

Zuyd's vision on modern-day higher professional education



Zuyd University
of Applied Sciences

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Foreword

In this document, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences sets out its vision on higher professional education. It was written to update the vision published in 2014. Zuyd's 2014 vision contains elements that have been kept in this version, such as the importance of integration of education and research, and a strong connection between education and the professional field, in which communities are an essential asset. Nevertheless, we felt it was necessary to update our vision in order to address the current zeitgeist in terms of the role of universities of applied sciences in the lifelong development of professionals and the increasing importance of technology in education. The latter aspect has been boosted by the coronavirus crisis out of necessity and we are determined to continue to build on the positive experiences that we have had.

It is also important to update our vision on education because of our desire to explicitly incorporate the core qualities described in Zuyd's strategy for 2019-2023. In this strategy, passion for our students' development is our primary focus. This new vision has been formulated on the basis of this passion and mentions various aspects that reflect this, such as the attention to active learning with technology. In that sense, the vision and strategy are intertwined. The vision provides input for strategic choices and their implementation. This implementation and thinking along the lines of the strategy also allows for this vision to be fine-tuned in a specific social context. This can be regarded as an iterative process.

This vision on education is therefore built on our previous vision, on important social challenges, and on the strategic decisions that have been made in recent years. As a result, this vision is the result of a bottom-up approach, powered by what we are working on together and the challenges we all see for the future. The draft of this vision was discussed with all directors, heads of programmes, and professors, as well as with the representative bodies, and suggestions for improvements have been adopted in this final document. During these conversations, recognition of the elements described was apparent. Our current position was discussed as well as the interesting challenges that will arise from this vision in the next few years, for instance with regard to blended learning and technology, and also concerning flexibilisation in education. This vision on education described a future scenario and partly determines the journey we will embark on together to demonstrate our passion for the development of students.

Board of Governors
February 2021

Introduction

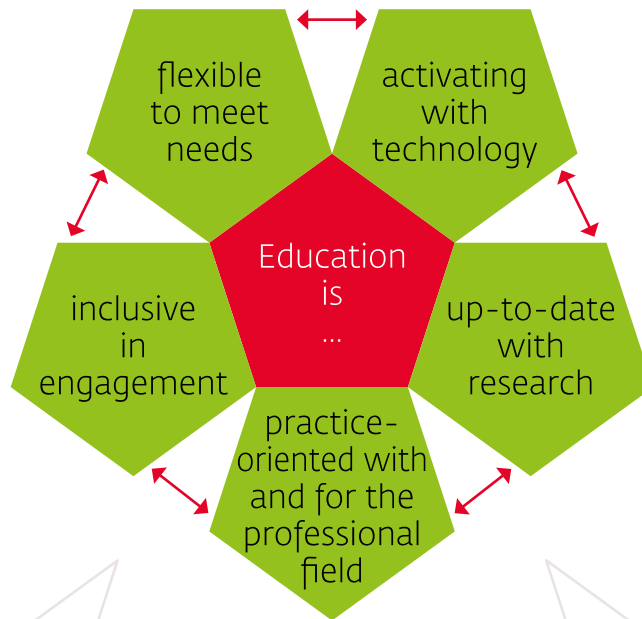
Passion for development is one of our top priorities at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. We focus our passion on the successful development of students into well-trained professionals for the (Eu)region, The Netherlands, or the world. This development not only focuses on encouraging learning or on the qualification of students, but also has a pedagogical aspect. In addition, we focus our passion on the lifelong development of professionals who are already employed and who wish to continue learning in order to further develop their talents.

Based on this passion for the development of students¹, we have formulated a vision for higher professional education. This vision is briefly outlined below and elaborated in this document.

Zuyd's vision on higher professional education

All students can study without impediment in a flexible, practice-oriented education setting, in which the link with applied research is guaranteed. Students acquire modern-day professional knowledge and skills in a motivating and activating learning environment supported by technology. By taking control and adopting a research-oriented attitude, they learn how they can contribute to innovations in professional practice and profile themselves in this area in their own way. In view of their diversity, students are seen, heard, and optimally guided in their professional development by committed teams of lecturers, with a particular focus on supervision during periods of transition. Through a solid collaboration with the professional field, education encourages students to be part of a community in which the culture of professional practice is demonstrated. Through the interconnection and interaction with their fellow students, lecturers, professors and the professional field, it allows them to continue developing and growing into (permanently) valued professionals in our complex and increasingly value and meaning-driven society in which technology plays an important part.

