

Teacher mobility in the Caribbean Netherlands: background, stay and departure

Summary

Findings

Many schools in the Caribbean Netherlands see a high turnover of their teaching staff. A high turnover means that each year the teams are composed of a large number of new teachers, which is not desirable for the current teachers, management and students. This situation mainly occurs in schools with many European Dutch teachers. School managers and HR recruiters report that it is often difficult to fill the vacancies satisfactorily. All too often, the number of suitable candidates is very limited, which restricts the school's choice. As a consequence of the high turnover and difficult recruitment, the continuity of education is no longer guaranteed and the quality of education may be at stake.

A considerable proportion of the present teaching staff will be lost in the Caribbean Netherlands over the coming years. More than half of the respondents who could assess their situation in the (near) future expected to stay in their present jobs for no more than five years. Three tenths (29%) even expected to stay in their present job for less than two years. The latter expected short-term turnover corresponds quite well with the historically calculated mean outflow of teaching staff of almost 15% per year. (Cörvers, Claessen & Kluijfhout, 2015).

The primary push factors to leave teaching and consequently often leave the Caribbean Netherlands are work-related, such as high pressure of work, insufficient salaries and inadequate options for professionalization. However, these work-related reasons are mentioned less often on Sint Eustatius and Saba (61%) than on Bonaire (76%). The push factors reported on Sint Eustatius and Saba are more often related to the living conditions and social network. This can be explained by the relatively small scale of Sint Eustatius and Saba compared with Bonaire. Teachers on Sint Eustatius and Saba also often mention the lack of recreational options, insufficient medical facilities, having grown tired of the island, very close social control and the fact that their partner cannot find a job.

The staff formation in the educational sector in the Caribbean Netherlands is varied. Besides the Caribbean Dutch teachers, a vast majority of the teaching staff are immigrants, often with a European Dutch origin. Caribbean Dutch teachers are often returning migrants (remigrants): they have returned to their island after completing a teacher-training course outside of the Caribbean Netherlands.¹ There are three important differences between immigrants and Caribbean Dutch remigrants as to how they experience working in education in the Caribbean Netherlands.

1. Since there is no structural teacher-training course in the Caribbean Netherlands, a considerable proportion of Caribbean Dutch teachers lived elsewhere for some time, see Chapter 3.

First of all, the immigrant teachers have a greater need for information during the application procedure and are on average less content with their job than Caribbean Dutch teachers. The circumstances on the islands – which may differ greatly from what the immigrants are used to – seem to play an important role here. Immigrants, for example, often need to accustom to the socio-cultural situation on the island (i.e. dealing with local people and local habits) and the pedagogical and didactic climate in the schools (i.e. teaching methods and contact with students). It should be noted that many immigrants also indicated they would have liked to receive more information before they started their jobs.

Secondly, the reasons why immigrant and Caribbean Dutch teachers remain in their jobs vary considerably. For Caribbean Dutch teachers the main pull factor is more often work-related (84% of the respondents) than for immigrant teachers (60%). The first group lists the good relationship with the students, challenging work and permanent contracts as reasons to stay. Immigrant teachers, however, often stay because they like the life on the island. This is not surprising, because this is often the reason why they came to the island in the first place.

Thirdly, there is a difference between the expectations of immigrant and Caribbean Dutch teachers with respect to working in education in the Caribbean Netherlands. As many as 75% of European Dutch teachers expect to leave their present jobs within five years and one in four even expects to have left within two years. The reason to leave is often that they have found a job outside the Caribbean Netherlands. By contrast, Caribbean Dutch teachers expect to stay in their current jobs for much longer: only well over 25% expect to stay for no more than five years and more than six in ten (62%) expects to stay for more than ten years or until retirement.

Recommendations

Islands such as the Caribbean Netherlands are known in literature as remote areas, which accounts for the fact that it is more difficult to recruit qualified, highly-educated staff (De Hoon and Cörvers, 2016). This is the main reason why managers of educational institutes in the Caribbean Netherlands have difficulties finding good candidates to fill the vacancies at their schools. It is essential to push back the high teacher mobility in the Caribbean Netherlands in order to reduce the costs for recruitment and selection and – more importantly – to guarantee the continuity and quality of education. The recommendations provided below may contribute to achieve this. However, because of the geographical location, the Caribbean Netherlands will always be confronted with relatively high migration dynamics and difficulties recruiting teaching staff. This implies that the costs to achieve and maintain a stable and high-quality teaching population will always be higher than in the European Netherlands.

The recommendations can be grouped into three clusters: a) improvements in preparation and information, b) employee selection on motivation, and c) more attractive working conditions and terms of employment, including better professional supervision. The latter cluster can be subdivided into recommendations that should be dealt with at a school level and those that should be implemented at a district or state level. The recommendations are based on the following findings. First of all, it was found that European Dutch teachers, and also - to a lesser extent – teachers from outside the European and Caribbean Netherlands, rate the information

they received about the working conditions as insufficient. Secondly, the life on the island, the adventure and the climate are the main reasons for many European Dutch teachers to apply for a job in the Caribbean Netherlands. Consequently, professional ambitions may receive too little attention during the recruitment, selection and supervision of new teachers. Thirdly, the work pressure is experienced as high in the Caribbean Netherlands. To prevent teachers from leaving, measures should be taken to increase teacher professionalization, including more challenges and more options for professional development, formal and informal training, as well as to improve personnel policies.

Preparation and information

- ❖ Recommendation 1: Make sure fair and clear information about living and working on the island is provided at an early stage.
- ❖ Recommendation 2: Try to increase the pool of candidates with experience in the Caribbean Netherlands by offering regular internships and work placements for interns, teacher assistants, teachers in training of other islands and other countries.
- ❖ Recommendation 3: Try to collaborate as much as possible with other schools and authorities with respect to information about recruitment and selection of candidates.

Selection on motivation

- ❖ Recommendation 4: Pay special attention when recruiting new personnel to their willingness and motivation to commit to the island.

Working conditions and HRM policy at school level

- ❖ Recommendation 5: Communicate the career options of each teacher clearly and timely as well as the requirements to obtain a permanent contract.
- ❖ Recommendation 6: Be alert to personnel that have problems because of the high pressure of work.
- ❖ Recommendation 7: Invest in good educational facilities at school.
- ❖ Recommendation 8: Facilitate professional development.

Working conditions and HRM policy at district or state-level

- ❖ Recommendation 9: Offer more transfer options and career perspectives for teachers within and between educational institutes in the Caribbean Netherlands.
- ❖ Recommendation 10: Look for options to offer compensation for the high living costs.
- ❖ Recommendation 11: Create a structural teacher-training course on Bonaire and/or options for distant learning.