

**A bridge to the future: European policy for vocational education
and training 2002-2010**

National policy report - the Netherlands

Summer 2010

Colofon

This report is one of a set of European country reports on VET policy developments prepared within Cedefop's ReferNet network. ReferNet is a European network of national networks providing information and analysis on national VET to Cedefop and disseminating information on European VET and Cedefop work to stakeholders in the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. The report has been produced by ecbo / ReferNet Netherlands as a contribution to Cedefop's fourth policy report which reviews progress in VET towards the policy goals of the Copenhagen process. The opinions expressed in this national report are not necessarily those of Cedefop, but of the author.

Title: A bridge to the future: European VET policy 2002 – 2010. National policy report – the Netherlands

Author: Karel Visser – in cooperation with Annemiek Cox

Organisation: ecbo / ReferNet Netherlands – Utrecht/'s-Hertogenbosch

Date: summer 2010

Template provider: Cedefop/ReferNet team – Thessaloniki

Translation: Language Unlimited - Utrecht

The preparation of this report has been financed on the basis of the Wet SLOA (Law on National Support Activities in Education; art. 12, subsection 10) and co-financed by the European Union via Cedefop as EU-agency for VET.

© ecbo – ReferNet Netherlands 2010

Use and taking over of texts, ideas and results out of this publication is permitted without restraint, provided the source is acknowledged.

Preface

This evaluative overview of Dutch policy developments in the vocational education and training system is a result of the Cedefop ReferNet work programme 2010. Its aim is to provide a clear, short description of these developments in the 'Copenhagen process' during the first decade of this century.

The 'Copenhagen process' was launched as the contribution of vocational education and training (VET) to the challenges identified in the Lisbon Agenda. In the Copenhagen Declaration, approved on 30 November 2002, the ministers responsible for VET in 31 European countries (EU Member States, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries), the European social partners and the European Commission agreed on enhanced cooperation in VET. The national ReferNet policy reports will be one of the main sources Cedefop will use to produce the 2010 review of the 'Copenhagen process', in line with its mandate. They will feed into an analysis of policy progress which Cedefop will prepare for the informal meeting of Education Ministers to be held during the Belgian Presidency at Bruges on 6-7 December 2010 as well as into a policy progress report which Cedefop will publish.

The Dutch report is subdivided into nine chapters emphasizing different aspects of VET (see Table of content). Especially of interest – for a foreign public – are the following parts of this report: VET in times of crisis or recovery (chapter 3), addressing equity in VET (paragraph 6.1), the introduction of a short cycle higher professional education (paragraph 7.3) and funding rationales for innovation in VET (paragraph 8.3).

Ecbo (Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training), as ReferNet partner in the Netherlands, was responsible for carrying out this task of reporting. Background information about the VET system in the Netherlands can be found in the Dutch *Country Report – Overview of the Dutch vocational education and training system - 2010* (See the English part of the website www.refernet.nl).

Summer 2010

Karel Visser - Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (*ecbo = Expertisecentrum beroepsonderwijs*) – ReferNet Netherlands

Utrecht / 's-Hertogenbosch - the Netherlands.

Table of content

Preface

Table of content

1. **Progress in modernising the Dutch VET system in the Copenhagen process**
2. **Socioeconomic challenges for future VET policy developments**
3. **Economic crisis, labour market and VET policy**
4. **Impact and implications of the joint work on European principles and tools**
5. **Strengthening links between VET and the labour market**
6. **Addressing equity, social inclusion and active citizenship**
7. **Quality, excellence and attractiveness of VET**
8. **Enhancing creativity and innovation**
9. **Financing VET**

1. Progress in modernising the Dutch VET system in the Copenhagen process

1.1. Impact of European cooperation on development of Dutch VET policy

The objectives and priorities formulated in the various declarations and communiqués (Copenhagen, Maastricht, Helsinki, and Bordeaux) are very wide-ranging. Based on the idea of promoting 'mobility in Europe' (and elsewhere!), the proposed priorities can be divided into two subgroups:

- a. Specific European tools that are aimed at contributing to the mobility of learners and workers, for example, by making what the individual has learned and is skilled at transparent. Alongside the Leonardo da Vinci mobility programme, this chiefly concerns the possible implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, the Europass and the ECVET system. Here we see a direct impact from 'Europe', to the extent that all these elements are indeed used (voluntarily). We will discuss this with detailed reference to the Dutch situation in Chapter 4.
- b. A package of politico-educational preferences for a VET system: accessibility, appeal, substance, design and character of VET, stakeholder commitment, relationship with surrounding educational activities (including higher education), quality, etc. 'Europe' is not leading in all these subjects – many of them were already on the Dutch VET policy agenda well before the various communiqués were published. Here, the European input can be characterised as reactive rather than proactive, and with good reason, given the principle of subsidiarity.

In short, while 'Europe' is key to the Dutch situation, its impact on the Dutch VET system as such should not be overestimated (nor underestimated for that matter).

EU-benchmarks

In addition, the EU benchmarks agreed for the 2000-2010 period (and since then for 2020 as well) play a part in assessing performance, including that of the VET system. As part of the open method of coordination, it is about policy learning through peer pressure. The Netherlands is partial to these benchmarks and monitors them carefully. Within Europe, the Netherlands is specifically interested in performance in Scandinavia, Germany, Belgium/Flanders, France and the United Kingdom/England, countries which are considered as reference countries. Each of the five EU benchmarks is reviewed below in brief.

