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Ad hoc request

Country fiches on skills governance in the Member States

The Netherlands

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1 Imbalances in the labour market

The employment rate in the Netherlands has decreased from 77.2 % to 76.1 % between 2012 and 2014 (Eurostat, 2015) but it is still higher than the EU 2020 target of 75 %. Despite the decrease in employment and a rise in unemployment, employers in some sectors still face difficulties fulfilling vacancies. Most difficulties in fulfilling the labour demand are in medical, pedagogical and care, and service occupations (Cedefop, 2014). This is in line with the increase of employment in the well-being (1.9 %), health (2.3 %) and other services (2.6 %) industry sectors between 2008 and 2012. Cedefop (2014) is predicting that the highest number of job openings between 2013 and 2018 will be in the health industry for medium and high level qualifications. The number of participants in medium level health education has been decreasing every year since 2010 and there is a decrease as well in the number of participants of higher education in health this academic year for the first time since 2002 (CBS, 2015). Based on these numbers it is predicted that there will be fewer potential employees in this sector while the job openings are expected to increase. This may cause a significant imbalance in the labour market. Another growth in job openings is expected in the technical sector (3.3 % for medium educated and 3.5 % for high educated) in the same period. A shortage in information and communication technology employees is foreseen (European Commission, 2015). This could negatively impact the competitiveness of the Netherlands. To address this problem and to fulfil the future demand of the digital economy, the government has introduced a range of programs including the 'Techniekpact' (more information in Dutch: <http://techniekpact.nl/>) and the 'Masterplan Bèta en Techniek' which goal it is to increase the number of students in technological studies to 40 % of the total amount of students. At this moment this percentage is 25.

When looking at the horizontal mismatches (employee is doing work at the correct level of education, yet in another field) it is notable that most mismatches are found at MBO-BOL 1 (ISCED 3) and WO (ISCED 7). Vertical mismatches occur when an employee is working in the correct field of interest, yet is overqualified for the job. A double mismatch involves both a horizontal and a vertical mismatch. The numbers in table 1 are based on the employees who currently have a job. The graduates of MBO 1 and WO are the only graduates where more than 50 % of all graduates are experiencing a mismatch. Thus, it is important to note that despite mismatches on the labour market, people may still find employment that falls lightly outside the scope of one's study. Yet, also unemployment may be caused by mismatches between labour supply and demand. Overall Erken et al. (2015) find that such mismatches have not increased during the crisis and that maximally one seventh of unemployment may be explained by a mismatch between labour demand and supply.

Table 1. Mismatch in the different levels of education in 2013

	No Mismatch	Horizontal Mismatch	Vertical Mismatch	Double Mismatch
MBO-BOL (ISCED 3)	145	25	11	19
MBO-BOL (ISCED 3)	255	15	7	23
MBO-BOL 3 (ISCED 3)	57	11	12	20
MBO-BOL (ISCED 3/4)	465	13	7	15
MBO-BBL (ISCED 3)	131	15	20	34
MBO-BBL (ISCED 3)	257	13	14	17
MBO-BBL 3 (ISCED 3)	60	7	23	10
MBO-BBL (ISCED 3/4)	476	6	11	7
HBO (ISCED60 6)		13	14	13
WO (ISCED45 7)		19	17	19

Source: (ROA, 2014)

2 Production of labour market and skills intelligence

There are several initiatives to forecast labour market demand. The research institute ROA, related to Maastricht University, conducts surveys for instance monitoring school-leavers, their level and type of education and their first steps into the labour market (an example of data is shown in table 1). ROA also makes general labour market prognoses and these also differentiate per economic sector, profession and type and level of education (ROA, 2013; ROA, 2014). Also Dutch PES (UWV) studies labour market trends, informed by data of Statistics Netherlands (e.g. on vacancies, labour force and labour demand) as well as their own data on the professions of people who have flown into Unemployment Benefits. PES has data per economic sector and per region. In addition the Bureau for Policy Analysis (CPB), an institute that also advises the government, at times publishes reports on skills mismatches.

