

Introduction to the VET System in the Netherlands

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The Dutch educational system

The general aim of the Dutch educational system is to give everyone a good opportunity for education and prepare for independence and responsibility in life. The education System in The Netherlands is coordinated by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on national level and on regional level by municipalities. Education in the agricultural sector is funded and coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Education is compulsory from the ages 5 to 18 and is provided in public, religious and private schools. One of the distinct features of the Dutch education system is that pupils choose their path (type and level) of education in an early stage. Both, public-funded and non-public-funded schools need to fulfill the criteria established by the Ministry of education.

In The Netherlands, full-time education is compulsory from the ages of 5 to 16. From the age of 16 until 18 students are obligated to attain a starting qualification that is sufficient for entrance at the labor market.

The Dutch education and training system comprises the following main elements:

- primary education
- special education
- secondary education: pre-vocational secondary education and general secondary education (consisting of 2 phases)
- vocational education and training and adult continuing education
- higher education

In general, the system is divided into two educational streams, the general education and the vocational education stream. General education goes from general secondary education to higher professional education. The vocational education stream goes from preparatory secondary vocational education to vocational education and training.

IVET

Vocational and educational training is in the Netherlands the main supplier of employees to the labour market. The educational design of VET in general is built around the profession and the competences needed for that profession. Competences consist of knowledge, skills and attitude. To ensure the right learning output, that is suitable for the labour market, the labour market and VET institutes together determine the output of the education, validated by the ministry of education. This output is written down in qualification files. The qualifications files together form the national qualification structure. All VET providers uses these qualification files to design their education an examination. The educational design is fit to regional labour market demands. Until August 2016 the qualification structure will be revised and implemented. From August 2016 all providers and educations will work with the revised qualification files. The aim of the revision is to simplify and reduce the number of qualification files, to make the qualifications more responsive to the labour market by adding options for choice and to put more focus on knowledge and skills instead of competences.

In the Netherlands the students can choose between two 'learning routes' in which students combine work and study: a school-based route and a work-based route. In both routes students gain the same diploma. In Dutch VET there are four training levels of different duration (six months to four years):

- VET level 1: training for simple practical work and for entry to the labour market as an assistant worker. There are no formal requirements for entry to this level. The level 1 diploma also gives admission to VET level 2. Programmes in this category last six months to one year.
- VET level 2: basic vocational training to carry out practical work. The level 2 diploma is an entry qualification for the labour market and also gives admission to VET level 3. Programmes last two to three years.
- VET level 3: training to become an independent practitioner able to work independently across a range of activities related to the occupational area. The level 3 diploma gives admission to VET level 4. It is also an entry qualification for the labour market. Programmes last two to three years.
- VET level 4: middle-management and specialist training able to execute work independently, as a generalist or specialist in an occupational area. The diploma gives access to higher professional education. It is also an entry qualification to the labour market.. Most of the programmes last three years. Some exceptions for example technical programmes or care programmes last four years.

There are currently 43 regional, multi-sectoral VET providers. They provide programmes in engineering and technology, health and social care, and economics. Also there are 11 specialist training centres that provide education for specific branches or industries. Furthermore, there are 11 agricultural training. VET programs are also offered by private funded schools. They determine themselves what and how to educate. When their education are acknowledged and registered in the central register for VET (called CREBO), the quality will be monitored and evaluated by the inspectorate of education.

The secondary vocational education path is the most chosen one in the Netherlands: It is mostly seen as the end of initial education, completed with an initial qualification. For others, it is regarded as an alternative route to higher professional education. Most students follow the vocational education pathway although general education is viewed as a superior path. Improving parity of esteem between the two routes is a policy priority .

CVET

CVET in the Netherlands is aimed at people over 18, at qualifying them for work or preparation for further training. CVET in The Netherlands is a broad field with many options, depending on what path a person desires to follow in his/her career or in what area a person wants to deepen his/her knowledge. In basic terms, a distinction can be made between general adult education and vocationally oriented continuing training (for unemployed and people in the job market). Corporate training for employed people comprises a large part of this system, however, it is also the hardest sector to define. The VET system in the Netherlands is developed without a distinct difference

between IVET and CVET. Both consists of public funded and private schools. As a consequence the quality assurance system in place applies to the VET sector as a whole.