- The first EU benchmark is to halve number of 18 to 24-year-olds who do not have at least a diploma at ISCED-3 level and who are also no longer in education. The Netherlands' aim for 2010 is to label a maximum of eight per cent of this group as early school leavers. In the Netherlands, this percentage dropped from 15.4 to 11.4 in the 2000-2008 period. As for the relative drop in early school leavers, the Netherlands has the highest score in Europe. The Dutch objective for 2020 remains unchanged. See also paragraph 6.1.
- The second EU benchmark is the extent of participation of 25 to 64-year-olds in learning activities, as measured by the Labour Force Survey. The European objective for 2010 was 12.5%; that for 2020 is slightly more ambitious at 15%. The Netherlands has its own objective, namely that at least 20% of this age group takes part in learning activities in 2010 and in 2020. In actual fact, 15.5% of this age group were taking part in learning activities in 2000, and 17% in 2008. The Netherlands has gone significantly beyond achieving this EU objective; however, the volume growth in terms of percentage is lower than the EU average.
- The third EU benchmark concerns the level of reading skills of 15-year-old students (PISA). The EU objective was aimed at reducing the number of students with poor reading skills by 20% in 2010. The Dutch objective is to bring the number of students down to a maximum of

8% in 2010 and in 2020. Between 2000 and 2006, this percentage increased from 9.5% to 15.1%. In other words, this represents a tough challenge which the government is addressing by setting new reference levels for basic skills. Compared to its neighbouring countries, the Netherlands is still performing well.

- The fourth benchmark is the number of 20 to 24-year-olds with an ISCED-level 3 diploma. The European and Dutch objective for 2010 is 85%, an objective that the Netherlands is not meeting: the percentage rose from 71.9 to 76.2 in the 2000-2008 period, which is slightly below the EU average.
- Finally, the fifth benchmark is the number of graduates in sciences and technology. The objective of a growth of at least 15% has been more than fulfilled: from 5.8% (in 2000) to 8.9% in 2007. That said, compared to neighbouring countries, the Netherlands scored low.

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2010). *Key figures 2005-2009*. The Hague: OCW.

1.2. Governance, cooperation and ownership of different actors in the Copenhagen process

There is no overview of participation by Dutch VET stakeholders in European activities linked to the Lisbon objectives and the Copenhagen process in the 2002-2010 period. Attempting to catalogue them would be entirely arbitrary and has therefore not been done. It can be said, however, that as a rule, consecutive Dutch VET agendas are in line with the all-inclusive European prioritisation, though stakeholders need not necessarily be aware of this.

1.3. External dimension of European cooperation in VET

We give two examples here:

There is close contact with the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba; both countries are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Many students from these countries are in higher education in the Netherlands, and for Dutch VET participants, these tropical countries are popular for work placements.

In addition, contacts with Turkey were intensified in the period up to 2010: support with establishing a National Qualifications Authority; reciprocal work placements.

2. Socioeconomic challenges for future VET policy development

2.1. Impact of globalisation on VET

The Netherlands has a long-standing reputation as an outward-looking country; one key factor is its geographic location on the North Sea and a hinterland with a strong economy such as Germany's. The Netherlands owes much of its prosperity to international trade. That said, its four chief trade partners are all in Europe: Germany, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. 80% of the Dutch export of goods and services is to Europe, and total exports come to slightly over 60% of GDP.

But globalisation or internationalisation is no new phenomenon. An *Internationalisation Agenda MBO* (upper secondary VET), produced and published by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with representatives from the upper secondary vocational education sector in 2009, inventories which answers VET can and must provide to boost the internationalisation aspect of this type of education.

Firstly, this is about increasing the mobility of learners and teachers (see chapter 4); this memo also backs the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci Mundus (global) programme in the European Union. Cooperation in Europe itself by using European tools is discussed in chapter 4.

It is also about embedding key competences in VET programmes that are important from an international perspective: learning foreign languages, and intercultural/cross-cultural and entrepreneurial skills. Attention was paid to these aspects during the development of an entirely new qualification structure for upper secondary VET based on descriptions of competences, which is currently being implemented. Foreign language teaching has been included in all qualifications, where it is required in professional practice and it is compulsory for all participants and students doing management training (the highest level of upper secondary VET). As yet, there is insufficient insight into the exact casting of this structure into curricula developed by schools, so that it is not clear whether extra efforts are needed in this respect.

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2009). *Internationaliseringsagenda MBO* (Internationalisation agenda upper secondary VET). The Hague: Ministry of OCW.

2.2. Impact of technological progress on VET

Technological change in any case impacts three VET sectors:

- Firstly, the digitisation of society. The use of new media is widespread in the Netherlands, new applications are easily absorbed and learning digital skills is an integral part of VET programmes.
- The outcomes-based qualification structure for upper secondary VET is regularly held up to the light by the seventeen sector-linked Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market. It is their statutory task to develop these individual qualifications and keep them up to date. The integration of new technologies in curricula must therefore be seen as an evolutionary process. Since 2004, cooperation between these organisations has improved, and this in turn has led to cross-sectoral qualifications.
- Developing completely new qualifications for newly created jobs is likewise one of the tasks of these Centres of Expertise. For instance, in recent years, several new qualifications have been developed for the creative industry. The programmes leading to these qualifications have a big appeal for youngsters and there is quite a lot of interest. See also paragraph 5.2.

