procedures, supervision, the composition of staff and student body, etcetera? Studies suggest that small scale teaching environments, with a personal approach due to short distances between teacher and student, and strong coordination are beneficial for students with ethnic-minority backgrounds (Wolff 2013: 168), or maybe more specifically for students who are less prepared or equipped for the academic environment.

The nuanced results also show that organizing students into three main ethnic categories is too coarse, and obscures other influences such as the kind of immigration background. For example, bicultural students who are Dutch-born, in many sectors do much better than students who are born abroad. The substantial differences between female and male students, which applies to students with various ethnic backgrounds, suggests that studying inequality will improve by using an intersectional lens.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we propose three sets of recommendations.

1. Enhance equality at the university at the level of course programs

As explained, the suggestion to enhance equality at the university is not a straightforward recommendation to uniformly improve the position of specific students. The analysis has shown that the current analyses at the institutional level are too general to draw relevant conclusions and to draft interventions. There is no uniform picture that indicates which students are underrepresented and least successful, so there is no uniform recommendation of how to improve levels of equality (although some general patterns are identified, such as the overall better performance of ethnic Dutch students compared to students from 'non-Western' background and the better performance of female students compared to male students). This resonates with the conclusion drawn by ECHO, that the situation strongly differs per university and course program, and that interventions can only be developed in specific contexts (2013: 75).

Rather, individual course programs should study their 'local' situation. Comparisons between course programs, and dialogues about local conditions that stimulate or hamper equality should stimulate exchange about good practices. How come that some course programs show less difference between students from various ethnic and migration backgrounds, and ethnic Dutch student than other course programs? How come that some course programs have many students with an 'alternative' educational background, and that in some course programs they do even better than students who come straight from VWO? These analyses can contribute to a further focus on the development and implementation of interventions. Course programs should be facilitated to monitor retention and graduation rates of groups and, especially, differences between groups in order to decide whether equal opportunity actions are needed. This facilitating role can be done by organizational units such as departments of Institutional Research.

These analyses on the mesolevel can be supported by further analysis of the quantitative data, but only if contextual variables about the educational arrangements at the level of the course programs are included.

A recommendation that does not require additional analysis, is the recommendation to maintain – or reestablish – accessible bridging programs, as students with ethnic-minority backgrounds (as well as students with lower educated parents) relatively often enter the university via alternative educational tracks.

Another recommendation is to avoid a (sole) focus on ethnic background. Immigrant generation – whether someone is born in the Netherlands or abroad – is more strongly related to study success. In addition, variations in composition and study success are also, and often even more so, shaped by gender and pre-academic track.

Those who will be working with the figures of the institutional Diversity Monitors should be aware that the presented figures can (slightly) deviate from the data that are available at the specific faculties or course programs. The Diversity Monitors are based on data that are collected at the national level, and provided by the national organization DUO (1cijferHO data). Detailed use in a specific context requires the involvement of people who are informed about the databases and specific situations in those contexts.

2. Implement structural monitoring and administration

In line with the original purpose of the project, we recommend a longitudinal monitoring of the developments regarding diversity and inclusion at the university on all levels (including the levels of faculties and in some cases course programs). We recommend conducting a **similar scan every year** to closely track developments in terms of equality and to monitor the effects of implemented measures. The institutional monitors can be used as a baseline and as a format for future reports (see the Appendix for the format.)

The conclusion that diversity should be evaluated on the meso level and not on the institutional level leads us to recommend to use **institutional data** as main data for upcoming reports, with 1cijferHO data as additional data. The 1cijferHO database seem less appropriate to serve as main database, because these data in some occasions diverge from the institutional data.⁴ It is more important that faculties recognize their figures in detail, than that the institutional comparisons are exactly comparable. Yet, in order to make cross-institutional comparisons, the use of the same format and definitions for the reporting is crucial.

Currently, details on ethnic and migration background end up in the institutional database via the 1CHO data, which are included in the institutional data. These variables are originally derived from the municipal administration (*Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie*). However, in the near future, details on ethnicity possibly will not be readily available or usable. This may require the **administration of ethnic background** by the university and permission to use this information. We recommend to timely consider alternative ways collecting details on ethnic background, with proper consent-procedures. In order to separate the effects of ethnicity and class, preferably also class-background or parental education level should be registered.

Note of caution: For reasons of privacy protection, these data should be stored safely and treated with great care. This means that they should only be used on **aggregate levels**, not on individual levels, and only used for **research purposes** that aim to contribute to a **reduction of inequality**.

⁴ Possible reasons are different ways of registration of students in bridging programs (*schakelprogramma's*), switchers and 'no-show' students (students who are formally registered as first year students, but in reality never show up and do not take part at any course program activity).

In addition to the analyses on the institutional data, a national 1cHO dataset can, as noted before, provide additional insights. A national database provides valuable information on, for example, dropout: do students who drop out of an institution drop out of the entire higher education system, or do they switch to another university? And does this occur more often in one group (or at one university), compared to other groups (or other universities)? In addition, also comparisons with HBO data are important, as these provide useful insights about processes of social mobility across education levels. If considered, the request for a national database, which includes variables on ethnic and migration background, requires a timely submission of a thorough project plan through VSNU/DUO.