¹ In this document, we use the term student. This term not only refers to students in a strict sense, but also to learners wishing to broaden or deepen their competencies in learning tracks within the context of lifelong development.



Zuyd's vision on education has various core elements. These elements are not independent entities, but are intertwined. In our view, higher professional education is education in which we stimulate student development by:

- taking an activating and modern-day approach with the use of technology
- keeping content up to date through the integration of research
- being practice-oriented with and for the professional field
- being inclusive in engagement
- demonstrating a high degree of flexibility in order to meet needs.

In this vision document, we will first discuss how we perceive student development, after which we will explain the five components of our vision on education. It should be mentioned that the integration with our applied research goes beyond what is stated here, as this research is also part of the primary process at our university of applied sciences. Our vision on applied research is set out in a separate vision document that discusses the significance of research at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences². This vision describes five elements that ensure that our applied research can be considered meaningful for the study programmes and the professional field, and for professional communities, talent development, and knowledge development. Since education and research together form the primary process of the university, there is a certain degree of overlap between both visions.

² Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (2021-draft). *Visie op praktijkgericht onderzoek* [Vision on applied research].

2

The development of the student and the professional

The education provided by Zuyd University of Applied Sciences focuses on the student's development. Not only does this development relate to the cognitive aspect of learning but it also has a pedagogical aspect for which it is important to have an open climate. In addition, we provide education and training to professionals in the field and this, too, is based on our passion for development.

From a social constructivist perspective³, we regard the learning process as an active process of acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes, that develops in interaction with fellow students, lecturers, professors, and professionals in the field, as well as with the learning resources. This learning process, in which collaborative learning is essential, ensures the student's engagement with the study programme and the various actors. The professional field plays an important part in learning, and shapes learning in and from authentic professional situations⁴. Learning in a variety of work-related situations (with case studies, in internships, in the company itself, or through on-the-job training) also ensures that the student experiences the professional culture.

The student's development not only focuses on learning as far as the content of the discipline is concerned, but also on the student's personal development as a person and a critical citizen with a good professional ethos. As a result, in addition to generic 21st-century skills such as creativity, entrepreneurship, and the ability to work in a team, a student should also have a research-oriented attitude, and thus be able to acquire research skills that can be used to gain and create knowledge. Part of this entails dealing with information and assessing this information in terms of reliability, given the fact that students gather substantial amounts of information via the internet and from social media⁵. The ability to analyse a problem and work towards finding a solution are other important skills. Conducting research within a professional context is a learning experience that is essential for a student's development.

We regard the outcome of learning as a change in attitude, knowledge, and skills. However, the learning ability is another important outcome of learning. Through learning, the student can learn to regulate his own learning. This self-regulated learning is the ability of the student to shape his own learning behaviour, which enables him to achieve learning goals in a particular context or environment within a specific timeframe⁶. Self-regulated learning requires insight into own performances and the ability to determine learning activities needed in order to achieve the set learning objectives. Paying attention to learning how to conduct self-assessments, formulate points for improvement and learning objectives is therefore important in education. Self-regulated learning is essential for lifelong development as a professional and as a citizen. Adhering to the principles of self-regulated learning ensures that the student is ultimately responsible for his own learning process and for managing it.

3 Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. London: Harvard University Press.

4 Merriënboer, J. J. G. van, & Kirschner, P. A. (2007). *Ten Steps to Complex Learning. A Systematic Approach to Four-Component Instructional Design*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

5 Brand-Gruwel, S., & Stadtler, M. (2011). Solving Information-based Problems: Searching, Selecting and Evaluating Information. *Learning and Instruction*, 21, 175-179.

6 Zimmerman, B.J. (2001). Theories of self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview and analysis. In B.J. Zimmerman & D.H. Schunk (Eds.), *Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: Theoretical perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 1-37). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.



We consider the motivation to learn and develop as a basic requirement. Learning based on intrinsic motivation ensures that what is learned is processed more deeply and enhances the student's self-confidence and his development as a person and as a professional. A customised approach for students, so that they are heard, and their education needs are met, also facilitates the students' motivation. The students' motivation is further strengthened through the students' effective engagement with their study programme, lecturers, professors, and fellow students, as well as with the professional field. This engagement ensures proper integration and a sense of belonging to and of being part of a community.

