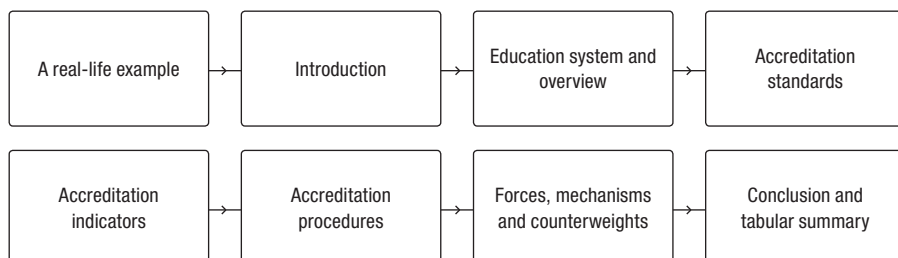


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## 9 THE NETHERLANDS: Quality Control as a Driving Force in Bilingual Education

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### A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE CLIL ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

Jan Steen College is a rural secondary school with a long-standing bilingual programme. Students in the programme are taught at least 50% of their subjects through English and the remainder through Dutch. This state school is expecting an accreditation visit from the European Platform, which coordinates bilingual education in the Netherlands. Prior to the accreditation committee visit, the school reported that it had a strong internationalisation programme that was undertaking exchange projects with schools in Italy and Mexico. European and International Orientation (EIO) is a key accreditation criterion. Also, the school detailed how the content of its curriculum was supporting internationalisation.

All bilingual programme teachers have passed the Cambridge Proficiency Exam, meeting at least the required Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level B2 (Council of Europe, 2001). Although the school's bilingual programme is nearly 14 years old, the previous Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) training was provided six years ago, and in fact some new teachers might not have had any CLIL training at all.

The accreditation standards require teachers to demonstrate CLIL skills, such as the ability to create rich learning environments where students are actively engaged in communication and where the learning and use of academic English language is fostered. The school has not provided evidence that pre-university students have achieved a CEFR B2 level in the third form (i.e. 15-year olds), which is another accreditation criterion.

The accreditation visit lasts one day and this time, as always, is conducted by a committee of three individuals – an experienced CLIL teacher trainer from a university, an employee of the European Platform, and a principal of a bilingual school. For the first hour of the visit the committee discusses the school's bilingual policy with the principal, the vice-principal and the bilingual department coordinator. During this meeting, it is confirmed that there has been no formal CLIL training for the past six years, but apparently there has been much informal training in the form of visits to CLIL conferences, peer-to-peer learning and the sharing of good practices at teacher-led national workshops. Each member of the committee observes half of four English-medium lessons; their visit is comprised of 12 observations, each lasting 25 minutes. Subjects taught through English include the sciences, humanities, the arts and Physical Education. On the whole, lessons are exemplary. Language support and development go hand-in-hand with subject teaching. An active learning approach is applied, with students communicating actively in English. Some lessons are more teacher-centred, with students getting little or no chance to speak, and there is no explicit focus on the learning of subject-related language.

The rest of the day involves interviews with the CLIL coordinator, European and International Orientation coordinator, subject teachers, English teachers, students and parents. The focus is on their experiences and beliefs, in order to help the committee check and further refine their understanding of the bilingual programme. In addition, the school provides additional proof of pre-university students' English language proficiency – recent speaking, reading, writing and listening test results.

The committee evaluates the school by giving it a score on each of the 45 accreditation indicators. The scoring is presented and a discussion proceeds with the school management team that looks at strengths and weaknesses. The principal acknowledges that CLIL training is long overdue. There is general relief that students appear to be reaching the B2 level. At the next national meeting of bilingual schools, Jan Steen College's success is publically recognised and it is awarded the European Platform's five-year accreditation certificate.

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the accreditation process for the 120 schools in the Dutch national Network of Bilingual Schools. The chapter first discusses the context of bilingual secondary education in the Netherlands. In addition, it details the rationale for the accreditation process and its role as an internal mechanism initiated by the national Network aimed at assuring the provision of quality bilingual education. Furthermore, the chapter traces the forces, mechanisms and counterweights acting on and originating from current educational practice.

