

PRESS RELEASE

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Increase in exchange students within Kingdom due to Kingdom Grant

As of next year, around 120 students per year will be able to go on an exchange programme or internship within the Kingdom thanks to the so-called Kingdom Grant. This is a new mobility programme for all students within the Kingdom, and aims to increase the short-term exchange of students. The first five Caribbean students with such a Kingdom grant recently started their studies in the Netherlands. Approximately 25 students are expected to use the grant this academic year. The Kingdom Grant is one of the measures that will help to support Caribbean students in their academic careers.

It is important to work hard to improve the academic success of Caribbean students. A recent [study](#) showed that students who complete their preliminary studies in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom are (much) more likely to switch to another study course, at WO and HBO level, than students who do their preliminary studies in the European Netherlands. At WO level, drop-out rates in the first year are highest among students from the Caribbean region. Many Caribbean students encounter extra obstacles when continuing their studies in e.g. the Netherlands. For instance, the decision to study in the Netherlands is a big step, and results in a relatively high drop-out rate. Caribbean students also encounter a lot of practical problems, like finding housing and obtaining a BSN.

Preventing drop-out and disappointment

The Kingdom Grant is a new mobility programme for all students within the Kingdom: secondary vocational education (MBO), higher professional education (HBO) and research-oriented education (WO). The programme is aimed at increasing short-term student exchanges between the countries of the Kingdom. For instance, a student from the Netherlands going to the University of Curaçao Dr. Moises Da Costa Gomez (UoC), or an Aruban student going for an internship to the Netherlands. This will enrich their academic careers and, for example, offer Caribbean students the chance to receive financial assistance that allows them to first see whether studying in the Netherlands is something for them, before they decide to commit to a complete study course. Students will study at an institution in the Netherlands for a maximum of six months. The aim is to avoid the drop-out and disappointment encountered when students decide to immediately opt for a complete study course. This will help to improve the academic success and educational equity of Caribbean students. Fewer drop-outs will also help to reduce the issue of student debt, which is encountered by many of these students. This prevents students from returning to their island of origin, and results in a *brain drain*. The Kingdom Grant makes it more appealing for students to continue studying on their own island, and to be part of a short-term exchange.

Minister Dijkgraaf: "It was truly inspirational to meet the first students with a Kingdom Grant. The introduction of this grant is an important and specific step towards improving the prospects, success rate and educational equity of Caribbean students. This exchange programme is based on the strengths of the four countries in the Kingdom."

'Erasmus+' within the Kingdom

The Kingdom Grant can be compared with the Erasmus+ programme which offers students financial assistance so that they can spend one semester at a European institution. Erasmus+ gives students from Aruba, Curaçao, St. Maarten, the Netherlands or the BES islands (Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius) a grant so that they can go on an exchange programme or internship to any European country, but not *within* the Kingdom. The offered grant is similar to the grant under Erasmus+, and the subsidy scheme (which has recently been opened to online consultation) states that Caribbean students can receive a maximum grant of 5900 euros.

This academic year, around 25 students are expected to use the new grant in the pilot phase. The aim is for around 120 students per year to benefit from the Kingdom Grant as of academic year 2024-2025. The Netherlands has set aside 0.6 million euros for the new mobility programme. Students have until the 1st of May 2024 to register for grants that will be available as of September 2024.

Improving academic success

The Kingdom Grant is one of the measures that aims to improve the academic success and educational equity of Caribbean students. The issue was high on the agenda at the Ministerial Four Country Meeting for Education last week in The Hague, which was chaired by the Netherlands on this occasion. The ministers agreed that a programme team would be set up to adopt a structural approach to improving academic success over the coming three years.

To increase the success rate of students in higher education, the four countries also decided to establish the Caribbean Academic Foundation Year. This is a joint *pre-academic year* that aims to better prepare students for a course at college or university. It should help to make it easier for students to move from senior secondary to higher education, at academic as well as personal level. The range of education possibilities available on the islands will also be examined. The first step in this involves a labour market analysis, whereby shortages in the labour market of the Caribbean region will be identified.