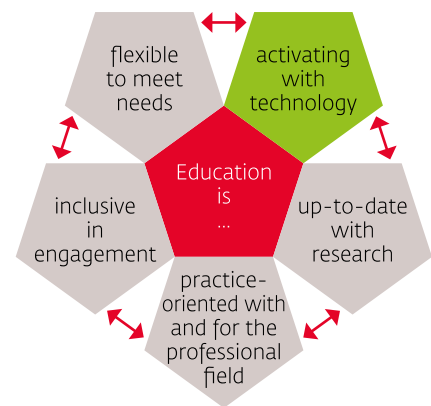
Taking control of one's own learning process and feeling autonomous, self-confident, and competent are the basic needs⁷ for intrinsic motivation. By meeting these basic needs through education and by creating a positive pedagogical climate, we are at the root of all aspects of the student's development.

⁷ Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.

3

Activating education using modern technological applications

Within their study programmes, Zuyd grants all students educational activities that encourage active learning as this motivates students and leads to a thorough acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which, in turn, has a positive effect on academic performance. Study programmes that encourage students to participate in active learning result in a higher completion rate and a shorter duration of study.⁸ A characteristic of active learning in professional education is that students work on assignments that are based on authentic situations or problems in professional practice and which result in profession-related products. As such, activities carried out by students – often in groups – are not focused on consuming knowledge, concepts, and procedures alone, but also on applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating these in an often complex, authentic assignment or situation⁹.



When designing active learning, we encourage the use of didactic methods that are geared to the learning objectives, taking into consideration the prior knowledge, learning competences, and interests of the students¹⁰. In this respect, the use of blended learning principles¹¹ has become an integral part of education in this day and age¹². Nevertheless, on-site face-to-face teaching will continue to be Zuyd's starting point as social engagement and its pedagogical aspect are important. However, a good mix of face-to-face teaching and ICT-based educational activities, learning resources, and tools (such as knowledge clips, instructional videos, recorded lectures, or webinars) that reinforce one another, will help students shape their learning process optimally. In this blended learning process, the engagement and development of students is of importance, and therefore the interaction between students and their fellow students, lecturers, professors, and the professional field is essential. Achieving this in a blended learning environment requires good opportunities for interaction, in physical as well as online environments, using synchronous (e.g. online classrooms with breakout rooms) and asynchronous communication (e.g. a chat function).

In addition to providing well-balanced blended education, we support the use of modern technology in our teaching. For example, virtual reality applications can be used in all sorts of complex situations to give students a 'real life' learning experience in a safe context. A computer is used to simulate a situation and a virtual reality headset will allow the student to become immersed into the sounds

⁸ Bakx, D. & Van Nuland, E. (2015). *Studiesucces verhogen. Bevindingen en maatregelen uit de literatuur*. [Increasing study success. Findings and measures in literature]. Breda: Avans University of Applied Sciences

⁹ Anderson, L. W. and Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*, New York: Longman

¹⁰ Van der Klink, M. (2017). *Sleutels voor studeerbaarheid. Intern rapport*. [Keys to study feasibility. Internal report.] Heerlen: Zuyd University of Applied Sciences.

¹¹ Rubens, W. (2016). *Elf modellen voor blended learning* [Eleven models for blended learning]. Retrieved from <https://www.te-learning.nl/blog/elf-modellen-voor-blended-learning/>

¹² This vision was written during the coronavirus crisis. As a result of the crisis, we have had to speed up the design of our blended learning environment. Our experiences will help us integrate forms of blended learning into our vocational education in future.

Students of Communication and Multimedia Design create their own 3D online learning and social hotspot

Students of Communication and Multimedia Design (CMD) have actively implemented the concept of distance learning during the coronavirus pandemic. While the education sector is still searching for functional and attractive online learning and teaching environments and, students are longing for a 'chill' online space where they can hang out with one another. The CMD students and lecturers of this study programme joined forces to create their own teaching, learning, and social environment. Not because they were forced to do so by the coronavirus crisis, but because they thought it would be 'fun' and because they wanted to do it. An online space was created in which students can walk around with the help of an 'avatar'. This space was further developed into a virtual learning and social hotspot with its own auditorium, workspaces, and exhibition hall. Here, poster presentations and exhibitions are held, students organise and take part in workshops and work on joint projects, and lecturers provide online teaching. In addition, assignments of students are not only displayed but also assessed in the exhibition hall. The success of this environment has ensured that it can also be used by prospective students during teaser sessions.