2.3. Impact of demographic change and international migration on VET

The proportion of elderly people is set to rise by 80% in the next decade or two, while that of younger people will remain more or less constant. In terms of ethnic origin, the composition of the population

will be even more diverse than hitherto. All these changes have a direct impact on how the VET system functions, now and in future. The challenges include:

- Establishing a permanent, rich and broad-based supply throughout the Netherlands. Several areas are faced with decreasing populations; these are generally those areas with the highest unemployment levels. VET schools in these areas are already often faced with the question of how to meet the choice of qualification needs as several programmes with relatively few participants cannot be supported in the long term. A mix of solutions is an option and will have to lead to situation-specific and customised programmes such as collaboration between schools, each VET school in an area choosing a different focus, elaborating qualifications (with the risk that they become unrecognisable for the labour market), setting up public-private partnerships and distributing costs among various stakeholders.
- Intensifying post-initial, formal and non-formal schooling and all manner of informal learning, particularly for the older age brackets in the working population. The Netherlands has reached a general consensus on raising the retirement age to 67 years; a decision as to the way in which and the speed at which this is to be realised is still the subject of political debate. The need to stay in work longer therefore requires those in the older age groups to remain employable. Current participation in schooling (2008 Dutch Labour Force Survey [LFS] measurement) is 27.2% for 25 to 35-year-olds, 18.2% for 35 to 45-year-olds, 14.6% for 45 to 55-year-olds and 8.5% for 55 to 65-year-olds. That is far above the European average (see paragraph 1.1 on EU benchmarks).
- Paying permanent attention to the integration of newcomers and migrants, both where learning Dutch and acquiring knowledge about Dutch society are concerned, and on the strict condition that (knowledge) migrants are welcome in the incoming country. The events of 9/11, when Bush announced his 'war on terror', have led to a certain degree of cultural xenophobia in Western societies and education may be able to make a modest contribution to reversing this counterproductive trend.

2.4. Impact of greening of economy on VET

That we now have to think in terms of *people, planet and profit* when organising and arranging the social, economic and spatial aspects of society is evident. That implies that this is and should be an aspect or theme in education and vocational education as well. With regard to vocational education programmes, the same goes for what was said above about the integration of new technology; an aspect in occupational qualifications in which sustainability plays a part to a greater or lesser extent; the development of new qualifications for new 'green' jobs.

A footnote is called for here, however. Several national – and European – policy memos create the impression that in this field, education should be so proactive as to be considered a panacea for social, 'green' problems. A dictum from the debate about educational inequality is certainly not out of place here: *Education cannot compensate for society.*

2.5. Other challenges for VET

The biggest challenge facing upper secondary VET (in particular initial vocational education and training) is embedding it in a lifelong learning strategy. A key question here is what level of flexibility IVET suppliers can attain with regard to the 'just-in-time-and-place' supply of educational courses and what may reasonably be expected of these providers in this respect. In terms of organisation, the system of initial education and vocational education is, after all, geared towards teaching students in cohorts in various types of education, during which a foundation is created for lifelong learning. This organisation method is both (cost-) efficient and also reasonably effective for initial education.

3. Economic crisis (or recovery), labour market and VET policy

Unemployment in the Netherlands is among the lowest in the world. It increased only marginally during the crisis, or at any rate to a lesser extent than expected, from an average 3.9% in 2008 to 6.1% in 2010. Unemployment dropped in the second quarter of 2010 and now stands at 5.7% (June 2010). How can that be and what part, if at all, does vocational education play? There are several possible explanations, some of which are better than others.

A first explanation could be that because of rising unemployment, fewer people register with a job centre; i.e. unemployment has a discouraging effect. As an explanation, this paints a rather simplified picture. A degree of deterrence is found only among youngsters: instead of working, they stay at school longer. The rise in educational participation among youngsters is not exceptional, however in 2009 (and probably also in 2010) as it has been on the increase for decades already (the driving force being a desire for personal development). The elderly and women do not allow themselves to be put off at all. Their numbers in the labour force have been steadily increasing for years, and this trend has continued throughout the crisis. For the elderly, work is financially worthwhile and women work chiefly in such growth sectors as care.

A second explanation that cuts more ice has to do with the strained job market as it was before the outbreak of the crisis, namely that there were 240,000 vacancies against 310,000 jobseekers in 2008. The first 'round of cost savings' during the crisis then involves either not filling vacancies or scrapping them altogether. Notwithstanding the economic crisis the number of participants (especially adults) in the dual pathway of upper secondary VET continues to increase during the 2005-2009 period.

A third explanation is the termination of contracts with self-employed (one-person businesses) and workers from temporary agencies. This large occupational group is by definition mobile, and therefore contributes to a rapid adjustment of the job market both in growth sectors and shrinking sectors.

A fourth explanation is the reduction in working hours of permanent staff, by first doing away with overtime. A harsher step is using part-time unemployment as a way of reducing staff working hours, which is done by implementing a temporary government measure involving part-time work (for which the person receives a wage) and compulsory schooling (with unemployment benefit) during the remaining working hours. The scope of this measure is not particularly ambitious as it applies to about 1% of the workforce.