Funding

Public VET providers are funded by the ministry of education, culture and science. Funding is provided as a lump sum. The agricultural centres are funded by the ministry of Economic affairs. Since 2015 VET providers receive additional funds based on quality agreements between provider and ministry. To be able to receive these additional funds providers had to submit a plan in how they are going to raise the quality of education. Special attentions in these plans goes to issues like, training of teachers, language and mathematics education, work based learning, excellence, early school leaving and increasing the output of the education for students. In the years that are coming the ministry will work on the development of indicators, with which the results of the providers of their work on quality, can be measured. If these indicators show that providers have better results than expected they will receive extra funding on top of the additional funding.

The organization of VET

In the organization of the VET system of the Netherlands different organizations and different stakeholders on different levels play a role. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science lays down the conditions for education. The provision of the VET programs is decentralized and organized by the VET providers, because of the strong regional orientation of VET. The VET providers determine themselves, within the legal requirements and in mutual competition, which programs they offer.

On the national level there is an organization called MBO in business that temporary is set up to stimulate and facilitate quality and quality assurance on VET provider level. This organization is public funded and supports different kinds of programs, projects and initiatives that work on quality and quality assurance. All these are focused on continuous learning and improvement and quality assurance.

The VET sector is represented by the Dutch Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad). This organization represents all public funded colleges for secondary VET and adult education. It promotes the collective interests of the sector, supports common activities of the colleges and acts as an employers' organization. The private VET institutes are represented by the NRTO, the Dutch council for training and education. They take care of the interests of the private institutes on national level.

S-BB

Since 2012 VET and the labour market are organized in one organization called the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (S-BB), commissioned by the ministry of education, culture and science. The aim of the S-BB is to support and take care of good cooperation between providers and labour market, in order that students will receive the best education based on labour market demands and will have good chances for find a job. One of the important tasks of the S-BB is to revise and to implement the new qualifications structure. From August 2016 all VET providers provide education based on the revised qualification structure. The S-BB is also responsible for assuring high level of quality of the learning companies and for providing information about labour market needs. The S-BB is organized in 8 sector chambers. There are over 220,000 accredited work placement firms for the supply of training places over

500,000 students on the level of senior secondary vocational education and training. Labour market information is made accessible for students by an information leaflet. This leaflet shows numbers of chances to find a training place in the region and a job after finishing the education, student satisfaction and the number of students that graduate.

Overall, the VET sector in the Netherlands is characterized by strong partnerships which include educational institutions and the social partners. Both the institutions and social partners can take the initiative to introduce, within a dialogue between parties, new occupations or qualifications or renew existing qualifications. The importance that is attached to stakeholder input in the quality assurance system is demonstrated by the fact that one of the indicators in the Inspection Framework assesses the opinion of stakeholders vis-à-vis the VET institution, their involvement in the design of the Practical Vocational Training Protocol (BPV-Protocol which is further described) and the educational programs.

Quality assurance

The annual report generated by institutions is the starting point for external evaluation of the quality under the responsibility of the Inspectorate of Education. The concept of quality assurance in VET is a legal requirement for VET providers. Article 1.3.6 of the WEB stipulates that VET providers are obliged to set up a quality assurance system for their institution and they have to ensure that, in as much cooperation as possible with other institutions, a regular assessment of education is undertaken including measures and instruments to safeguard that the teaching staff maintains their competences .

Overall, the main actors in charge of quality assurance are the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science through the Inspectorate of Education as well as the VET providers themselves. Dutch VET providers are left a high level of independency in the design and implementation of their individual quality assurance system. However, they are evaluated externally by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education.