Students of Business Studies and Communication and Multimedia Design graduate online

Jill and Kimberly, students of the Business Studies and Communication and Multimedia Design programmes respectively, were the first students to graduate remotely from Zuyd University of Applied Sciences in the spring of 2020. 'We kind of expected this due to the lockdown on the Friday and immediately looked at what we should deal with first,' the Head of Programme explains. 'The Examination Board was contacted directly on Monday to get everything organised.' Jill is extremely relieved that it worked out well. 'I was actually supposed to be defending my thesis on the Monday. Unfortunately, it was cancelled at the last minute due to the developments surrounding the coronavirus. For a moment, I thought I would not yet be able to finish my study but, fortunately, a solution to the problem was quickly sought. And so, I found myself sitting in front of my laptop on Tuesday. I'm happy that Zuyd helped me look for a possibility that would allow me to complete my study. At least I can now say that I've graduated!'



and sights of the 360° environment with a specific assignment. Serious games, in which gaming techniques and elements are introduced to achieve learning objectives, can also enhance the learning environment. Students are often challenged and motivated by the competitive element. The use of augmented reality, in which a mobile phone is used to apply a layer of digital images over the real world, also generates challenging learning experiences¹³. This means that a student of Architecture, for instance, can receive information via an app about interesting buildings while strolling through a city. Lastly, students are activated and motivated by gaining insight into their learning achievements and progress. An implementation based on learning analytics, in which data are generated from the learning environment and/or education systems, presented transparently, and accompanied by specific advice, can be useful in this regard. Another implementation is a personal dashboard in the digital learning environment, in which students can follow the achievement of their goals – through summative and formative tests – in relation to their fellow students¹⁴.

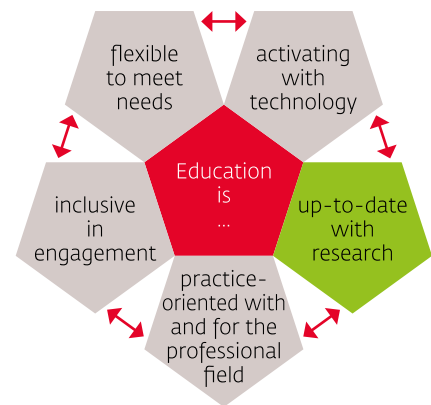
¹³ Ternier S., de Vries F., Börner D., Specht M. (2014) Mobile Augmented Reality with Audio. In: Cerone A. et al. (eds) *Information Technology and Open Source: Applications for Education, Innovation, and Sustainability*. SEFM 2012. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 7991. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

¹⁴ Jivet, I., Scheffel, M., Drachsler, H., and Specht, M. (2017). *Awareness is not enough. Pitfalls of learning analytics dashboards in the educational practise*. 12th European Conference on Technology-Enhanced Learning. Tallinn, Estonia, 12-15 September 2017.

4

Up-to-date content in education through integrated applied research

During their study, our students deserve to develop into inquisitive and research-oriented professionals that have learned to reflect critically on their own professional practice. This calls for education with up-to-date content that focuses on the development of a research-oriented attitude. The applied research carried out by professors and lecturers participating in our research centres, in cooperation with our students and the professional field, contributes to curricula with up-to-date content that focuses on the development of students with a critical and research-oriented attitude¹⁵.



The Global Minds Research Centre and the Horizons in Hospitality minor

During the Horizons in Hospitality minor, to which the Global Minds Research Centre makes a significant contribution, students of the Hotel Management

School Maastricht took the train to Amsterdam in 2019 to visit two leading companies: Rituals and Heineken. The first stop was the Rituals Benelux Office on the Herengracht. The students were given various introductions on the corporate operations and the day-to-day tasks of an area manager. The opportunities for internships were also explained. During the visit to the shop, one of the employees explained how Rituals implements hospitality in the company. Afterwards, the students went on to visit Heineken. There, the presentations focused on hospitality and creating the 'Heineken feeling' during large-scale events. The visit was rounded off with the Heineken Experience Tour during which the company's history was elaborated.

¹⁵ Schoenmakers, S. (2013). *Kennismaken om kennis te maken, verbindingen tussen onderzoek en onderwijs* [Getting to know others to create knowledge, connections between research and education] e-book Heerlen: Zuyd University of Applied Sciences.