A final explanation is that businesses have been cautious when it comes to laying off staff, for fear of losing skilled workers and so being faced with shortages once the economy starts to recover. After all, the population is ageing and the baby boom generation will be retiring in the near future.

All these explanations may say something about the modest increase in unemployment, but they do not explain the recent decrease in unemployment, according to the Central Planning Office (Dutch economic think tank). This can only be due to an economic recovery, for instance a rise in exports.

4. Impact and implications of joint work on European principles and tools

4.1. European principles and tools related to lifelong learning strategy and VET development

The situation with regard to the implementation and use of tools developed at European level is as follows:

- The European Framework for Reference of Languages of the European Council is used to develop and practice foreign language teaching in upper secondary VET.
- The Dutch vocational education system has a complete system of qualifications (i.e. diplomas) from ISCED levels 2 to 5. Horizontal transfer is possible at the same level, usually involving a longer period of education as the student switches from one sector or educational field to another. Vertical transfers and progression routes are laid down by law, with everyone having the opportunity, in principle, to attain the highest level. As such, there are no cul-de-sacs or traps in this differentiated system, so that it is in theory suited for a lifelong learning strategy. These and other qualifications are classified in a national qualification framework (NLQF) that reflects the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In 2009, the Ministry of Education took the lead by tasking a group of experts to develop the NLQF, which is to be referenced to the EQF at the end of 2010. The further implementation will then be outsourced to a national coordination point in 2011. Several parties have indicated that they want to be involved in implementation. The aim is to use EQF labels in all Europass documents from 2012.
- The implementation of the European quality assurance principles is also on the agenda. It should be noted here, however, that a well-balanced system of quality assurance is already in place for upper secondary VET and higher professional education, albeit with a different character for each type. In upper secondary VET, this system involves a combination of supervision and inspection (with a fairly heavy emphasis on assessment/examination for which the schools themselves are responsible), nationally established learning outcomes in the various qualifications, the obligation of VET suppliers and Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market to have their own quality assurance systems with a view to permanently improving performance, and not unimportantly, to account for their performance to the public. Improvements can be achieved within this system. This section of Dutch vocational education (largely) meets the European indicators for quality assurance. That also applies to higher professional education which has a system of self-evaluation, review and accreditation, for the time being at programme level. A fairly small national reference point for EQA-VET is planned for upper secondary VET, which is or will be linked to the national Leonardo da Vinci agency (LdV). Although the exact terms of reference and the division of responsibilities are yet to be agreed, this policy choice shows that what is at issue is not the quality assurance system but the optimisation of participation in study and/or work placement activities abroad. Otherwise the terms of reference would probably have been framed differently.
- The national reference point for quality assurance will also be forming the national coordination point (NCP) for ECVET. The scope of those terms of reference is not fully clear yet. Given such factors as the link with the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the modest size of the NCP, it is not illogical to presume that these terms of reference will, at least for the time being, relate to the qualitative and substantive improvement of the (current) mobility activities of learners in a number of educational fields where mobility is relatively high, and not so much to ECVET as a (possible) system indicator of VET. Incidentally, the desirability of this latter point is a fundamental point for discussion. From a pragmatic point of view, the question can be raised whether the combination NLQF/EQF - Europass (possibly a refined version hereof) would not suffice to promote the transparency of and communication about qualifications and acquired competences.

4.2. Promoting geographical mobility of learners and teachers/trainers

Compared to all upper secondary VET students, the number of participants registered in upper secondary VET via the LdV programme and the very modest BAND programme (Dutch-German exchange) in 2008 was 0.54% (a total of some 2,700). In 2004, this was 0.33% (at least a two-week stay abroad).

The figures for teacher mobility are: 413 in 2004 and 634 in 2008, with a peak of 852 teachers in 2007.

This registered mobility is not the entire picture. In addition to mobility in a programme context (LdV/BAND), there are free riders who spend part of their studies abroad. Over-18s who wish to pursue a full-time upper secondary VET programme abroad can take their Dutch student grant with them to an as yet restricted number of countries.

5. Strengthening the links between VET and the labour market

In advance

The grids on the basis of which qualifications are developed that respond to qualification needs in terms of quantity and quality were laid down and regulated by law years ago. These are as follows for the various types of education:

- In lower secondary pre-vocational education: examination syllabi are laid down in a framework by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and developed by the Foundation for Curriculum Development in the Netherlands. Advice is sought from representatives in the field/social partners for the specific pre-vocational part.
- The grid for upper secondary VET is implied in a ministerial memo on Occupational profiles and curriculum development (*Beroepsprofiel- en leerplanontwikkeling*) from 1986 and was laid down in the Adult and Vocational Education Act (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*) in 1996. In upper secondary vocational education: the national qualification structure defines the desired output/outcomes of the qualifications. Three steps can be identified:
 - a. social partners develop and determine/validate vocational/occupational profiles; these are not transformed to 'occupational standards';
 - b. representatives of social partners and education develop the qualification profiles (output), which are adopted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science / Agriculture, Nature Management and Food Quality. This development work is done by the 17 branch-specific Knowledge Centres for VET- Trade and Industry;
 - c. schools develop curricula – in cooperation with training firms – on the basis of the qualification profiles.
- In higher professional education: qualifications and programmes, developed by the schools, are accredited by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation. A curriculum is part of the accreditation request. Representatives in the field are involved in drafting study programmes that are to be accredited. When associate degree programmes, part of short-cycle higher education, are introduced, the accreditation process closely scrutinises their relevance for the job market (see paragraph 7.3).

