

## **General Introduction Frisian in education:**

Overview and developments since 2012

For the On-the-Spot-Visit (2 March 2016) of the Committee of Experts to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS 148)

### **1 Actual position of Frisian in education**

Structural but (in all respects) marginal; main concerns are the teaching time allocated on the schedule in all grades. Since there is no national curriculum officially in terms of minimum time tables, the position of Frisian in the curriculum is the result of school policies. The first recommendation in the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle report of the committee of Experts (2012) par. 11 is still actual: “strengthen the teaching of and in Frisian at all levels of education”.

Major developments:

(1) Devolvement of power from central government to provincial administration with regard to the core goals or attainment targets. As a result of this devolvement, the provincial administration has made efforts to monitor in greater detail the implementation of educational measures, as well as the spending of relevant funds for the teaching of Frisian, the so called Material Preservation of Frisian (MIF).

(2) The further development of the model of trilingual schooling in terms of continuity throughout primary school and in connection to secondary education.

### **2 Pre-primary provisions**

The number of bilingual and Frisian medium pre-school provisions is increasing steadily. Currently more than 180-day care centres, and playgroups (out of > 300 provisions in Fryslân) are Frisian medium or bilingual ones. They cater between 30%-50% of all children under 4 years in Fryslân. In a separate document the SFBO will inform the ComEx in greater detail on this increase as well as the progress which has been made with regard to the further development of materials.

Two major developments should be mentioned:

(1) The “Heit & Mem Panel”, a social platform for young parents, aiming at information on bilingual upbringing and discussing dilemma’s and solutions.

(2) The introduction of optional courses for Frisian in Vocational

Training in this school year 2015-2016. The course lasts 3 hours per week during one semester. The course is aimed at education assistants, and health care workers.

Although this undertaking is still partly fulfilled, as stated in article 99 of the ComEx report in the 4<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Cycle, some progress is made with regard to vocational training, in particular with regard to the training of pre-school teachers and nurses, as well as classroom assistants in primary education.

Therefore, as a result of this monitoring and consultation cycle, **the Netherlands can be encouraged to sign the relevant undertaking in article 8, sub-paragraph d on vocational training, level iii or iv.**

- **3 Primary school**

In addition to the extremely short paragraph on primary education, presented by the central government of the Netherlands in the fifth periodical report (submitted 16 November 2015), and in addition to paragraph 103 in the ComEx report (2012) a number of special developments should be mentioned:

(1) According to the report on the Material Preservation of Frisian (MIF) drafted by ms. Nienke-Jet de Vries (2015), almost all primary schools in Friesland (90%) offer Frisian as a subject, 40% offer Frisian as a subject for one lesson (30 à 45 minutes) per week, whereas half of all primary schools use the Frisian language as a medium of instruction during half a day, or a full day per week, alongside with the teaching of the language as a subject. However, there is a huge variety of teaching time, and a decrease of teaching time. Schools tend to limit the lessons to the core goals of merely understanding the language, making use of the school television programs and additional reading materials. Schools that limit themselves to that model, however, cannot be considered aiming at the core goals of reading and writing at a sufficient and comparable level with Dutch and English. In other words, they do not meet the official attainment targets for Frisian. Although we call these programs “bilingual”, in international terminology (as defined by scholars as Colin Baker and Ofelia Garcia), those programs could better be evaluated as “cultural heritage” education.

**Therefore, one must conclude that this undertaking in article 8, sub-paragraph b, level ii, is still not fulfilled.**

However, the provincial administration takes its responsibility very seriously. Recently, the province of Fryslân has initiated the

“Taalplan Frysk”. As a replacement of the traditional role of the province of the formal “granting exemption of the obligation to teach Frisian” as stated in article 9 of the Law on Education, this language planning program is intended to stimulate the schools to introduce tailor made approaches for the teaching and learning of Frisian, as well as to develop a strategy at school level aiming at the setting of higher ambitions in terms of Frisian as a subject. To that end, the province will grant schools “partial exemption of the obligation”, and provide the schools with funding from the Material Preservation Fund (MIF) as well as stimulate the schools to develop further ambitions towards the achievement of the attainment targets. In the years to come, we will monitor carefully how this “Taalplan Frysk” works in practice, and to which extent the expected results will be achieved.

(2) Fortunately, the number of schools that apply the model of trilingual primary education is increasing during the last years. Today, more than 70 primary schools (out of 445) participate in the Network of Trilingual Schools.

The concept is very much based on the principles of one language – one teacher, the split of time and the use of Frisian respectively English for dedicated subjects.