Integration of research into education not only keeps the educational content up to date but also ensures that students learn to adopt a research-oriented attitude. Integration goes even further, as research conducted in the research centres is often done together with professionals in the field and other educational institutions. Professors, lecturers, and professionals collaborate with students in research – integrated in the curriculum – on practical problems and social themes. The manner in which research takes place will differ per domain. Research in the art programmes is often exploratory by nature while research within the technological study programmes is more likely to be experimental. We embrace this diversity in research and the cooperation between the domains leads to new and interesting insights. Students are involved in this and thus we match graduating students with research assignments based on the needs of society, with students working together on research assignments with and within a professional research environment in Centres of Expertise, practical learning environments, laboratories, or skills labs. In this way, the students become part of a professional community.

The integration of applied research in education also ensures that, based on the expertise that is built up, the results are translated into the content of curricula. This makes it possible for lines of research in research centres to be tailored to specialisations of study programmes and allows for student participation. The development of specific minors that are socially relevant and important for the development of the student also tie in with the themes of the research centres. The themes that are prevalent in the region (a healthy society, future-proof businesses, valuable neighbourhoods, and a circular production system) are thus linked to our education and, together with professionals in the field, we educate students that are able to find their way in professional practice as starting professionals.

The way in which our applied research contributes to the students' development goes further than simply contributing to parts of the curriculum. The research centres and their research activities also play an important role in for instance community building. This is set out in the vision on applied research at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences¹⁶.



Research and education integrated in the art programmes

Every year, the Research Centre for Arts, Autonomy and the Public Sphere organises a research studio within the curriculum of one of the art programmes. The research

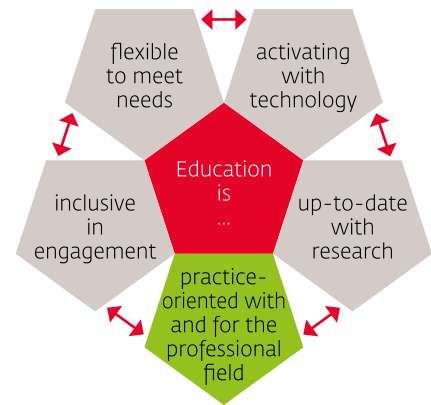
studio is a hybrid learning environment that revolves around a social theme or other issue, in which challenging education is combined with artistic research. The central focal point is formed by the interaction between creation and reflection and between thinking and doing. The studios are positioned at interfaces between disciplines and form intersections where art, science, and society can meet. This interdisciplinarity resonates with the increasingly hybrid professional field of artists and designers. More so than ever before, creators are seeking connections with a wide variety of partners and contexts in the interest of their artistic practice. It is therefore important that students learn to make their work relevant for new domains. Learning to conduct research contributes to this significantly.

¹⁶ Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (2021-draft). *Visie op praktijkgericht onderzoek* [Vision on applied research].

5

Practice-oriented education with and for the professional field

At Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, we educate students and train professionals who want to further develop their knowledge and skills so that they can (continue to) operate successfully in complex professional practice as well as (continue to) contribute to new ideas and innovations in the field. This means that the education is directly linked to professional practice so that students are given an accurate idea of the professions and realistic expectations. It also ensures that students are involved in the professional community. A strong link between education and professional practice makes it easier for students to apply their theoretical knowledge to the field and this, in turn, increases the transfer of theory into practice¹⁷.



Cooperation with the professional field, in order to ensure that education is embedded in practice and meets the needs of the professional field, can be implemented in a variety of meaningful ways. For example, the professional field can be closely involved in developing, designing, and implementing the education. Also, students can gain practical experience on a regular basis during various internship sessions in the study programme, or students can work on practical problems in research projects, together with professors, lecturers, and professionals in the field. Study programmes can also operate in accordance with the concept and principles of workplace learning¹⁸. Experience has shown that this helps our graduates find their way in professional practice and that they can be characterised as entrepreneurial professionals who are ready for a successful start.

We educate our students for a professional field that is not only focusing on the region and Euregion but we also take a national and international perspective. We want to give students a broad scope and offer them opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills to develop a global mindset. Dutch is the basic language of instruction at our university, but given this perspective, students can pursue minors in German and French besides opportunities to learn other languages. The ambition is for students to develop an internationally-oriented attitude that allows them to move freely across borders. This means that students – in collaboration with the professional field – cross borders to take part in projects or pursue minors, complete international internships, or take part in exchange programmes, and thus devote attention to the development of intercultural competences. The global

¹⁷ Salomon, G., & Perkins, D. N. (1989). Rocky roads to transfer: Rethinking mechanisms of a neglected phenomenon. *Educational Psychologist* 24, 113-142.