5.1. Identifying and anticipating skill needs

The Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (*ROA*) is the institute in the Netherlands that specialises in labour market forecasting and skills anticipation. The forecasts aim to increase transparency of the match between education and the labour market. Two approaches can be distinguished: top-down and bottom-up. In the top-down approach, a general forecasting model for the whole labour market and data from national sources are combined to serve two main functions: policy and information. Every other year, the organisation publishes the report '*The labour market by education and occupation in 20xx*' which includes analyses of expected labour market developments in the light of particular policy issues. The information function is primarily intended to assist and support vocational and educational guidance processes.

In the bottom-up approach, partial models of labour market forecasting are used, for example for just a selection of sectors or occupational classes, with input from specific (ad hoc) data sources. This can be complementary to the top-down approach.

In addition, a year and a half after graduation, tests are carried out among graduates leaving university, higher professional education and upper secondary VET; these take place regularly with the central focus on the interface between education and work.

The association of Knowledge Centres for VET and Trade and Industry (*Colo*) – active in upper secondary VET – works together with the ROA to make better use of the available data. Their cooperation has been laid down in a contract. These 17 branch-specific Knowledge Centres publish the results of 'education and labour market research' for their own sector, making use of ROA information and other resources. These documents contain information on the labour market by sector or branch, such as expected demand for qualified personnel and the expected availability of places in companies for practical training (as part of vocational education programmes), as well as qualitative developments related to changing and new employment. The educational institutions are subsequently responsible for attuning their provision of education at regional level. The regional training centres sometimes carry out their own market research to gain insight into expected needs for qualified employees at regional level.

Social partners and educational institutions can both take the initiative to introduce new occupations or qualifications or renew existing qualifications. Furthermore, social partners have an explicit task to take the initiative to incorporate new occupations or qualifications into the national qualification structure in upper secondary vocational education.

The centres for work and income (*Centrum voor Werk en Inkomen - CWI*), the social security agency (*UWV*) and the Council for Work and Income (*RWI*) are also involved in the cooperation between the ROA and Colo to match information on demand and supply in the labour market, at sectoral and regional level. The CWIs and the offices of UWV merged on 1 January 2009 and are now known as The Work Enterprise (*Het Werkbedrijf*).

Private commercial training providers have their own marketing strategies (including market research), so that they can offer courses that are relevant to potential target groups and the labour market.

Source: *Country report Dutch VET system – 2009*. Cedefop/ReferNet/ecbo; www.refernet.nl

5.2. Integrating skill needs of the labour market into VET provision

A new qualification structure for upper secondary VET was developed in the first decade of this century. The basis for the structure was laid down in several memos dating from the late 1990s. At the time, critical comments were made about the 'old' qualifications, in that they paid too little attention to 'key skills'. The new competence-based qualification structure describes learning outcomes by linking core tasks and working processes in occupations to some 25 generic competences. The schools now implement this structure, which is accompanied by curriculum renewal.

The term 'curriculum' has a specific meaning in the Netherlands. In relation to the term 'qualification', the best definition is: a document that relates to the desired implementation of an entire educational programme, leading to a diploma. The document always contains descriptions of the following: objectives – contents – educational structure and approach – assessment/evaluation. The extent of detail can vary. The development of a curriculum is a matter for the individual schools within the legal frameworks as laid down in the constitution.

Schools are primarily responsible for the modernisation of their curricula. Authority with regard to learning arrangements is assigned to them; this is constitutionally regulated ('state education' has a negative ring to it in the Netherlands), which is to say that (most) 'how' questions are answered by schools (for vocational education) themselves; close collaboration exists with companies in the region. This does not mean, however, that the national government remains completely aloof. It can stimulate those developments and innovations that have consequences for the modernisation of curricula.

5.3. Involving labour market actors in VET

In the Netherlands, social partners and representatives of the business community are closely involved in VET, and this is further encouraged at both national and regional/local levels. Their involvement nationally was outlined in paragraph 5.1. and the *In advance* section at the beginning of this chapter. In addition to considering the promotion of workplace learning at regional level (see paragraph 5.4), the following initiatives should also be taken into account:

- An arrangement for technology centres in which VET schools and businesses work together to enhance technical vocational education. The national Platform Science and Technology (Platform Beta-techniek) is also active in this regard, funding all kinds of projects at regional level.
- Encouraging the creation of strategic alliances between schools and businesses, towards a regional policy agenda for VET!
- Innovation incentives and initiatives as mentioned in chapter 8.

5.4. Promoting workplace learning

Upper secondary VET distinguishes two learning routes: a school-based pathway with internships (at least 20% of study time) and a dual pathway (at least 60% of study time in vocational practice). Workplace learning also takes place in other types of education (pre-vocational education and higher professional education), although in those cases, the dual pathways are not so clearly delineated and internships are more common. Several measures for promoting workplace learning have been in place in the last few years:

- The introduction of a work placement package (2006-2010), where learners following ISCED-2/3C level VET programmes can gain practical experience through apprenticeship routes, mini-businesses and simulations.
- Improving communication on out-of-school learning opportunities in upper secondary VET via www.stagemarkt.nl
- Project directorate Learning & Working (cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) aimed at encouraging lifelong learning. It does this by promoting dual pathways, which are increasingly being taken up by adults, by promoting the use of accreditation of prior learning (APL) procedures (engaging the APL Knowledge Centre – *Kenniscentrum EVC*) and setting up learning and working infoshops at regional/local levels (see paragraph 6.2.).
- The new associate degree programmes are offered mainly as part-time or dual options (see further paragraph 7.3.).