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## BILINGUAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW

In the Netherlands, students enter one of three possible streams of secondary education at the age of twelve: *vmbo* (junior pre-vocational education, 4 years), *havo* (general secondary education, 5 years), or *vwo* (pre-university education, 6 years) (cf. [www.government.nl/issues/education](http://www.government.nl/issues/education) 2014). English, French and German are the most frequently taught foreign languages (see Van Els and Tuin 2010; Moonen et al. 2012, for further background information on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the Dutch educational system). However, English is also a compulsory subject in the upper two years of primary and throughout secondary education. Final examinations for upper secondary consist of two parts: a state-controlled reading examination and internal school examinations which test the other language skills (speaking, writing, listening, as well as understanding of literature). Targets based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001) have been established that range from A2 (Basic User), for junior pre-vocational, to B2 (Independent User) for pre-university education.

Schools are relatively autonomous with respect to curriculum content and teaching methodology. The Dutch government does not directly mandate educational innovation at the school level. This applies to bilingual education as well, which has been a bottom-up development initiated by school boards, teachers and parents since the early 1990s. Currently, approximately 120 (of 700) secondary schools offer a bilingual stream at the secondary level, usually in parallel with a 'regular' non-bilingual stream. In bilingual schools, at least 50% of the curriculum is taught through a second language. Virtually all bilingual schools offer Dutch-English bilingual education; only a few offer

a Dutch-German programme. Bilingual education was first introduced in the pre-university *vwo* stream, but is now being increasingly offered in the *vmbo* and the *havo* streams as well (cf. [www.ikkiestto.nl](http://www.ikkiestto.nl)).

Research conducted in the Netherlands has demonstrated that students in bilingual streams reach higher levels of English proficiency than students in regular streams (Huibregtse 2001, Admiraal et al. 2006, Verspoor et al. 2010, 2012). On national examinations, bilingual programme students also achieve results in Dutch and content-matter subjects that are at least on par with those of students in regular programmes. In addition, De Graaff et al. (2007) and Schuitemaker-King (2012), in their studies of 80 lessons and 15 subject teachers in the Netherlands, found that subject teachers teaching through English were able to facilitate CLIL by applying effective language teaching strategies in subject classes.

It is noteworthy that the bilingual programme is coordinated by the European Platform, a central mechanism in programme development. The mission of this government-financed agency is the development of internationalisation in Dutch education. The schools that operate under the European Platform are grouped under the national Network for Bilingual Schools.

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## ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The Dutch *Standards for Bilingual Education in English* (see Tool 8) resulted from a lengthy, multi-year discussion through the national Network for Bilingual Schools beginning in the mid-1990s. It was agreed that the standards should be compatible with the Dutch curriculum, should support students in preparing for compulsory national examinations in Dutch and should be aligned with the programmes of international and non-international schools. After several years of discussion, the standards were adopted in 2002 by all Dutch bilingual schools. Stakeholder inclusion was an important force in helping to ensure that schools accepted and used the standards – a key mechanism in programme development. The standards serve as a guide for new as well as experienced bilingual schools. Key criteria from the standards include:

- in the lower grade levels (ages 12–15), a minimum 50% of lessons should be taught through English<sup>1</sup>
- in the upper grades (ages 15–18), 25% of teaching and study time should be in English
- students reach level B2 in Year Three (age 15)

- teachers are well-versed in CLIL methodology
  - students engage in project-based collaboration with students abroad at least once
  - teachers have at least a B2 level of language proficiency
  - students' proficiency in Dutch may not be negatively influenced
  - national exam results for the subjects taught in English may not be negatively influenced
  - authentic teaching resources and learning materials in English are used, covering the Dutch curriculum as well as an international orientation
  - schools offering a bilingual programme in the upper grades must offer the International Baccalaureate *English Language and Literature* course.
- ➡ See Tool 8 for a full version of the standards.

## ACCREDITATION INDICATORS

The standards are presented in an accreditation framework that contains 45 indicators in the following categories: learning results; programme quantity; programme quality; international orientation; CLIL pedagogy; quality control; organisational preconditions, and individual and team-based professional development (see Tool 7). Every five years, accreditation committees appointed by the European Platform ascertain whether a school conforms to each individual indicator and, by extension, to the standards. Indicators are scored on a binary scale (+/-). Twenty-three of the indicators are norm-indicators, meaning that each one must be met for the school to merit certification. Failure to meet any one single norm criterion results in non-accreditation. These norm indicators outline the minimum quality level that is required of all schools – for example, that at least 50% of subjects should be taught through English and that there should be international collaboration. The other, non-norm indicators form part of an ideal CLIL learning environment as agreed upon by all the schools in the network; for example, schools should have at least three native speakers of English: one in the English Language department and two in the other subject departments. This indicator is motivated by a desire to give learners additional opportunities to hear native English (of whichever variety) in diverse subject areas. Native speakers are also likely to bring different teaching methods and an international perspective. However, since schools face many staffing challenges this is not a minimum requirement, but a goal. During accreditation visits, schools are invited to elaborate on their efforts to expose students to native-speakers of English, preferably through direct contact with qualified teachers, but also

by other means, such as guest speakers, exchange programmes and online collaboration with peers abroad.

## ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

All 120 schools that form the national Network for Bilingual Schools in the Netherlands subscribe to the standards and the accreditation framework. These documents are the basis for accreditation. Schools generally take one to two years to prepare for the launch of their bilingual programme. Students enter the programme in the first year of lower secondary school (age 12). When the first cohort of students is in its second year, a mock accreditation visit takes place. Two years later, the lower secondary programme (for students of age 12–15) undergoes accreditation. Should a school extend the bilingual programme into upper secondary, another accreditation takes place three years later. From thereon, schools must renew their accreditation every five years (*cf.* Table 1 for an overview of the accreditation process).

**Table 1: Bilingual secondary school development and the accreditation process**

Year	Stages	Type of visit	Committee
1	school joins the network; prepares for one year (sometimes for two years)	none	
2	school starts bilingual classes; first students are in Year One	none	
3	first cohort of students is in Year Two	advisory visit and mock accreditation leading to a progress report	an experienced principal and a European Platform staff member
4	first cohort of students is in Year Three; B2 level achieved	none	
5	fully operational bilingual stream in the three lower forms; first cohort is in Year Four.	lower secondary programme accreditation visit possibly resulting in accreditation	a CLIL expert, an internationalisation specialist and an employee of the European Platform
6, 7	schools wishing to do so extend the bilingual stream to upper secondary	none	
8	first cohort takes final exams and graduates from school	senior programme accreditation visit possibly resulting in accreditation	a CLIL expert, an internationalisation specialist and an employee of the European Platform
12, 17, 22 ...	the school has been accredited for five years	re-accreditation visit possibly resulting in re-accreditation	a CLIL expert, a principal from a different bilingual school and an employee of the European Platform

If a school does not pass an accreditation round, a further visit with a different committee will take place within two years. Should a school fail two consecutive accreditations, the Network regulations stipulate that the school lose its membership in the Network and its accreditation. To date, no school has failed the accreditation more than once. This underlines the purpose and effectiveness of the accreditation process; it is a model for focused educational redesign. If the model is implemented with insight and sufficient effort, and supported by professional development, it provides a powerful mechanism for the creation of a sustainable bilingual programme.

The accreditation procedure itself is evaluated on a yearly basis by the committee members, the European Platform and the steering group of the Network. The standards are discussed and evaluated regularly by the members of the Network for Bilingual Schools, and adapted if necessary.

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## FORCES

Trust is a major driving force in school-based programme development. This includes trusting the Network to make decisions which, by extension, leads to trust in the mechanisms created by the Network. Trust is a precondition for effective collaboration between schools, coordinators and teachers. Trust combines with another force, the autonomy that arises from a fundamental human desire to have a degree of control over one's own life. Network schools and teachers enjoy a degree of autonomy as they are left with the responsibility of deciding how to best apply the standards.

A strong sense of commitment to the standards and the bilingual programme is another substantial force encouraging quality provision of bilingual education. The commitment arises from the sense of ownership that is created as the schools themselves develop the standards. Furthermore, the primary stakeholders (school principals and bilingual department coordinators) are responsible for their implementation. In addition, many principals, programme leaders and teachers report feeling a strong sense of responsibility not only for their own school's bilingual programme, but for the Network as a whole. This is exemplified by how they advocate for bilingual education in the community. Moreover, in the bilingual programme accreditation visits an external principal of a bilingual school from the Network always participates. He or she usually provides valuable feedback to the principal of the accredited school, and also learns from the accreditation procedure. This sharing of responsibility for accreditation intensifies the principals' commitment to the bilingual programme in general and to its standards.