¹⁸ Van der Klink, M. & Boon, J. (2017). *Toetsen van werkplekleren* [Assessing workplace learning]. In Van Berkel, H., Bax, A. & Joosten-Ten Brinke, D. (red.). *Toetsen in het hoger onderwijs* [Assessment in higher education] 241-251. Houten: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum



Applied Science: practical education on the Brightlands Chemelot Campus

All students of the Applied Science study programme are trained in the professional practice of the Brightlands Chemelot Campus. From day one, these starting professionals cooperate with lecturers, professors, and experienced professionals in learning communities on the campus to tackle societal challenges within the themes of health and sustainability. The students are immersed in the world of chemistry, working in state-of-the-art laboratories on the campus.



Law and the Zuyd Legal Lab

The Zuyd Legal Lab is the training organisation of the study programme of Law at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences in which students provide legal services under the supervision of professionals – lecturers, professors, lawyers, and a former bailiff. In this setting, students learn on the job. On the website of the Legal Lab, students write blogs that are relevant for professional practice. A chatbot called 'Legal Lot' which has been developed together with the students, facilitates access to justice as it helps answer simple legal questions in an easily accessible and affordable manner. Knowledge about the development process is shared by the students in their blogs.

competences acquired, enable students to contribute to the wider society. Through of our strong cooperation with the professional field – on a regional, Euregional, national, and international scale – we are committed to differentiated practice-oriented study programmes¹⁹.

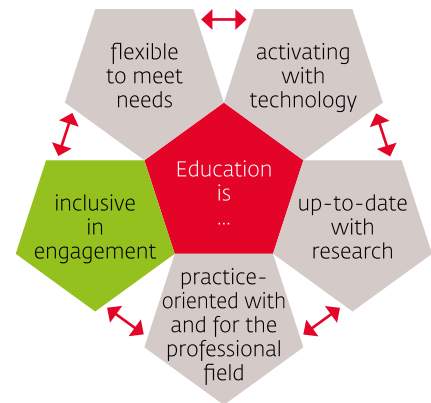
Many alumni of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences work in the professional field. Maintaining relationships with our alumni gives us the opportunity to design our education with and for the professional field. Alumni familiar with how our education is designed, can provide useful feedback; on the added value of the education as well as shortcomings in the study programme in terms of particular competencies.

¹⁹ Hoefnagels, A., & Schoenmakers, S. (2018). Developing the Intercultural Competence of Twenty-First-Century Learners with Blogging during a Work Placement Abroad. In J. A. Oskam, D. M. Dekker, & K. Wiegerink (Eds.), *Innovation in Hospitality Education: Anticipating the Educational Needs of a Changing Profession* (pp. 123-142). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

6

Inclusive education in engagement

We want our students to feel involved at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences – with their programme, the lecturers, and their fellow students – and to become part of a community in which the professional culture is embedded. Engagement is closely related to a student's academic as well as social integration into a study programme. Academic engagement focuses on the student's identification with the study programme and with the professional field which he intends to participate in as well as on active participation in the educational activities. There are several aspects to engagement and community building and herein lies a task for the study programme, in dialogue with the professors and the professional field, as well as for the student. Paying specific attention to community building fosters a sense of connection that is essential for the student. A lack of engagement with or sense of connection in the community is an important reason for students dropping out, particularly at the beginning of their studies²⁰.



[Come on in, it's fun here. Warm welcome@Zuyd]

A warm welcome to Zuyd's study programmes

Every year, as part of Warm Welkom@Zuyd, we welcome students studying at intermediate vocational colleges who want to come and get a taste of Zuyd's study programmes as part of their optional course 'progression to higher professional education'. During the introductory afternoon, the students have the opportunity to find out more about studying at a university of applied sciences and about Zuyd and its study facilities. They can talk with current Zuyd students. These vocational education students can take an optional course called 'progression to higher professional education'. This option is somewhat similar to a minor in higher professional education and has been developed by lecturers working in intermediate vocational education in collaboration with lecturers and students at Zuyd.