6. Addressing equity, social inclusion and active citizenship

6.1. Addressing equity in VET

The political adage is to make the regular VET system accessible and attractive to all, the consequence being that the system must be flexible. So the regular system of VET is also aimed at serving vulnerable groups. Several measures have therefore been taken to achieve this. They include:

A. Regular VET and reduction of early school leavers

- Opportunities for pupils in lower secondary VET and practical training who may not be able to gain a lower secondary education diploma that enables them to combine lower secondary VET with participation in an job-oriented 'assistant training' programme (ISCED level 2), which is normally provided by upper secondary VET.
- The introduction of job-oriented assistant training programmes within upper secondary VET in the 1990s; and, a few years ago, a more labour-market oriented 'assistant training' programme for youth 'at risk', which has just yet an experimental character (upper secondary VET level 1; ISCED-2 level).
- Extra support for all participants in upper secondary VET levels 1 and 2 (ISCED levels 2/3C). Aim: preparatory activities geared at identifying and supporting those with learning difficulties.
- The introduction of a 'personal budget for youngsters' in upper secondary vocational education who need 'special education' (e.g. handicapped persons; social-emotional problems and so on). Using this budget, awarded following a rigorous procedure, the participants can 'buy' extra support in upper secondary VET. This budget can, on the one hand, be used for peripatetic guidance given by people in the special educational needs field and for additional support in upper secondary VET, on the other. This takes place on the basis of an action plan.
- In recent years, care advice teams whose concern is with 'troubled' youngsters (termed 'difficult' by some) have been set up in upper secondary VET. Schools, youth work organisations, mental health care organisations, police, judicial authorities and other care providers (also in the work sphere) work together to support those whose multiple problems put them at risk in their school careers and help steer them in the right direction. In addition, special programme facilities are set up for these youngsters now and again (e.g. 'community schools', 'plus arrangements', etc.). The aim is to have these care advice teams fully up and running in upper secondary VET by 2011.
- Improving the transfer from pre-vocational education to upper secondary VET by creating collaborations to set up hybrid programme structures, e.g. combining the last two pre-VET years with an upper secondary VET ISCED 3C programme, in which teachers from both school types are involved. These experimental programmes are aimed at reducing early school leaving, which is at its most problematic during the transfer from pre-VET to upper secondary VET.
- The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science published a new memorandum on early school leaving in 2006. Since the introduction of the term 'basic vocational qualification', this subject has been on the agenda since the early 1990s. A basic vocational qualification means that a person has gained an upper secondary education diploma (at least ISCED 3C level). The new memorandum makes a provision for a qualification duty for 16 to 18-year-olds who do not have such diplomas. This has meanwhile come into law. Since 2007, activities are conducted in accordance with this law.

- In addition, municipalities can take measures to reduce early school leaving and to integrate vulnerable groups in education and/or work. This also applies to people aged 18 to 23 and is to be increased to 27 (compulsory/voluntary apprenticeship scheme). They often use the possibilities of the regular VET system at upper secondary level or sometimes design their own programmes with the support of regular VET providers and/or enterprises that offer work-based learning places.

The theme of many of the above initiatives is to halve the number of early school leavers. This is directly linked to EU benchmarks 1 and 4 (see paragraph 1.1). Between 2002 and 2012, these numbers are to drop from 71,000 to 35,000 a year. Seeing as there were 42,000 early school leavers in 2009, considerable progress has already been made. In light of the developing knowledge economy and the expected constraints in the labour market, some economists regard the problem of early school leaving as the number-one economic problem; all potential talent will need to be tapped and we cannot do without it. It is remarkable, the number of early school leavers decreases and the sense of urgency to reduce the problem increases.

B. Jobseekers and those threatened with unemployment

Unemployed people can search for jobs at their local/regional Centres for Work and Income (Employment Service). These centres have merged with agencies that pay social security and unemployment benefits to the unemployed and people with occupational disabilities. The municipalities are responsible for paying income support to people with no income from work or the social security/insurance system. These agencies cooperate in helping people to find work. Training can be part of the (re)integration into work. Private re-integration offices and several private and 'public' education providers (offering commercial contract activities and sometimes regular IVET programmes for the relevant target groups) are involved in programmes leading to work for people receiving benefits (unemployment, income support or social security benefits). Depending on the circumstances, people themselves have a say in the choice of the most appropriate routes back to work, in the form of training components such as courses/programmes paid by these agencies.

To stimulate civic integration, participation in education and the labour market, a 'participation budget' has been introduced at municipality level. This is a merger of three former budgets for social welfare and income support (Work and Income Support Act – *Wet Werk en Bijstand*), employability education and civic integration. The aim is to decrease bureaucracy. The Participation Budget Act has been operational since January 2009.