Inspectorate of education

Acknowledged educations in the public and private VET institutions are monitored by the Inspectorate of Education who is responsible for the external assessment of the quality assurance of the VET providers. The renewed Inspection Framework for VET entered into force on 1 January 2012 (Toezichtskader BVE 2012) which aims to assess the quality of VET providers and programs and supports the institutions to comply with the minimum quality standards. It applies to publicly funded VET institutions, private VET institutions providing VET recognized programs and exam institutions. This Inspection Framework consists of the following seven assessment areas: educational processes, examination, rate of return, quality assurance, compliance with legal requirements, quality of teaching staff and financial stability. These seven assessment areas are sub-divided into aspects and indicators against which the inspectorate measures the quality of the VET provider, its programming and teaching staff. The inspectorates way of working is risk-based. Which means that the inspection increasing when a institute is at risk of low quality of education.

Generally, the Inspectorate carries out inspection visits every three years to assess the quality assurance of VET providers. Every year they carry out inspections at one third of the institutions and per institution 1 to 5 programs of education. If their quality assurance is at risk, supplementary ad-hoc inspection visits may be undertaken. Besides that extra inspection can be carried out when signals give reason to that. A report is issued based on the inspection visit which subsequently should be used by the institution to make amendments to its quality assurance system or to set new objectives for future development. If the assessed institution has lack in quality and or/and an unsatisfactory or weak quality assurance system in place, the Inspectorate will carry out a follow-up visit in the subsequent year and monitor if the required improvements are met. The provider is then expected to show remarkable improvements and have a satisfactory system in place. When the institute doesn't show enough improvement, the Ministry has the possibility to:

- Give financial sanctions like recovery or freezing of funds;
- Official warnings;
- And as a last resort, to withdraw the license to provide education or exams.

On 1 January 2012 the renewed Inspection Framework was implemented which introduced four main changes compared to the previous frameworks:

- There is an increased emphasis on quality assurance, i.e. quality assurance is now one of the seven main assessment areas;
- Quality assurance is assessed at institutional level and at program level;
- Triennial inspections as opposed to annual inspections; and
- Intensive monitoring of unsatisfactory or weak performing schools.

The rationale behind the renewed framework is a shift in focusing on only the output of the education and examination to a focus on the quality assurance and the output of the education and examination. Also there is a shift in focus from quality assurance assessment at program level to institutional level. Both are assessed now. This allows the Inspectorate to now hold the institution as a whole responsible for unsatisfactory or weak quality assurance. It is however the competence of the institution (and not the Inspectorate) to decide the approach adopted to improve the quality. The Inspectorate carries out a follow-up inspection to assess whether the quality and quality assurance system has been improved. There is on-going monitoring of the VET providers such as through for example monitoring complaints, unsatisfactory of students and media as well as the ad-hoc inspections visits if necessary. When the inspectorate agrees the quality is low in such cases, the school is given a one-year period to make the necessary improvements. If however, the quality assurance of a specific provider continues to be at risk, the Inspectorate is allowed to undertake further measures such as for example meetings with the Board of Governors, issuing fines or even closing-down the institution.

The monitoring process of the Inspectorate of Education comprises three phases:

- Phase 1: review of the institutions is undertaken to identify potential shortcomings in the quality of education or the management of the institute;
- Phase 2: Where difficulties have been identified in Phase 1, the Inspectorate carries out further investigations into quality issues;

- Phase 3: Where deficiencies have been identified in the previous phase, for example insufficient quality in the delivery of programs, insufficient quality of examinations, financial risks or non-compliance of legal requirements including those concerning quality assurance, action is taken to address them as soon as possible on the basis of agreements reached with the institution concerned .

The Inspectorate reviews the results of the agreed program of quality improvement after one year. If there is no evidence of improvement in the institution, the Inspectorate informs the Minister of Education of the situation who, as a result, may withdraw the institution's license to deliver courses. The Inspectorate issues regularly monitoring reports as well as the report "State of Play of Education in the Netherlands".