2.1 Forecasting capabilities

CPB (2013) concludes that any forecast is based on loose projections of labour demand and supply, without taking into account the interaction between supply

and demand. Thus, many prognoses should be interpreted as indicators of potential tensions between supply and demand. Yet, short-term predictions are still useful for the reason that these may signal adjustment processes. Thinking in such terms of processes is key, as for example a labour market shortage is not a static state, yet a reason for the market to adjust, for instance by setting higher wages for professions in which there is a shortage, which will lead to a higher inflow of students in a particular study for reasons of labour market attractiveness (CPB, 2013). Yet, companies could also opt for moving production abroad, or for attracting foreign workers.

The Netherlands has a tradition of forecasts per economic sector (CPB, 2013). Short-term forecasts may encompass moreover predictions per education level and type, such as made by research institute ROA. CPB finds these forecasts useful as they supply the market with information, and in the case of ROA the forecasts take into account the interaction between education segments. For instance, if there are less school leavers with a university-level diploma in economics, yet there are more school-leavers who have followed an education in economy at the higher professional education level, then the calculations include that these groups may partially fulfill the same vacancies (CPB, 2013). Moreover, there are sector level organisations, such as employers' organisation that study trends in their specific sector, such as the child, youth and home care sector that publishes facts and figures.

Also PES communicates that predictions do not entail certainty of what is going to happen. It uses models to predict the future, taking into account also the expected economic growth (as established by CPB) as well as expected productivity trends, as the latter also influences the amount of workers needed. Moreover, government policy affects labour demand considerably, which for instance has been noticed in the child care sector where lower child care tax credits for parents has resulted in a decline of employment in the sector (Bekker, 2015). The relevance of forecasts is according to PES that it provides signals to stakeholders when creating proactive labour market policies. It supports answering questions such as where to develop extra programmes to attract personnel or to take into account that in certain professions people may become redundant. Moreover it indicates in which professions extra training and schooling should take place in order for people to be prepared for the future labour market. PES moreover recommends to combine its prognoses with other studies, in particular those that deal with a specific region or economic sector. To this end, PES cooperates with regional labour market professionals. As of April 2012 PES moreover gets regional information from the project Sector information (*project Sectorinformatie*).

As of January 1st 2015 an integrated foundation for collaboration between the VET education sector and business was established (SBB), which was the result of a merger of 17 different knowledge centres. Such centres have improved the collaboration between education and employers at sector level and provided a basis for policy learning between stakeholders. The institute has a role in reforming the national qualification infrastructure (see below) and the creation of a clearly defined set of labour market-oriented career profiles (Bekker et al., 2015).

2.2 Transmission and use of information

All studies containing forecasts are readily available on the Internet. There are also sector level organisations, such as employers' association that use data to

report trends to their members so as to inform them where labour market shortages or surpluses might occur. As such they are a source of information for employers that want to develop future policies for personnel. The more active employers' association also host workshops where views, information and best practices are shared. Some even develop regional level 'transition pools' where employers may exchange personnel so as to develop employment security within the region and economic sector and retain skills for the sector. One example is the transition pool in the health care sector in the south-east of the Netherlands, where employees may also follow training in doing job interviews and where digital e-portfolios make the skill profile of employees visible to the main actors within the sector and region. Such e-portfolio may also be the basis of career development (WZW, 2015). At the regional level, some provinces have data as well on the types of vacancies per municipality, as well as the level of education of job seekers per municipality (see e.g. the province of Gelderland that has a public database on its website: <http://ammgelderland.databank.nl/>). Such data is often combined with economic ambitions and programmes for the near future, such as the province of Gelderland that wishes to develop its innovative clusters in the Food Valley and Health Valley, as well as support the upcoming Energy and environmental protection technology, Industrial activities as well as the Fashion niche (Gelderland, 2011). It moreover wants to support small and medium sized companies. Obviously such ambitions may be translated in the types of employees that are needed to make such businesses into a success. The province is aware of this and facilitates the cooperation between businesses, education institutes, and knowledge centres. It has further developed the regional labour market policy, for instance by actively supporting the Platforms Education / Labour Market (Platforms Onderwijs Arbeidsmarkt), as an evaluation showed that such platforms are vital to improve the cooperation between education, employers, and government. Such regional focus may become much more relevant as from January 2015 onwards large responsibilities for income and reintegration have been decentralised to the municipality level (Bekker and Wilthagen, 2015).

