

Board of Examiners

your reference

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Maastricht
October 2015

To whom it may concern.

The Board of Examiners (BoE) is often confronted with questions about how the grades acquired at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience (FPN) can be interpreted in the context of other grading systems outside of the Netherlands. The purpose of this letter is to provide additional information and clarification regarding the grading scale applied at FPN. Furthermore, given the large number of German students in the FPN bachelor programme and following the guidelines provided by the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC)¹, the BoE provides an indicative conversion of Dutch grades into the German grading scale.

Information regarding the grading system used at Maastricht University and FPN is given in the Diploma supplement and follows the Dutch grading scale wherein 10 is the highest grade, 6 the minimum pass and 1 the lowest grade. Dutch examiners uniformly comment on the great difficulty in obtaining 9's and 10's and the respectability of 6's. There is also agreement that an 8 represents a high level of achievement, while grades 6 and 7 generally account for the majority of passing grades awarded. This can best be understood against the historical background of the Dutch grading scale, as explained below by NUFFIC:

“Grading practice in the Netherlands differs from that in the US and the UK inasmuch as the really high grades (10 and 9) are rarely awarded, regardless of the achievements of a given group of students. It is part of the grading culture in the Netherlands, dating back to the late 19th century when the scale from 10 to 1 was officially introduced. At the time, it was decided that a 10 should only be awarded in the case of absolute perfection. But as it was felt to be almost blasphemous for mere mortals to be the judge of absolute perfection, a 10 was hardly ever awarded. Instead, the 9 was considered to be a slightly less impossible goal to reach. With the advent of multiple choice testing and the yes/no type of questions, 10s and 9s came within reach of ambitious students. To this day, however, these grades are still very rarely given in oral examinations or open question testing, such as essays, presentations, project reports or theses.”²

Regarding the translation of grades between the educational systems of the Netherlands and Germany, the BoE refers to the grade conversion formula provided by the NUFFIC. On its website (www.nuffic.nl), and concretely under the section ‘Diploma Recognition’, NUFFIC presents the so-called ‘country modules’. The country modules³ provide information about the correspondence between the Dutch education levels and their equivalents abroad. The country modules also include grade conversion formulae and comparative information⁴. Below an excerpt from the German country module⁵ (from 2012, p. 14, emphasis added):

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“In Germany, the highest mark (1) is awarded more often than in the Netherlands (10). In the context of admission to higher education, the following formula has been used for many years to convert Dutch secondary education examination results into German results:

$$x = 1 + 3 \cdot (N_{\max} - N_d) / (N_{\max} - N_{\min})$$

where x = the German exam result,
N_{max} = the highest possible pass mark in the Netherlands
N_{min} = the lowest possible pass mark in the Netherlands, and
N_d = the candidate's result.

Initially, N_{min} was set at 6 and N_{max} at 10. However, this produced results that were far too low compared to those obtained in Germany. For this reason, for the purpose of converting higher education examinations results, **N_{max} has been set at 9 since 2011.**”

Example: The calculations for the grade conversion of a 7,5 obtained in the Netherlands are as follows: German grade = $1 + 3 \cdot (9 - 7,5) / (9 - 6) = 1 + 3 \cdot 1,5 / 3 = 1 + 1,5 = 2,5$. Hence, it is expected that the candidate's grade of 7,5 from the Netherlands, will be considered as equal to 2,5 in Germany.

The Maastricht University study registration system does not provide information regarding the ranking of a student within a cohort. Nevertheless, the diploma supplement features information that can be very helpful with regard to the relative position and educational achievement of a student. Interested parties are invited to consult the grading table which provides a distribution of grades from previous years of the programme. The grading table is a standard table which provides the statistical distribution of grades obtained within the bachelor programme. The data in the table are based on the total number of passing grades awarded in the bachelor programme during the indicated academic years. This table allows for a simple and more transparent interpretation and conversion of grades from one academic system to another. Keep in mind that the grading table is based on whole grades and is not weighted while the great point average (GPA) is based on whole and half grades which are weighted according to course credits.

Furthermore, a clear indicator of high academic achievement is the (Summa) Cum Laude distinction. Graduating with the designation (Summa) Cum Laude is a clear distinction of the student in question in comparison to his/her peer group. In the FPN's bachelor programme around 10% of the students succeed in graduating Cum Laude and 1% succeed in graduating Summa Cum Laude.

On behalf of the Board of Examiners at FPN,

Dr. Hanneke van Mier
Chair

¹For further information please consult the website of the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) at www.nuffic.nl, and concretely the so-called 'country modules' in the section 'Diploma Recognition'. The country modules provide information about the correspondence between the Dutch education levels and their equivalents abroad. The country modules also include grade conversion formulae and comparative data (<http://www.nuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/country-modules/country-modules>, accessed August 2013).

²Quote from the document "Grading Systems in the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom" of the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC, October 2012), accessible at: <http://www.nuffic.nl/en/files/documents/about-nuffic/publications/gradingsystems.pdf/view> (accessed August 2013).

³See: <http://www.nuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/country-modules/country-modules>

⁴See the following link for examples from grade conversion in various countries: <http://www.nuffic.nl/diplomawaardering> click on diplomawaardering and click on cijfersystemen..

⁵From: <http://www.nuffic.nl/en/files/documents/diploma-recognition/country-modules/country-module-germany.pdf> (accessed August 2013).