C. Migrants

One key theme is the 'integration' of migrants, i.e. learning Dutch and acquiring a knowledge of Dutch society. This field of adult education has not been able to function smoothly in recent years. In the space of a few years, responsibility has twice passed to a different ministry (from Education to Justice to Housing, Communities and Integration), which says something about how emphasis can shift. Moreover, the publicly funded upper secondary VET providers used to offer these integration courses. Since 2007, councils have been publicly outsourcing these courses and selecting providers on the basis of a price-quality ratio (privatisation).

D. Youth Unemployment Action Plan

The 2009-2011 Youth Unemployment Action Plan (*Aktieplan Jeugdwerkloosheid*) is a response to the economic crisis and is aimed at avoiding a 'lost generation'. A sum of €250 million has been made available to develop regional initiatives so that all youngsters are either in school, at work or in a combination of work and school. Councils, employment services, schools and employers are involved in these initiatives. Sectoral level support comes from Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market, part of whose statutory remit is to promote practical learning in upper secondary VET.

6.2. Support services for groups at risk

In the mainstream education system, schools are to provide education that is optimally adaptive ('appropriate education') and that is in line with youngsters' starting situation. Paragraph 6.1. sets out specific measures that (can) optimise services for youngsters.

Infoshops are being set up at a regional level where people can go for help finding work or apprenticeships. These include infoshops for youngsters in connection with the qualification duty and apprenticeship scheme, apprenticeship infoshops initiated by the Project Directorate Learning & Working (see paragraph 5.4.), mobility centres set up in response to the economic crisis (guiding from job to job). The same parties are involved in all these initiatives (see paragraph 6.1.D.).

6.3. Active citizenship

Chapter 5 discusses qualification files for upper secondary VET. In terms of content, there are two parts to these files. Firstly, there is a specific section that is directly connected to an occupation or occupational field. Secondly, the document (*Leren, loopbaan en burgerschap*) is an integral part of each qualification file. Both sections together set the trend for curriculum development in schools. Moreover, both give expression to what upper secondary VET is all about, namely learning for work/occupation and for citizenship and geared to 'continuous' learning.

7. Quality, excellence and attractiveness of VET

7.1. Improving the quality of VET

Quality can be defined as meeting what are considered realistic expectations of stakeholders, i.e. VET participants, VET customers, VET funders). As for the fundamental quality of VET, the inspectorate has an important task exercising proportional supervision. In recent years, additional emphasis has been placed on a number of supervision issues:

- Maintaining the 850-hour norm. Upper secondary VET must provide at least 850 hours of supervised teaching time per year. This standard is a statutory proxy for effective learning time.
- Supervising exams administered by schools, in terms of both content and design (product and process). A few years ago, this task was taken over from the Quality Centre for Examinations (*Kwaliteitscentrum Examinering*), which was responsible for the external validation of school-based exams.

The inspectorate can judge educational programmes as being 'weak', in which case supervision is stricter/more intense and the school is given a period of time in which to make improvements. The minimum aim is that no single programme is given this designation.

What does emerge repeatedly from educational effectiveness research are two important variables in the quality domain: effective learning time (see above) and educational adaptiveness. The highly heterogeneous population of upper secondary VET entails imposing stringent requirements on schools with regard to adaptive and flexible teaching. This is attracting more (policy) attention, one of the reasons being that not all participants regard the programmes as being sufficiently challenging. See paragraph 4.1. for the implementation of the European principles on quality assurance.

7.2. Promoting excellence in VET

For several decades now, the Netherlands has been involved in skills competitions in which participants showcase their craftsmanship. This takes places at sectoral/national level (SkillsNetherlands), European level (EuroSkills) and global level (World Skills). The first European competitions were held in 2008 in the Dutch city of Rotterdam.

In addition, schools can themselves select a number of fields in which to excel, i.e. achieve outstanding quality. On the one hand, the definition of excellence – where it exists – is very broad and, on the other hand, excellence requires a further operationalisation of opportunities for upper secondary VET.

Excellence can, for example, be achieved by (a) combining top-class sport with upper secondary VET, (b) linking a sector-specific centre of expertise to a VET school, (c) providing bilingual (Dutch/English) teaching in certain VET programmes, (d) (extra-) curricular activities in which VET participants do assignments together with students from the higher education community, (e) providing unique high-profile programmes at national level.

7.3. Higher level qualifications in VET

Associate degree pilot programmes were launched in higher professional education in 2006. These AD programmes are part of an accredited Bachelor's programme with a study load of at least 120 ECTS. To date, some 150 programmes have been accredited in various rounds, and the number is

increasing. In a separate round, several newly applied-for programmes are to be assessed at the end of this year. What is exceptional about this round is that the AD programmes that are to be accredited will be run by the universities of applied sciences in collaboration with upper secondary VET. Several of these are part-time or dual-track programmes, and many of the students have a background in VET and several years' practical experience.

7.4. Teachers and trainers

The initial/continuing training of teachers in IVET is governed by two important laws. Firstly, the Professions in Education Act (*Wet BIO – Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs*) and secondly, the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, which is applicable because the teacher training courses are provided by institutions for higher professional education and universities.

The Professions in Education Act, which came into force on 1 August 2006, regulates the standards of competence for both teachers and others working in education-related jobs in primary, general secondary, vocational secondary and general adult education. Training courses must be based on these standards. The law enables schools to devise policies for maintaining the skills of their staff.