The interviewee of the higher professional education school (ISCED 6) uses labour market information to facilitate the school-to-work-transitions.¹ It uses among others data from ROA to know which types of competencies are in demand at the labour market and then adjusts the curriculum if certain studies. For instance, ROA monitors how fast school-leavers are able to find a job and if certain types of education score low on this indicator, the curriculum is adjusted. The school also uses this information to inform (potential) students on the labour market perspectives of some studies. Yet, students themselves decide which type of education to follow. Moreover, formal education gives students a ticket to enter the labour market, but it does not mean that this education suffices for an entire career. Lifelong learning is needed as well.

Thus, whereas national level data contains valuable information, the regional economies seem to become more and more a key player in developing skills, matching skills and demand, as well as developing future visions on the regional economy. PES has realized this and has started to provide thorough regional analyses. Also some regional employers' association have started to develop

¹ The interviews have been carried out within the scope of a project to find ways to create a youth-unemployment-free zone. The authors thank Ruud Muffels, Wendy Wesseling, Emmy de Kleijnen and Anne Kampshoff for conducting the interviews.

more coherent views on keeping and developing skills within the region and sector. Because the Netherlands has started to decentralise many responsibilities in the income support, reintegration support and care to the municipality level, the regional level will become a major unit in which labour market intelligence can support the development of the regional economy.

3 Steering the education and training provision

3.1 Policies and programmes

The Dutch education system resembles the 'general skills' regime (Hall & Soskice 2001) in which students acquire not only professional knowledge needed to perform tasks in a certain profession, yet also acquire general knowledge. It makes the level of generic skills of Dutch youngsters rather high compared to OECD countries. The Dutch education system is a mixed system of general education at primary (pupils aged 5-12 years ISCED 1 level), secondary (HAVO/VWO pupils aged 12-18 years ISCED 3) and tertiary level (University, students aged 19-22 years ISCED 7) and vocational education and training at secondary (MBO, pupils aged 12-16 years) and tertiary level (HBO, students aged 17-20 years ISCED 6) (Bekker et al., 2015). The vocational training system in the Netherlands at the secondary vocational level (MBO ISCED 3 and 4) takes up to four years, depending on the level of training. After completion of this secondary vocational training, people may start to work or continue to a higher form of education (tertiary education). Currently, over 600 vocational education programmes courses are provided, yet plans are to decrease their number considerably (Bekker et al., 2015). Each MBO course (ISCED 3 and 4) has two main learning routes: school-based (BOL, trainee routes) and work-based routes (BBL, apprenticeship routes), both with a significant different focus on school-based and working-based learning. In the trainee routes pupils mainly learn at school, while participating for one or two days a week in different workplaces as part of the vocational training. In the apprenticeship routes pupils are employed in professional organizations for at least 60 % of their time (3 days a week or more) (Bekker et al., 2015). These routes thus offer different degrees of 'exposure' to working and learning in practice and offer employers to co-shape the skills and competences of pupils. The school-based route is gradually being replaced by a combined school-based and workplace-based learning route, for the reason that employment perspectives for the apprenticeship route are much better than for the trainee routes (see: Schaap, Baartman, & de Bruijn, 2012:100).² This means that education institutes see and acknowledge the importance of having part of the skill development taking place in real workplaces, both to make sure that pupils learn the skills which are in demand, and in the realisation that such skills and the network among employers will make it easier for their pupils to find a job.

Whereas the majority of Dutch university programmes do not offer internships on a structural basis, the ISCED 6 level HE often includes obligatory internships lasting of about 6 months (Eurydice, 2005b).³ A discussion related to the obligatory apprenticeships in ISCED 3 and 4 education levels is that there is a shortage of traineeships, internships and apprenticeships offered by employers.