The Inspectorate is working on a new framework for the monitoring of the quality of VET providers. The aim of the new framework is to be able to judge the quality of education and examination in a more holistic way: what are the results, how is the provider assuring the quality and do they have insight into the risks. The work that is done by the provider on quality assurance will take a more important role in the work of the Inspectorate. If the providers provides good information, the inspectorate will base their research on this information. Also the inspection will take place in dialogue with the provider. For example teams of teachers will be ask to present their quality, vision of quality and the way they take of care of the quality.

Peer learning and peer assessment

In different organizations and different networks schools and quality assurance coordinators work together on peer learning and, audits and professionalization. In one network almost all of the VET providers cooperate. This network is called the Quality Network (www.kwaliteitsnetwerk-mbo.nl) and is partly funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education. Another network of quality assurance is part of the MBO Raad, the council for VET colleges. The participants support each other in order to improve the quality assurance of their education and training. This support includes sharing information and experiences, training staff to review the quality of VET providers and by performing reviews in which the system of quality assurance used by an organization to monitor and improve VET, is examined.

The Quality Network aims to review all its member organizations every three years. The external review on a VET provider's quality assurance system is performed by an audit team of four people, led by an independent auditor. The first day of the audit involves discussions with managers, and education and support staff. The main aim is to get an impression on how the organization's quality assurance system works. The second day is used to investigate two educational teams in order to understand how the quality assurance system operates at a team level. A report is then compiled and sent to the VET provider's Board. The VET provider is invited to publish the report's conclusions and the quality profile of the organization. The Quality Network organizes training courses for staff from the VET providers so they can become an auditor. Once an individual has completed the course, and produced a portfolio of evidence from a number of reviews, the auditor can be certified and included in a register of reviewers.

The quality network is working now on an additional form of audits. The idea is to do audits of the same programme in 5 institutions. The aim is to generate more information for be able to improve the quality. The information is comparable. The approach of the audits is appreciative: what is going well, what are best practices other schools can learn from and what can be improved?

JOB-monitor

The JOB Monitor is an external quality assurance assessment tool and is coordinated by “Jongeren Organisatie Beroepsonderwijs (JOB)”, a national interest organization for VET students financed by the Ministry. This organization coordinates a student satisfaction survey (two-yearly) called the “JOB Monitor” and measures how satisfied VET students are with VET education. On the basis of the JOB Monitor, JOB issues a report which draws on the satisfaction of VET students of VET education and makes suggestions on how to improve the quality of education. More specifically, some of the themes covered by the survey in terms of student satisfaction are the following: competences acquired; information provided; participation; choice of career guidance; traineeship; school facilities. The information can be used by both VET providers as well as the Inspectorate. Both the VET providers and the Inspectorate attach great importance to the JOB Monitor. Almost all providers participated in this survey. The survey is filled in by a bit more than 50% of all VET students. The focus of the survey is with emphasis providing information for improve the quality. It is not meant for benchmark aims.

Benchmark

On initiative of the MBO Raad (the council for VET institutes) there is a yearly monitor of the financial results, where success rates of the VET institutes are included. The aim of this benchmark is to give insight in the financial results of the sector on individual VET provider level. So institutes can compare their results and learn from that in their own situation.

Another assessment tool used by the VET providers is the ROA monitor (undertaken by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour market) which monitors the number of students finding a job after their graduation in VET. The two new to be developed monitor instruments are to measure both the satisfaction of companies and the satisfaction of teachers.

Furthermore, transparent and objective information about the quality of educational programs and the chances and perspective on the labour market is very important for students to select the right education. In order to provide this informative the S-BB in in order of the Dutch ministry developing an information leaflet with this information for all educational programs.

Other developments

- There is a need to further enhance the quality of examination. For that extra measurements are taken by the ministry, the council of VET colleges and the VET providers themselves to improve the quality of examination. The agreement on national standards for examination is increasing and a lot of effort is put in the training of teacher and management in examination and how to assure the quality of examination.
- More and more attention is going to peer review and learning as a mean of improve the quality of education.

- Quality Assurance is being reassessed based on advices and round table discussions with students, teachers, Board Members, other sectors representatives, politicians, etc;