The standards and the accreditation process aim to create a shared vision that guides the development of a programme that fosters additive bilingualism and a European and international orientation among students. As such, the accreditation standards and procedures support and enhance teachers' and other stakeholders' belief in the value of CLIL as an effective pedagogical approach for subject and language learning. The standards also constitute high expectations. High expectations are a powerful force for both students and teachers in the development of rich learning environments that use internationalisation and bilingual education as an authentic setting for content and language learning. Furthermore, these high expectations act as a powerful stimulus for deeper learning by both teachers and students. Moreover, the accreditation system personifies a belief in the need for quality control and peer evaluation as an instrument for improving professional development and programme quality.

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## MECHANISMS

In its commitment to quality, the Network of Bilingual Schools' main vehicles for programme implementation are committed pupils, parents, teachers, principals and school boards, as well as a stimulating teachers' network. The belief in, and commitment to, the bilingual programme amongst these people are the primary forces fuelling the mechanisms that contribute to successful teaching and learning. In addition, three sets of mechanisms have played a central role in the development of the Network of Bilingual Schools and the accreditation of the bilingual programmes in these schools.

First, the national Network of Bilingual Schools, the European Platform as the national coordinating organisation and the quality control committees are all central mechanisms that create structures and opportunities through which quality and cooperation can be developed. Tangible examples of such opportunities are regular symposia for teacher professional development in CLIL, a professorship for research on bilingual education supported financially by the Network, pre-service and in-service CLIL teacher-training programmes, regular national meetings of bilingual school co-ordinators and participation in European networks for bilingual education development. Opportunities for cooperation and discussion have led to the creation of standards for bilingual programmes, teacher competences and accreditation indicators. These are important mechanisms for enhancing programme development and management. They also constitute a coherent discourse that



is held in common by key stakeholders, both from participating schools, from candidate schools, and from local, regional and national educational policy makers.

Second, within this organisational framework, all participants and stakeholders agree on clear benchmarks; namely, standards for bilingual schools and a quality control process, both of which are compulsory for membership in the Network. Furthermore, all schools adhere to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, as well as to the Common Framework for European Competence. These instruments provide a shared point of reference for discussions about quality bilingual education.

Finally, logos, certificates and other branding instruments are valuable mechanisms that can contribute to a sense of belonging, uniqueness and pride that further reinforce commitment to the programme. Only accredited schools may use these branding instruments. Therefore, they play a substantial role in schools' public relations and communication campaigns. Other mechanisms that promote high quality bilingual education are exclusive 'members only' training programmes for bilingual schools' coordinators, and national activities for bilingual students, ranging from mathematics to cricket contests, as well as annual debating, drama and junior speaking contests.

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## COUNTERWEIGHTS

Counterweights can consist of either forces or mechanisms or a combination of these that play an active part in the dynamics of programme implementation and development. This section will not only discuss existing counterweights, but argue that counterweights need to be used consciously to counter potentially negative mechanisms or forces.

Expansion of the programme is dependent on an ongoing push-and-pull phenomenon. Parental pressure and student interest in bilingual education act as counterweights to the hesitation of school boards to take on additional responsibilities. Thus, raising parent and student awareness of the benefits of bilingual education can contribute to programme expansion insofar as better-informed parents and students are likely to actively demand more high-quality bilingual programmes.

Although the standards are owned by the national Network of Bilingual Schools and each member school is therefore co-responsible for the standards and the accreditation procedure, the schools may see the standards and

in particular the 'norm' criteria as somewhat undermining their autonomy. As a counterweight, schools have a certain freedom to apply the quality criteria in terms of their local context; for example, they can decide which subjects from the sciences or the humanities they want to offer in English, or if they prefer to organise face-to-face or virtual school exchange projects. Furthermore, schools can also choose to take international English-medium formative and summative exams from awarding bodies such as Cambridge International Examinations.

Bilingual education is characterised by a strong focus on L2 development in subject learning. However, as compulsory final examinations in the Dutch secondary education system are administered in Dutch only, this acts to some extent as a counterweight to English-medium programming because most bilingual schools switch back to using Dutch in the upper grades for teaching the science and social science subjects. This invites teachers to adopt strategies (counterweights) to ensure that students who switch back to using Dutch as a medium of instruction in those subjects continue also to develop academic language proficiency in these domains in English.

As a counterweight to potential negative backwash effects of focusing on assessing student achievement using high-stakes tests, it would in the future also be important to identify and assess less-discussed potential benefits of bilingual education programmes. These might include positive student attitudes regarding language learning and use, their satisfaction with the programme and the extent to which they acquire intercultural competence and a global orientation. Equally importantly, it would be helpful to assess the effects of the bilingual programme on innovative teaching practices, such as increased cross-curricular and international student collaboration.