² See overview of apprenticeship and traineeship schemes in the Netherlands launched until 2013 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=11348&langId=en> , p.98

³ See also http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/publications/misc/isced_97/luij08_the_educational_system_of_the_netherlands.pdf

As it is a mandatory part of education, pupils not only miss out on skill development but also lack education opportunities. It risks them becoming a NEET (not in employment, education or training) (Bekker et al., 2015). Due to the crisis especially the number of available work/learning places for the BBL apprenticeship route has decreased considerably, because companies either need to reduce costs (also wage costs) or are facing redundancies within their companies (Bekker and Verschoor, 2014). Surprisingly, of all types of BBL education, technology-related studies face the sharpest decrease of working/learning trajectories, whereas this sector would benefit from having more labour supply (Platform Bèatechniek, 2013). At the same time skill requirements for BBL inflow (eg language skills and mathematics) may pose an obstacle for inflow as well (SBB, 2014, p.2-3). Initiatives to increase the inflow into BBL are more active acquisition of internships and learning/working places and the use of funds the sector level job plans offer (see below). As of school year 2015-2016, experiments are opened for a combined (BOL/BBL) learning pathway, enabling more flexibility in learning/working trajectories (Bekker and Verschoor, 2014). Such an experiment may last maximally six years and is likely not to have any budgetary consequences.

In 2004 the "Platform Beta Techniek" was established and another initiative to develop more skills in technology is the Master Plan Beta and Technology (Masterplan Bèta en Techniek) which is part of the top sector approach. These are created to increase the number of students in the technology-related studies and are co-funded by the Dutch government. Moreover as of May 2013 there is a Technology Pact (*Techniekpact*) in order to speed up the growth of the number of students in technology-related studies. Another aim is to keep employees with a technology background within the sector, also if they are facing redundancy or have already become unemployed. This retention may happen via work-to-work transitions. The Technology Pact was signed by education institutes, employers, trade unions, top sectors, regions and national level government. Although the Pact entails national level initiatives as well, its main implementation level is the region. A first monitor shows some positive results in the inflow of students in technology studies, yet more efforts need to be made as there are still projections of skill shortages in certain professions ([Techniekpact, 2015](#)).

Emphasis on skill development may also be found in the sector level job plans, for which the government allocated 600 million Euros via co-financing systems (Rijksoverheid, 2013). This plan focuses on youth employment, maintaining skilled workers and supporting people who are threatened to be fired in finding new work. The program was planned for 2014/2015 but the minister already managed to fund some projects in 2013. A recent example of a project partially funded by the minister is the plan '*werk maken van talent*', which wants to support talented young people in Amsterdam. It ultimately aims at finding employment for them in companies that are in need of personnel, such as the ICT-sector. This plan has received 7 million Euros to increase youth employment in and around Amsterdam. The other 7 million is financed by the employers, unions and educational institutes in the region. Other programs are developed

within the sectors transport⁴, food industry⁵ and police and defence⁶. A first overview of the first 24 sector plans shows that the plans mainly aim at retaining personnel, providing training and schooling including schooling employees for work in other economic sectors (Bekker and Verschoor, 2014). It is also used to create internships. These 24 sector plans create 17 500 extra working/learning trajectories. Another report, looking at 36 sector plans, displays a focus on maintaining jobs and heightening the quality of employees by training them to a higher level (nu.nl, 2014), thus contributing to a better match between labour supply and demand and preventing job losses (Dekker, 2014).

Apart from these policies that address specific skill development, there have also been general and structural policies to reduce early school-leaving in the Netherlands. Early school-leaving was much higher than the Europe 2020 goals, yet has now been decreasing below this target, partly related to successful government intervention (from 13.5 % in 2005 to 8.6 % in 2014 - Eurostat data). In these interventions the regional and local level have again played a major role. They took integrated and concerted approaches, involving schools social work institutions and local communities. In 2013, efforts were continued, allocating 114 million Euro a year to bring down further the number of dropouts from 36000 to 25000 per year (Bekker et al., 2015). Reducing early school-leaving is relevant as the current labour market requires people who have a diploma at a sufficient level (Starter qualification with at least ISCED 3 or 4), and having such a diploma improves the chance of being employed considerably. As such longer-running programmes such as the 'School Ex' initiative successfully stimulate to prolong education and to choose for studies with good employment prospects.

Although there are already a lot of policies in place, there is a common believe in academia, government and policy circles, that the distance between the education system and the labour market has grown too large and that there is a need for more intensive collaboration to improve the skills match (Bekker et al., 2015). Interviews show such mismatches, although not everyone believes that this is a key issue. PES in region south Netherlands seeks cooperation with different labour market actors, for instance to decrease youth unemployment. Such cooperation is vital to reach solutions and create chances. Part of the solution is to make employers more aware of the fact that there will always be some gap between the knowledge and capabilities of young people and the skills they demand. Rather employers should acknowledge that it sometimes takes some time for young people to adjust to the working rhythm. This is partly a normal process, yet PES gives support and provides after care, once a young person has found a job. This is especially the case when young disabled has found a job and here PES may provide job coaches. For other UB recipients such after care may not be provided, and here the task of PES remains mediating between a vacancy and a person.