²⁰ Severiens, S. E., & Schmidt, H. G. (2009). Academic and social integration and study progress in problem based learning. *Higher Education*, 58, 59-69.



Study programmes in health care: interprofessional education and collaboration

The health care sector is changing. The time when nurses were just nurses is in the past. This applies to health care in the broadest sense, whether in relation to occupational therapy, physiotherapy, or psychology, for example. It is important to speak the language of other specialists. As a nurse, you do not have to provide physiotherapy, but you should be able to recognise when someone should be referred to a physiotherapist. Interprofessional collaboration is a requirement for every future health care professional. With health care education focusing on interprofessionalisation and collaboration we want to teach students to cooperate with other disciplines from an early stage. It should be second nature.

It is important for us to achieve academic engagement from the very start of a study programme. Opportunities for contact between lecturers, students, professors, and professionals during the first hundred days are important to ensure academic integration. The structure of the curriculum – with sufficient contact hours at the beginning of the first year – the approachability and availability of lecturers, the use of peer tutoring, the possibility to contact an academic guidance counsellor, and sufficient opportunities for contact with the professional field are essential throughout the study programme.

Social interaction between lecturers and students has a positive effect on the students' well-being. This includes aspects such as generating the students' interest and enthusiasm for the subject matter, setting clear goals, asking open questions and provoking discussions, and the availability and support of the lecturer. Social interaction in relation to fellow students has an equally significant effect. This mainly refers to collaborative learning in small groups in which students have a clear individual task and responsibility. Social integration is also important in terms of the student's overall personal development. An open and transparent pedagogical climate gives students opportunities to develop reasoning skills, personality, and character, so that they can deal with the complexity of today's world and the unknown issues of the future.

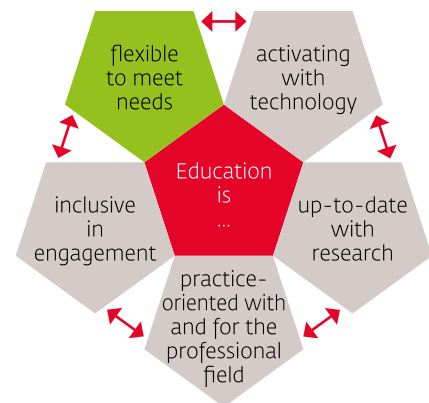
Paying attention to social integration also means focusing on diversity in education. The student population in higher education is becoming increasingly diverse. We want our students to enjoy an inclusive learning environment in which every individual student can develop to his full potential, regardless of gender, personality, learning style, cultural background, ideological beliefs, or any functional impairment. Managing diversity is consistent with our basic principle of wanting students to develop intercultural competences. By taking diversity into consideration and encouraging students to adopt a broad view of social themes from various perspectives during their studies, we educate our students to become right-thinking, newly-qualified professionals with a moral compass²¹. In addition, it is also important to take into consideration diversity within the teaching staff.

21 Van Mieghem, A., Verschueren, K., Petry, K., & Struyf, E. (2018). *Inclusief onderwijs: een overzicht vanuit de literatuur* [Inclusive education: an overview in literature]. *Impuls voor Onderwijsbegeleiding*, 49, 13-20.

7

Flexible education to meet the needs of students and the professional field

Even though the learning outcomes to be achieved in education are often fixed, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences considers it a major advantage that students can achieve these outcomes in a learning environment in which they have a certain degree of freedom of choice. The availability of options that are compatible with the students' learning process, their phase of development, and interests has a positive influence on the learning outcomes. Our student population is heterogeneous, and our students differ in what they need to be successful. As it is our aim to provide education that offers equal opportunities to all students, it goes without saying that our teaching deliberately takes into consideration these differences between students, with particular attention given to students with a functional impairment. Offering flexible learning tracks can be useful in this regard.



A curriculum offers students the opportunity to make choices regarding their learning track and the way in which they want to achieve their goals. This requires a certain degree of flexibility in curricula, such as in the choice of minors offered, projects that students can work on, internships that students can undertake, and the method and moments of assessment²². Being able to switch study programmes easily is also desirable for students at times because, despite clearly expressed expectations, it remains difficult to make choices at a young age. It is therefore important to support students in making the right choice. From our point of view, organising flexible learning environments also requires proper coordination within the entire education chain in order to allow vocational education students with specific ambitions to transfer to a university of applied sciences without difficulty and to enable our students to progress smoothly to education at a research university.