During the initial phase of certification in three steps: basic, plus and star; schools can enjoy the assistance of a native speaker of English as a substitute teacher or class room assistant, as well as a native speaker of Frisian as seems fit. This process is being guided and monitored by the School Guidance Institute Cedin ([www.cedin.nl](http://www.cedin.nl)).

Recently, the concept of Trilingual Education is changing:

(1) The introduction of English from grade 1 onwards. The national government welcomes the introduction of English as a second language from the early years on, and stimulates this development by means of a national project of 20 schools nationwide; one of those schools is the trilingual primary school De Pôlle in Marsum.

(2) The change of the strict split of time and themes regarding the use of the languages towards a more integrated use of the languages, called “translanguaging”, a concept and terminology introduced by Welsh educationalists. This concept will be further developed in close co-operation with the schools and teacher training within the framework of the “Taalplan Frysk”.

The schools of the Network of Trilingual Schools are developing

their own educational and language policy which includes the training of teachers in both Frisian and English, the continuity of teaching and learning of all domains and levels, the use of digital teaching materials, active internationalization “at home” by means of the closed social platform “MySchoolsNetwork”, and the application of digital monitoring and testing tools for language command (vocabulary, spelling) and reading comprehension. All those tests and tools are linked to the levels of both the national scales for language command and the international scale of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

During the school years 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 a project is carried out on the development of evaluation and testing of teaching results for the higher grades of primary as well as the lower grades of secondary schools: “Grip” ([www.grip.frl](http://www.grip.frl)). This is a common project of the Afûk, Cedin and NHL university. On the one hand evaluation and testing tools are developed that are linked to the teaching methods in use: “School 8”, and “Searje 36”. On the other hand, evaluation instruments and tests are developed independent from teaching materials, for language command (vocabulary, grammar, translation), and reading comprehension. All these new instruments and tools are being developed in close cooperation with the schools and individual teachers involved. The response is great, and the success is guaranteed. The challenge, of course, is the sustainability of the project results after the expiration date of the project. All these efforts are made, and we are still working on the goals, in reply to the complaints by the national inspectorate in its report ‘Tussen wens en werkelijkheid’ / ‘Desire versus Reality’ (2010).

**One might conclude that big efforts are made to improve the quality of teaching to comparable levels of national and international standards.**

From the side of the national government, however, there is a serious threat on the continuity of the trilingual schools as a provision due to the scaling up process. Quite a lot of the actual trilingual schools are small schools in rural areas. Recently, the national education council has given the advice to raise the minimum number of pupils in primary school (8 classes, pupils aged 4-12) from 23 to 100.

The national education council proposes to implement this minimum number as from 2019. Without special measures in

favour of trilingual schools, the number of schools working in that model will decrease dramatically.

#### **4 Secondary education**

Frisian as an obligatory subject was introduced in secondary education as from 1993. Attainment targets and exam programs were set. However, at most secondary schools, Frisian as a subject is taught only one hour per week in the first grade.

**The conclusion is, that the undertaking in article 8, subparagraph c, level iii is still not fulfilled.**

The undertaking of Frisian as an integral part of secondary education will only become fulfilled when all schools will be obliged to teach Frisian in all grades of lower secondary education, that is to say all classes before the ultimate two classes when students choose their own exam package.

Frisian as an optional exam subject in secondary education (VMBO, HAVO, VWO) was introduced in 1971. Annually, slightly more than 50 students take Frisian as an optional exam subject. During the last 45 years, schools remained reluctant to offer Frisian as an optional exam subject. They hesitated to invest in the continuity of teaching in the grades 2 – 4, and they require a minimum number of students to take part in the exam classes.

The Material Preservation of Frisian (MIF) is applied rather well at those schools that have Frisian included in the curriculum. The funds are available not only for teaching materials, but also for the subvention of lessons from grade 2 onwards.

However, there is no minimum time table, and by consequence, the financial resources from the national ministry of education are not sufficient to provide tailor made lessons OF Frisian throughout all grades of lower secondary education.

With regard to the schooling IN Frisian some slightly more positive remarks can be made. Following the (relative) success of trilingual primary education, a number of secondary schools has taken the initiative to develop a concept of “tri- or multilingual secondary education” with both Frisian and English as a subject and medium of instruction alongside Dutch as the national language. The state report in the fifth monitoring cycle (2015) foresees an increase “to at least ten locations [that] offer a multilingual stream in secondary education”.

To date, however, only 5 schools are taking part in this project officially. It seems rather difficult to apply such a perfectly balanced model in everyday school practice, as is shown in the relevant report by the EP-Nuffic (2014).

Schools stay connected in a network of multilingual schools. This is successful only at the level of individual teachers of Frisian, but not yet at the level of school management or school board.