The interviewee of the higher professional education school (ISCED 6) says that the school is very active in attempting to narrow down the gap between education and labour market and to empower students. Yet, a good labour market entry and career is not solely determined by the type of education, but also by the

⁴ <http://nos.nl/artikel/622117-werkgelegenheidsplan-in-transport.html>

⁵ <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/nieuws/2014/12/15/minister-asscher-in-totaal-67-miljoen-euro-voor-werkgelegenheidsplan-in-de-levensmiddelenindustrie.html>

⁶ <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/nieuws/2015/01/14/minister-asscher-ruim-40-miljoen-voor-werkgelegenheidsplan-politie-en-defensie.html>

resilience and flexibility people on the labour market have. An interviewee from the intermediate level professional education (ISCED 3 and 4) describes the policies of his school to stay in touch with the labour market, yet also to keep the option of flowing into higher professional education as optimal as possible. For one, the school only offers education in areas where professions exist on the Dutch labour market. New education tracks are jointly developed with government and employers. Once every six years a qualification dossier is made in which new curricula and new education strands are included. Core education strands are set, yet there is also room to develop education types that fit regional needs, and this room is further filled in in joint cooperation with businesses. This also results in businesses giving guest lectures and setting-up class rooms for education-simulating-practice (e.g. learning to work with equipment/machines). Yet, there is also room to improve further.

The examples above demonstrate that Dutch education and training policies are constantly changing. As the government largely finances education, political decisions deeply effect education (see Bronneman 2011; Bekker et al., 2015). In a large parliamentary inquiry in 2008, deep concerns were raised about the quality of education. Compared to other knowledge economies, Dutch investments in higher education are relatively low, while in the last five years hardly any improvement in the quality were visible (Bekker et al., 2015). New balances need to be found between the accessibility of education, quality and efficiency.

3.2 Financial incentives

The national government is the main financier of the Dutch formal education system. Despite country-specific recommendations between 2011 and 2014 to spare education from budget cuts, the Commission (2014) has witnessed a decline in investment in education, as expenditure on education is forecasted to fall from 19 % of total government expenditure in 2005 to 16.6 % in 2017 whereas the public expenditure on education in terms of percentage of GDP (which has been stable at 5 %) is expected to decline.

At times there are some schemes for skill development of employees as well, such as the sector level job plans via which the government co-finances 600 million EUR also (yet not solely) on skill development (Rijksoverheid, 2013). Also ESF is at times a source of funding for developing skills. However, a skill development programme to upgrade the skills and knowledge of low skilled workers was terminated in the new ESF rounds. In the former ESF time frame a lot of companies made use of ESF to provide small courses to their low skilled workers. This seemed to be a successful scheme in terms of the number of participants, yet, it entailed small courses and much less a longer-lasting education trajectory for instance to obtain the level of starter qualification (ISCED3 or 4). An ESF-strand that has been prolonged is the one addressing interventions for pupils with learning deficiencies, aiming at assisting school-leavers from special education into a job or into further education. This is very useful as well in terms of increasing the probability of vulnerable youth to flow into the labour market.

4 Career and vocational guidance

Career guidance seems necessary to address as currently there are quite some students who choose to switch to alternative types of education because they regret their first choice. Therefore, the national policy is to prevent students from

picking a study that does match their talents. Students now have to subscribe for a study earlier in the year, and also have the right to ask for advice, including following test classes and having a meeting with students or lecturers (Bekker et al., 2015). Below there are some examples of how school try to match (potential) students with the correct study, but also wider career oriented programmes.