As a counterweight to elitism, the Dutch-English bilingual programme is now being offered in all three streams of Dutch secondary education, including the pre-vocational stream. Although relatively few schools are participating so far, there is a growing belief that bilingual education is a positive challenge that is suitable for students in all streams. Schools are still discovering ways to better implement bilingual programmes in junior vocational education. An adapted version of the standards has been adopted recently for this stream.

Most bilingual schools demand a fee from students for participation. This money is used for extra-curricular activities and professional development programmes. As a counterweight to the potential for the programme to become elitist, schools waive the fee for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. To ensure that the additional fees are spent as designated,

schools must show during the accreditation procedure how the additional fees have been used.

Schools are under increased pressure to meet student needs. Not only bilingual education, but other types of programmes, such as Science ('Technasium'), Entrepreneurship ('Entreprenasium'), Culture and Sports are gaining popularity as well. Bilingual schools, therefore, may face competition from schools offering such challenging programmes. A clear counterweight to the potential pressure from other schools is the well-established nature of the bilingual programme along with its well-developed standards and accreditation procedures. These can help build the quality of the bilingual programme and stakeholder confidence in it.

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## CONCLUSION

The Network of Bilingual Schools, the standards and the accreditation procedures have proven their relevance over the past 15 years. These central mechanisms have created structures and opportunities through which forces for quality bilingual education can be facilitated and supported: trust, commitment, cooperation, a shared vision, belief in the educational power of CLIL, and European and international orientation. On the one hand, the strength of the forces and mechanisms in the Dutch context have proven to operate as effective counterweights to criticism, scepticism and competition from other promising curriculum innovations. On the other hand, they have intensified our own evaluation process of bilingual education, raised awareness of our own gaps in knowledge and guided programme improvement.<sup>1</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 On 1 January 2015, the European Platform merged with the Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in higher education. The European Platform is open to international dialogue about its [Standards](#) and accreditation procedures.

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FORCES	MECHANISMS
<b>Key values in human relations</b>	<b>Organisations</b>
Trust in the qualities and competencies of colleagues from other bilingual schools in the network Respect for differences in pedagogical vision between schools	<b>People</b> Committed parents Committed teachers Committed principals and school boards A stimulating teachers' network
<b>Principles for cooperation</b>	<b>Structures</b>
Stakeholder inclusion High expectation for all stakeholders Shared responsibilities for educational development Commitment to goals and standards criteria	National Network of Bilingual Schools National coordinating organisation (European Platform) Quality control committees
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Knowledge building</b>
A desire for bilingualism An interest in intercultural competence and internationalism	Regular symposia for professional teacher development on CLIL Professorship for research on bilingual education supported financially by Network of Bilingual Schools Pre-service and in-service CLIL teacher training programmes Regular national meetings of bilingual school coordinators Participation in European networks for bilingual education development
<b>Beliefs</b>	<b>Agreements and benchmarks</b>
A belief in the power of content and language integrated learning A belief in the power of European and international education A belief in value of challenging students and teachers leading to better learning and teaching A belief in the value of peer evaluation	Standards for bilingual schools, compulsory for network participation Quality control procedure Common European Framework of <b>Reference, EIO framework</b> International Baccalaureate
<b>Processes</b>	<b>Vehicles</b>
An iterative approach to programme improvement	Additional fee for extra-curricular activities, professional development and bilingual schools network participation Logos and other branding Strategy and work plan for public relations Training programme for bilingual schools coordinators National activities for bilingual students
<b>Founding principles</b>	
Construction of a shared educational vision common to key stakeholders Buy-in to a vision of programme development Encouragement of individual initiative Shared responsibility for ensuring a quality programme	
<b>Mechanisms</b>	
<b>People</b>	
<b>COUNTERWEIGHTS</b>	
Parental demand	School board hesitation
High-stakes test results	Other less tangible benefits
Benefits of bilingual education	Challenges of bilingual education
National network coordination	School autonomy
Instruction through L2	National subject examinations in L1
Risk of elitism	Widening access
Additional fee	Fee waiver
Attractive potential of bilingual schools	New school profiles with different focus, such as science <b>entrepreneurship</b> , pulling students away