In practice, English is being applied for the “harder” subjects such as science and economics alongside with music, whereas Frisian is applied for history and physical training.

To this end, a book for the teaching of history called “MEMO” has been translated into Frisian, all three volumes for three grades of lower secondary education. Also a series of special books and other media related to the Canon of the history of Fryslân is available in Frisian and in Dutch.

And, in primary school, often history is being taught in Frisian as well. Thus there is a certain continuity from primary to secondary education in the teaching of history through the medium of Frisian.

In summary:

- (1) Secondary schools tend to limit themselves to the absolute legally requested minimum of one hour per week only in the first grade. Fortunately, the provincial government of Fryslân has introduced a measure to subvent schools financially for lessons of Frisian given in grade 2 and following of secondary education.
- (2) With regard to Frisian as an optional exam subject in secondary education, the number of students taking this exam as a normal exam subject, or as an additional exam subject, is rather low, but remains stable just above 50 students per year.

New perspectives

Last year, before the elections of the provincial assembly in March, 2015, teacher students and active teachers of Frisian alike, have proposed to the political parties to make available Frisian as an optional exam subject at all secondary schools in Fryslân. Such a measure is not very difficult to implement, provided the availability of enough qualified teachers.

More important however is a language policy at school level.

Although schools can benefit from new teaching methods with assistance of video-conferencing and digital tools such as ‘Searje 36’ and ‘Myschoolsnetwork’, the basic requirement for the

continuity of Frisian as a regular subject and exam subject, is the presence of this subject on the schedule of all grades.

## 5 Teacher Training

Article 8, sub-paragraph h

The Committee of Experts has expressed its concern regarding the limited number of teachers of Frisian with any formal qualification in its report (2012) in paragraph 117-118. The Netherlands' state report (2015) does not mention teacher training at all.

To date, however, all "Pabo"-students of both primary teacher training institutes (NHL & Stenden) take part in the lessons in the first cycle of two years. However, not all of them pass the exams for the official qualification "foech Frysk":

At NHL: 18 (2012) – 12 (2013) – 5 (2014) - 7 (2015).

At Stenden: 18 (2012) – 13 (2013) – 24 (2014) - 10 (2015).

Furthermore, on top of that, around 20 students take the minor "Multilingual Education in International Perspective" (30 ECTS). Hopefully this number will increase due to the merging process of both Pabo's which is foreseen to be finalized by September 2018.

In addition, the NHL university of applied sciences, offers a course for primary school teachers on "Language Policy at School".

To date around 100 teachers have participated in that course.

So far, the number of teacher students for secondary Education remains very low. This year only 12 bachelor students for the second grade qualification, and 2 master students for the first grade qualification have enrolled.

The lack of sufficiently qualified teachers for Frisian is mentioned in the Inspectorate Report 'Tussen wens en werkelijkheid' (= 'Desire versus Reality') (2010).

Currently, due to the marginal position of Frisian at secondary education, at most schools the number of Frisian lessons to be provided for is too limited to offer a full time job as teacher of Frisian. Often, teachers of Dutch, history, geography and so on, are appointed teacher of Frisian for a limited number of hours per week – however, without an adequate qualification.

Although the legislation Wet Bio (Beroepsregister in het Onderwijs / Law on the Registration of Professionals in Education) urges the schools to appoint qualified teachers only, it is (and remains) hard

to convince those teachers to take an additional part-time study of 240 ECTS during four years.

By consequence, at a number of schools, the vacancy of Frisian lessons circulates every two years among under-qualified teachers.

Recently, the NHL university has started a reorganization of the curriculum of teacher training for secondary schools, aiming at a more flexible and tailor made approach. It is foreseen to re-arrange the study of Dutch and Frisian towards a double qualification for both languages for the students who so wish: a bachelor study of 4 years (240 ECTS). This concept will be developed in the general restructuring of language teacher training in the project “Life Long learning” (2016-2020) initiated and funded by the Netherlands’ ministry for Education.

## **6 Inspectorate**

Article 8, sub-paragraph i

There is no special attention given to this undertaking in the Netherlands’ state report (2015), nor in the report of the Council of Europe (2012).

It should be noted, however, that there is no special inspectorate for Frisian (as is the case in some other countries). But the national inspectorate is giving attention to the content and quality of lessons OF and IN Frisian during the schools visits once in four years. The last official report by the Inspectorate dates back to 2010.

Taking into account the developments described in this ‘General Introduction Frisian in Education’ one might expect that the Inspectorate will make a new report within a few years. So far, the inspectorate officially is reporting back to the national government only. Fortunately, as a consequence of the devolvement of power regarding education in Frisian, the national inspectorate will report also officially to the provincial administration.

Literature:

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