3. Carry out additional analyses and research

The findings of the Diversity Monitor 2017 raise important new questions that call for further research:

- What does the picture look like when we include **other universities and HBO-institutions** in the analysis, maybe also foreign higher education institutions? We hope that other universities, and also other educational institutions such as HBOs, join the (yearly) Diversity Monitor, which will advance possibilities for comparison and the robustness of the conclusions. For now, we warmly welcome the intention of University of Amsterdam and University of Utrecht to participate in the Database working group.
- We concluded that the institutional meso-context strongly influences the presence of inequality. **What is this effect of the institutional meso-context?** This question is important to answer, as it helps us further understand mechanisms of inequality and equality, and how to develop interventions to level the university playing field. This can be investigated by quantitative analysis on the existing student data, while adding characteristics of the meso-level. Variables should be added about educational arrangements that can be expected to affect the playing field; such as scale of teaching, rate of student participation, ways of testing, kind of selection procedures, process or intensity of supervision, the composition of staff and student body, etcetera. Qualitative research methods can help identifying such beneficiary characteristics.
- What is the situation at the **Master-programs**, and how is the bridge between Masters and Bachelors for students of the various categories?
- Can we **disentangle the effects** of the various demographic and institutional (meso-) characteristics? This can be investigated by performing additional, multivariate, analyses.⁵

⁵ Preliminary findings of logistic regression analysis of the EUR-data indicate differences between sectors in the way ethnic background and previous education are related to study success indicators.

- How can we **enhance the data quality**? In order to further improve the validity, relevance and comparability of the yearly Diversity Monitor, we need to investigate the connection between the institutional data and the 1CHO data. We should also keep re-evaluating the definitions and operationalizations, using internal and external reporting as input.

Appendix: Reporting format

Institutions, faculties and course programs can be compared when they have the same format⁶. For the reporting, we suggest to use the format laid out in this Appendix (although we can imagine that – in addition to this aligned reporting – other formats are used that are more conform the numbers used at the particular institutions / faculties / course programs).

We strongly recommend close cooperation and alignment between the various universities, in the context of a central working group in which all participating universities are take part. To ensure some level of coherence and connection between the various diversity-related initiatives, we recommend to link this central working group to the National Network of Diversity Officers (LANDO).

(1) STUDENT COMPOSITION

Report institution-wide and per sector, split out by

- Gender
 - o *Male*
 - o *Female*
- Ethnicity/immigrant background⁷
 - o *Ethnic Dutch* (two Dutch-born parents);
 - o *'Western' migration background, 2nd generation* (Dutch-born student with at least one parent born in a 'Western' country, and no parent born in a 'non-Western' country);
 - o *'Western' migration background, 1st generation, Dutch previous education* (foreign-born student – before entering higher education – studied in the Netherlands, with at least one parent born in a 'Western' country and no parent born in a 'non-Western' country);
 - o *'Western' migration background, 1st generation, previous education abroad* (proxy for 'international student') (foreign-born student who – before entering higher education – studied abroad, with at least one parent born in a 'Western' country and no parent born in a 'non-Western' country);
 - o *'Non-Western' migration background, 2nd generation* (Dutch-born student with at least one parent born in a 'non-Western' country);
 - o *'Non-Western' migration background, 1st generation, Dutch previous education* (foreign-born student who – before entering higher education –

⁶ The syntax used to analyze the 1CHO-data of EUR, UL and VU was developed by Risbo/EUR. For more info about the syntax, please contact Peter Hermus (Risbo/EUR).

⁷ For the current reporting, in the EUR and UL analyses, the groups of Dutch-born students (ethnic majority students and students of the second generation) was limited to students who followed Dutch previous education. Dutch-born students with non-Dutch previous education were left out. Numbers were only small. For reasons of completeness, we recommend to include this last group in future analyses.

studied in the Netherlands, with at least one parent born in a 'non-Western' country);

- *'Non-Western' migration background, 1nd generation, previous education abroad* (proxy for 'international student') (foreign-born student who – before entering higher education – studied abroad, with at least one parent born in a 'non-Western' country).
- Previous education level before entering this specific university:
 - *VWO* (pre-academic track)
 - *HBO-P* (higher vocational education, 1st year)
 - *HBO Other* (higher vocational education, Bachelor diploma)
 - *WO* (other university)
 - *Foreign*
 - *Other*

(2) STUDY SUCCESS

Study success is to be reported institution-wide and per sector; cohorts may be combined. Study success is measured by the following variables, split out by gender, ethnic/migration and background and previous education. by:

- **Dropout rate**, after 2 years of study.⁸
- **Graduation rate, 4 years** after first enrolment at the university.
- **Graduation rate, 6 years** after first enrolment at the university.

As many groups with an arrear close (part of) the gap after four years of study, we recommend to use the **graduation rate after 6 years** as the central variable for comparing study success. After all, the most important indicator of study success is whether – ultimately – a diploma is obtained. To monitor arrears and barriers 'along the way', we can compare:

- *Dropout/retention rates* (early drop out in relation to graduation rate is an indication of the *selectivity of the first years* and whether this differs per group)
- Rate of *switchers* to other course programs.
- *Duration of study* (For how many did their graduation take longer than 4 years? Compare the share of *'langstudeerders'* between groups)

⁸ For some course programs, the BSA (Binding Study Advice) are given after two years.

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