Teachers in upper secondary VET fulfil all possible roles – generic roles such as instruction, guidance and assessment, and more 'specific' roles, some of which are part of the job and some of which are not, and which may include curriculum development and innovation, assessment development, coordination tasks e.g. for internships, career guidance, quality assurance, applied research activities, monitoring, remedial teaching, and so on. In consultation with school management, the possible and desirable roles are distributed among the team of teachers.

Increasingly, schools for upper secondary vocational education are training teaching staff themselves as part of a dual pathway within teacher training. This includes students on training and employment contracts, teaching assistants undergoing teacher training, and lateral entry staff with substantial work experience.

Schools for upper secondary vocational education have their own budgets for in-service training for teachers. Together with the teachers, they decide about the content of courses and the institution that provides the training. School boards are obliged to take measures and introduce tools to ensure that the staff to whom standards of competence apply can maintain their skills and knowledge (an obligation laid down by the Professions in Education Act).

7.5. Improving horizontal and vertical permeability of education and training systems

Transfer issues in and around vocational education have been high on policy agendas in the last decade. The 2001 Transfer Agenda in Vocational Education (*Doorstroomagenda Beroepsonderwijs*) was published by a small committee and was warmly welcomed by politicians and practitioners alike. The core of this agenda was based on two basis principles: to assign participants' (educational) career a central role and to achieve qualification gain. Qualification gain is the sum of the internal yield of all educational programmes/courses and the increase in the numbers of transfers to higher educational courses. While the route to higher education follows a traditional pattern of primary school, general secondary education and then higher education, the transfer agenda highlights an alternative route, namely primary education, lower/upper secondary VET through to higher education. Putting this agenda into operation has led to multiple reform initiatives for which the government has made funds available. These initiatives are discussed in chapter 8.

8. Enhancing creativity and innovation

8.1. Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in VET

The new upper secondary VET qualification structure was discussed in paragraph 5.2. Some 237 competence-based qualifications have been developed, which, in principle, cater for VET as a whole and are linked to a total of 627 different diplomas. 25 or so key competences are, to a greater or lesser extent, linked to the core tasks and working processes of a range of occupations/occupational fields, such as cooperating, taking the initiative, etc.

8.2. Improving quality of teaching and guidance

See paragraph 7.4. Professionalisation activities have been paired with the development and implementation of the new competence-based qualification structure for VET (see paragraph 5.2. and 8.1.). Key points for attention here are the teacher in the role as coach, new assessment techniques, designs for hybrid learning environments and the creation of on-the-job training places.

8.3. Innovation-friendly institutions and encouraging partnerships

The Netherlands has a long tradition of educational reform. Paragraph 7.5. already mentioned that the 'transfer agenda' has been a key driving force behind the reform of and the improvement in alignment in lower/upper secondary VET and higher professional education. At first, additional funds were freed up and distributed among VET schools (up to 2006), after which the lump sum funding of VET schools was stepped up by the addition of an 'innovation box'.

The innovation strategy in VET is directly linked to a funding rationale:

- The basic strategy is that each school is responsible for improving the education it provides (term: improvement). This is funded using the school's regular budget.
- The broad-based strategy comprises changes in educational practice, which are not new but new for the school in question (term: renewal). For this purpose, each school receives additional funds that are distributed according to a specific allocation formula, for example the said innovation box.
- The in-depth strategy is about innovations ('new' in VET). Additional funds can be found by submitting project plans to (temporarily operating) intermediary organisations that encourage innovation. The VET school is not automatically entitled to funds as in the broad-based strategy, but has to qualify for them by having projects approved.

Spearheads in the modernisation of vocational education are: (1) a turn towards competence-based learning in multiple forms; (2) more active forms of work, which call for greater levels of independence and self-regulation amongst participants in vocational education programmes; (3) the introduction of a greater variety in practical learning with the emphasis on the practical applicability of knowledge: workplace learning; simulation companies; carrying out assignments for companies, etc.; (4) the development of longitudinal learning strands that transcend the different types of vocational education; (5) the introduction of different forms of supporting participants: coaching, mentoring (also peer mentoring), career guidance, etc.; and (6) the introduction of more varied means of assessment, including the simulation of an aptitude test.

9. Financing VET

9.1. Improving efficiency, equity and levels of VET funding

No fundamental changes have been made to the funding framework of both IVET and CVET in recent years. The following statements can be made, however:

- More has been invested for specific target groups in upper secondary VET, in particular for the prevention of early school leaving, for 'troubled' youngsters and for the disabled.
- Millions of euros have been made available for innovations in both pre-VET, upper secondary VET and higher professional education (see chapters 7 and 8). These include the following: promoting the career development of youngsters, promoting vertical transfer between types of education, boosting returns on education (qualification return), promoting collaboration between schools and businesses, promoting collaboration between VET schools that offer programmes at various ISCED levels.
- By improving salaries, etc., more has been invested in staff.

9.2. Use of 'lifelong learning programme' funds

The Netherlands receives funds from the Leonardo da Vinci programme in upper secondary VET. Although these funds are welcome, they represent only a fraction of the additional investments otherwise made in VET by the Dutch government.

9.3. Use of other EU funds

Little or no use is made of other EU funds in IVET. By contrast, in CVET, industry-linked training funds do use them for refresher courses for employees.

For more information about funding see: Cedefop/ReferNet/ecbo (2010) *Country report the Netherlands*. Chapter 10. www.refernet.nl