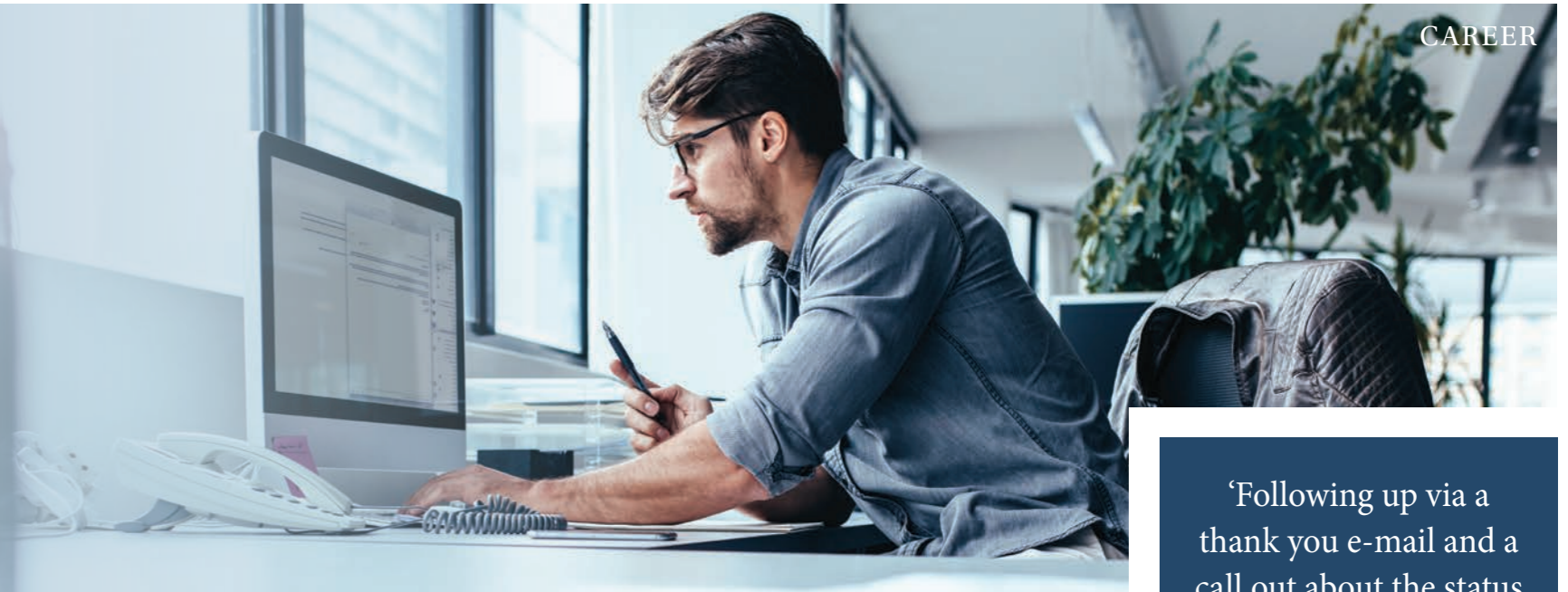


Job hunting in the Netherlands

There are currently abundant job opportunities in the Netherlands but, as with every country around the globe, there are some cultural norms that you have to take into account in order for your job search to be successful.



‘Following up via a thank you e-mail and a call out about the status of your application shows your genuine interest in the position’

By **Sevi Christoforou & Nannette Ripmeester**

Navigating the nuances might seem complicated at first but becoming aware of the cultural differences can help you better understand the job search process in the Netherlands.

Starting Your Job Search

When it comes to applying for a job in the Netherlands there is no such thing as an ideal time. There is good timing, of course, but the sooner you begin your job search the better. Don't wait until you find accommodation, until your previous contract expires or until after you receive your university diploma. Start preparing for your application early on, so you have everything ready before your job search begins and in case an opportunity comes up. Also, spread the word about your upcoming job search as early as possible. Looking for a job should be an active process in the Netherlands! Stay ahead of the game and avoid the risk of missing out on a great opportunity.

