

NIG background

Providing a curricular training programme for PhD students is relatively new in the Netherlands. Of old Dutch universities did not follow the Anglo-Saxon graduate school tradition where PhD is a next phase of continuous education, but the continental European ‘Von Humboldt’ tradition, where writing a dissertation is an individual research project between an individual researcher and his or her professor, with hardly any training.

In the 1980s the junior staff-position of an ‘assistant-in-training’ (AIO), who is to finish a PhD in four years, was introduced at Dutch universities, primarily in order to avoid the threat that, due to severe retrenchments and ageing problems at Dutch universities at the time, all junior temporary personnel would vanish from academia. A whole new generation of upcoming young researchers threatened to be lost. Therefore this temporary junior staff-position was created to ensure that enough dissertation research was done to create a new generation. At the time of the introduction of this AIO position educational training for PhD’s hardly existed.

In the early 1990s the institute of ‘research schools’ was introduced at Dutch universities, a ‘centre of excellence’ in a particular field of science, which amongst others should provide AIO’s with a proper educational training for doing a PhD. In the Dutch administrative sciences that led to the establishment of the Netherlands School of Public Administration, later joined by the political sciences, resulting in the NIG. Since the early 1990s individual dissertation researchers were for the first time ever provided with a proper curricular training to prepare them for successfully finishing a PhD.

The Bologna treaty of 1999 brought European universities a further step towards the Anglo-Saxon university tradition by introducing the two-stage Bachelor-Master system and the third stage of PhD education. Universities in all EU-member states are legally prescribed to offer a proper PhD training programme to their PhD students. Notice though that, although most European universities have now, ten years after Bologna, wholly or partly introduced the Bachelor-Master system, that holds not true for PhD training. Various European countries (e.g. Austria, France, Germany and Spain) still have a traditional ‘Humboldtian’ pattern of individual PhD research without curricular training. Other countries (e.g. Italy and Switzerland) have governments investing in PhD training via curricula and scholarships. The Nordic countries and the Netherlands had already prior to the Bologna treaty established PhD educational programmes with national networks (POLFORSK in Denmark and NIG in the Netherlands). In most European countries individual university departments have to provide for educational training of a small number of PhD students. Economies of scale and cost-effectiveness of PhD training in administrative and political science by establishing national interuniversity cooperative networks, does only exist in the Danish interuniversity political science research school POLFORSK with eight participating universities and institutes (with which NIG has an exchange programme and shares a common course), and the Netherlands interuniversity graduate school NIG, which is a cooperation between nine Dutch universities that offer administrative and political science degrees.

NIG is providing not only a highly cost-effective, but also a high-academic-quality training programme for all PhD students in administrative and political science in the Netherlands.