The interviewee from the higher professional education institute (ISCED 6) gives good examples of how career guidance may be organised in schools. Already at the stage of inflow into education the school offers a check for study choice which entails measuring student's personality, motivation and interests and translating this into a probability of having a successful education trajectory for the particular study. It for instance checks whether or not the student's talents matches the demands of the study. If the match is not optimal students are still allowed to flow in, yet, the test does help to detect less well developed talents or competencies. Moreover, every three months the directors of the different education strands meet to discuss the outcomes of surveys which are held among students, based on which curricula might be adapted. The school also keeps track of whether or not students are present in class so as to know whether or not failing certain subjects could be related to attendance or not.

Interviewees of a University (ISCED 7) give the student career centre as an example. This career centre develops an orientation at the labour market, facilitates relevant side-jobs for students (which for instance makes visible the talents and competencies of students), mediates in specific assignments in practice, arranges internships, and supports entrepreneurship. It supports students in their study choices and choices for certain career and individual coaching and career advice may be offered until a year after graduation, thus having an after care function as well. The career centre also tries to prevent students from dropping out of education by having regular meetings with students in which ambition and pathways to their aims are mapped out, as well as the challenges they have. Yet, in the area of drop-out prevention improvements may be made, also in terms of benefitting more from the information the University has about drop-outs.

The school at ISCED 3 and 4 level uses information brochures to inform students about the labour market and apprenticeships prospects of the study they are about to choose, as well as the evaluation of the study by the education inspectorate, the inflow probability into higher education and the average salary of a school-leaver. Also this school finds the moment before inflow into education relevant and organises open days and short internships in order for potential students to make the right choice. The school also invests in arranging high quality internships or apprenticeships and accepts not more students then there are internships. Moreover the school tries to match labour market needs to also train pupils in work attitude, applying for jobs and it makes such training part of the curriculum. A best practice is the scheme *MBO solliciteert* (MBO applies for jobs) which especially has helped students in technology education, as having direct contact with employers increases the chances of job inflow.

5 Stakeholders in steering education and training provisions

The government is an important stakeholder in the Netherlands in steering education and training provisions. It supplies its ministries and organisations with funding to tackle the current problems in the labour market. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science are the most relevant ministries. They are responsible for the match between

education and work. In order to do so they give funding to organisations like Dutch PES (UWV) and education institutes. These organisations will address different causes of the imbalances in the labour market. Yet, throughout the article the initiatives and cooperation at regional level have proven to be of high value to actually match labour supply and demand and to forecast certain developments in skill profiles that are in demand or will become less needed.

The initiatives at regional level show the key relevance of a good cooperation between education and labour market stakeholders, such as school, employers, PES and municipalities. Generally, such cooperation gets wide support. Yet, there are naturally also some discrepancies in insight of the various stakeholders with respect to the requirements of the labour market. For instance the interviewee of the higher professional education institute (ISCED 6) finds that students benefit from acquiring general skills instead of sector or profession specific ones. This is due to the fact that labour markets are quite volatile and general skills enable workers to flow into new jobs more easily. It makes them thus more capable to cope with labour market changes. Employers no longer offer jobs for life, making that workers with too specific skills or training are in a way vulnerable. The interviewee says that some employers agree with this viewpoint, others disagree. Moreover the wide range of education types and the wide range of students and their preferences and talents makes that it is not always easy to predict what fits the labour market best. In a way this means that there will always be some gap between demand and supply. Yet, transparency could improve the quality of education, enabling students to make informed choices. This has worked well in the technology sector according to the interviewee.

Also the interviewee from ISCED 3/4 level education finds that there will never be a perfect fit between labour demand and supply, yet, if employers phrase their demands better improvements could be made. The interviewee sees that the willingness of employers to cooperate has been improving. Other improvements could be to re-develop part-time education strands for those who already have a job. Moreover, partial certificates should become an option, making it unnecessary to do an entire education trajectory, yet to school and train in certain aspects of a profession. Another improvement would be to have more intensive guidance and education in the first year of education, as here the highest drop-out rates emerge. The school also values cooperation with different stakeholders and cooperates with employers, municipalities and PES. This cooperation especially addresses vulnerable young people. There is a platform education, labour market and economy in which the school deliberates with employers about the types of education it offers. There are also regular meetings with other schools in the region about the portfolio of education types, for instance dealing with the question whether a certain study should be offered by a single or multiple education institutes. Moreover the foundation SBB assists with attracting internships. If there are not enough internships available the school itself attempts to arrange a number of internships itself.

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