Searching for Job Vacancies

The process of looking for job vacancies varies from country to country. In some countries, it is common use to turn to family and friends that could connect you to a prospective employer or even assign you a specific job. While networking and personal contacts are also important in the Netherlands, a job search is predominately an individual responsibility. Searching for job vacancies in the Netherlands might seem easy, but especially for non-Dutch speakers it

could turn out to be more complicated than anticipated; for instance, when you're attracted by the job specifications in English, but find out that mastering the Dutch language is one of the requirements. Having a job-search strategy can really increase your chances of finding a job. Start off by defining your criteria and standards (location, sector, title, skill set & interests, future goals, values, flexibility, commuting times, etc.), then start making lists of companies and organisations that you find interesting and that also hire internationals. Moreover, take notice of every job portal, jobsite and association website that matches your criteria and has opportunities for internationals. Sign up for their job alerts. Finally, contact a Dutch recruitment agency (uitzendbureau) that is specialised in your field and also works with international job seekers.

Extra tip:

Go the extra mile and find opportunities to show your interest and motivation in other ways, beyond your application. A friendly LinkedIn message, a call to ask some questions or simply express your motivation, a sales pitch during a networking event or a job fair, a speculative application, etc., will all be appreciated by a Dutch employer, if done in a polite and subtle manner.

‘A good reference and show of genuine motivation could be more effective in the Netherlands than an impeccable CV’

Building/Using Your Network

Networking is an integral part of the country's business culture. Networking during your job search in the Netherlands is not just going to events and job fairs to meet prospective employers and to conduct small talk, but it is more about leveraging whom you know and spreading the word about your ongoing job hunt. Talk to people you already know, e-mail and reconnect with people

who are willing to help, connect with the right people on LinkedIn, etc. and share your career goals, passions ...and why not?, your resume too! A good reference and show of genuine motivation could be a hundred times more effective in the Netherlands than an impeccable CV or cover letter.

The Application

While it's important to 'sell' yourself to an employer, your CV should represent you in a neutral way, as Dutch employers value modesty. Having international experience plays a big role in selecting candidates, as it is a good indication of soft skills and cross-cultural competence. Moreover, don't underestimate your activities outside work and studying, as they are very important for Dutch employers, so make sure to elaborate on your volunteer work experience, side jobs and civic responsibilities. The style of the Dutch application letter is short, direct and professional. Keep in mind, when writing your application letter, that a candidate's motivation is one of the main selection criteria.

The Interview

When invited for a job interview in the Netherlands, inform yourself thoroughly on the company in advance. As this goes for the country's culture, it also goes for the company's culture. Researching the company's values, mission and goals as well as the people you will be working with, is a step that you should definitely not overlook. This will help you align your answers to their expectations, adjust your behaviour and show them that you are a perfect fit for their team.

Aside from questions about your motivation, education and the company, prepare yourself for questions about your character, strengths and weaknesses, extra-curricular activities, as well as questions on membership of societies and organisations. Dutch recruiters attach great importance to leisure activities and civic responsi-

bilities. Be prepared! At the end of the interview it is common for you to ask some questions yourself. Give some thought to it in advance.

Some examples of general questions in job interviews in the Netherlands:

- What are your major strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you like about our company?
- Have you ever joined a student association? Have you joined any commissions?
- Did you have any civic responsibilities?
- What is your current family situation and how do you foresee this in the future?
- What are your hobbies?
- Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?

Body Language

Body language is one of the first things that a Dutch hiring manager will note during an interview. Sudden movements and stiff posture will make your interviewer(s) tense as well, while crossed arms and a laid-back posture make you look arrogant. Make sure to sit up straight and not in a 'closed' position.

The Follow-Up

In some countries, following up after an interview can come across as intrusive or rude. However, in the Netherlands following up after interviews via a thank you e-mail and a call to find out about the status of your application is considered appropriate and shows your genuine interest in the position. ✎

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