In our vision on education, the flexibilisation of education goes beyond simply establishing possible learning tracks within a study programme. Within the context of lifelong development, it is our aim to give professionals the opportunity to develop their talents by offering a range of different educational and training programmes. We regard this as a societal task for higher professional education which requires a flexible education system in which full-time, part-time, and dual study Bachelor's, Master's, and Associate degree programmes are compatible with one another. It is important in this respect that students and other learners can apply previously acquired competences and can learn in

²² CINOP (2019). *Flexpraktijken. In gesprek met flexibiliseringspioniers in het beroepsonderwijs*. [Flexible practices. Interviews with flexibilisation pioneers in vocational education]. 's-Hertogenbosch: CINOP.

Engineering: the success of the flexible part-time programme



The part-time Bachelor's programme in Engineering demonstrates that the flexible education concept meets the needs of the labour market within the context of the 'flexibilisation of higher education' pilot. In this part-time programme, the participating professionals combine work and study in their own working environment and receive a great deal of personal attention. A core team of committed and enthusiastic lecturers, who have already been shaping the development and implementation of the curriculum for more than two years now, have chosen to take professional roles as the curriculum's starting point. The team arrived at this decision after researching the training needs of businesses in the region. A very pleasant culture has developed between the participants and the supervising lecturers/coaches in this programme.

A better match through participation in technasium schools



In 2017, Zuyd entered into a collaboration with the Bernardinuscollege (Heerlen), Sophianum (Gulpen), Graaf Huyn College (Geleen), and Lyceum Schöndeln (Roermond) to stimulate the development of pupils talented in STEM subjects. Zuyd takes a broad approach to collaborating with these so-called technasium schools. For example, when working on their 'meesterproef' – the final assignment completed in their examination year – pupils from these technasium schools are not only supervised by their own teachers but also by lecturers at Zuyd. In addition, the technasium pupils are offered broad study and career guidance so that they are more focused and motivated when choosing a study programme. During joint study afternoons, teachers from the technasium schools and lecturers from Zuyd exchange knowledge and expertise as part of their professionalisation.

a workplace setting in order to acquire the learning goals of a study programme. Short tailor-made training programmes in contract variations also offer opportunities to provide specific training and education for professionals in certain sectors.

In order to meet all these needs relating to lifelong development, it is important to structure the content and the organisation of the education, such as providing a modular format and certification for study units²³. It is a challenge to design and organise flexibility in education, in a way that justifies the proper construction of curricula and the relationship between feasible, teachable, and affordable education, in which the logistics are taken into account. However, clear structuring in a flexible learning environment ensures that we can meet the needs of the student and the professional field.

²³ Merriënboer, J. J. G. van, & Kirschner, P. A. (2007). *Ten Steps to Complex Learning. A Systematic Approach to Four-Component Instructional Design*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

In conclusion

Zuyd's vision on modern-day higher professional education matches with the passion we have for the (continued) development of students and professionals. Based on this vision, we organise our education in such a way that we prepare our students in the best possible manner for a bright future in which they continue to learn and cherish ambitions to grow in their professions.


Our ambition is that the professional field – in the region, Euregion, The Netherlands, and beyond – also indicates the need to embrace students from Zuyd University of Applied Sciences because, as skilled professionals with a research-oriented and critical attitude, they make a contribution to innovation in the field. This ambition requires proper integration of our teaching with applied research, in cooperation with the professional field, so that training can be provided in a cohesive manner.

The feasible education that we develop in line with this vision must also continue to satisfy the principles of teachability, organisability, and affordability so that, from Zuyd's perspective, all kinds of processes can be organised and regulated properly. If, for example, processes relating to timetable scheduling are compatible with teachable study programmes and curricula, this will benefit study feasibility and the well-being of all students and employees. The ability to carefully devise a flexible education system that is suitably teachable, organisable, and affordable presents an interesting challenge for the future.

The basis is to provide modern education and create room for innovative initiatives in order to keep improving the quality of education. This also ties in completely with our vision on educational quality and quality assurance²⁴, in which we work on continuous improvement in PDCA cycles.

By offering up-to-date study programmes based on technology-supported activating teaching methods developed with and for the professional field, while fostering inclusiveness and engagement in a flexible setting, we are able to educate students and support the lifelong development of professionals so that they are appreciated as critical and right-thinking professionals.

²⁴ Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (2020). *Quality Assurance in Education Manual*.



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