

Short introduction to quality assurance in VET in the Netherlands

COLOPHON

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1 VET in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, VET contains four training levels (EQF level 1 to 4) of different duration (six months to four years). In the Netherlands, a VET student can choose between three learning pathways. The first and the second are the most common.

- 1 The first one is the school-based pathway (BOL-pathway, with minimum hours for guided lessons and workbased learning (the latter is approximately 20%-60% of the learning).
- 2 The second pathway is the on-the-job-training pathway (BBL or the apprenticeship pathway, with approximately four days of learning-on-the job and one day at school);
- 3 The third pathway is a custom pathway for working students, who want to improve their position on the labour market. In this not government funded pathway schools are offering a customized route to graduate in their education. There is no minimum hour standard for this pathway, so the endurance of the education will mostly be shorter than the other pathways.

These pathways lead to the same level of qualification and diploma. The content of the programmes, in terms of what is acquired, is determined at national level in a qualification profile (with educational standards as output) within the national qualification system. In the Netherlands initial education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) lead to the same certificates.

All courses are divided in nine sectors: 1) trade, 2) ICT and creative industry, 3) mobility, transport, logistics and maritime, 4) specialist craftsmanship, 5) technology and build environment, 6) food, green and hospitality, 7) business services and safety 8) health, welfare and sport, 9) entrance. Schools can use these sectors for organizing their colleges. VET is provided by ROCs (multi-sectoral regional education centres), AOCs (agricultural education centres) or special craftsmanship colleges (for specific industries and crafts). ROCs are large training centres with an average student population of 12 000, AOCs and craftsmanship colleges are smaller: the average number of students of these colleges is 2000 students.

At the end of their VET education, students have to take exams, which are set by the VET schools, except for generic subjects like language, these are national exams. A commonly used type of examination is the aptitude test, which can consist of employment tests, simulations and observations of work activities to see whether the student possesses the necessary skills. This test takes place in an authentic situation and is, in most cases, organised and executed in cooperation with the labour market. An independent committee of the VET provider issues the diplomas and assures the quality of examination. This committee exists of employees of the VET provider and at least teachers of the involved courses need to be part of this committee. In addition, the committee needs to have a representative of the labour market. To increase its independence the law states that management cannot take part in the committee. However, an exception to this rule is possible when the VET provider can make sufficient valid arguments for independence of the committee, if management is part of the committee.

In 2000 major changes have been made in organising VET. Along with the implementation of competence-based learning in VET around the year 2000, working in teams was introduced at public funded VET institutions. The basic rationale is in order to deliver competence-based vocational education, a variety of (teaching) disciplines is needed. The concept of teams being the basic organising unit in VET institutions was ratified in the 2009 agreement between social partners and educational institutions (not formally ratified by law) – i.e. collective terms of employment and professional statute. Teams are responsible for delivering educational programmes of one or more subgroups of students. Teams have a mutual responsibility for a wide range of team tasks: developing and delivering the educational programme, study and career counselling, supervising work placements (internships), mentoring, certification, but also the development of the team as a group of professionals as well as individual professional development, the coordination of teaching activities, quality assurance, and innovation of the curriculum. The implementation of the concept of working in teams is an ongoing process and VET institutions are at different stages of adoption.

2 Cooperation with social partners

Overall, the VET sector in the Netherlands is characterised by strong partnerships, which include educational institutions and the social partners. The VET council represents VET providers and JOB represents students. In S-BB (stichting beroepsonderwijs en bedrijfsleven) education and the labour market work together. The S-BB is divided into 9 Sectoral Chambers. The Sectoral Chambers are responsible for developing and maintaining the qualifications for a particular sector. Besides, they have to supervise whether there are sufficient numbers of companies to provide internships according to quality standards, and have to deliver information on labour market developments in the sector on a regular basis.

3 Legislation

The Ministry of Education lays down the framework and general conditions for VET. The VET law mandates VET providers to set up a quality assurance system, this is the same for the public funded and the private schools. They are relatively free to design and implement their own system, but they have to ensure regular quality assessments that include the arrangements in place for teacher training. The VET law comprises measures to further align the provision of education and training with the demands on the labour market. The S-BB, in which education and the fields of work are represented, is responsible for developing a clear qualification structure in which the knowledge, the skills and the professional attitude required by businesses and schools are set out.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science works with government agreements (for example Bestuursakkoord mbo 2014) and policy letters (for example 'Focus op Vakmanschap' and 'Kamerbrief met visie op mbo: een responsief mbo voor hoogwaardig vakmanschap') to set out the priorities/ focus areas for the coming governing period. To raise the quality, as an addition, extra funding (partly performance-based) has been provided since 2015, every four years. The minister has concluded quality agreements with all public funded VET providers. Based on these agreements all VET providers set goals and made plans to improve the quality for the period from 2015 until 2018.

From this year schools made new plans to improve their quality. This 'Quality Agenda' lasts from 2019 until 2023. Part of the extra funding is provided in advance and part of the extra funding is provided if agreed goals are reached.

The inspectorate of education is responsible for the external assessment of the quality assurance of the VET providers.

4 The Inspectorate of Education

The Inspectorate of Education monitors both public and private funded VET schools. The inspectorate evaluates if the VET providers meet the demands set by the ministry. These demands are elaborated in a framework and are divided in 6 categories. Requirements with regard to the 1) educational process, 2) examination and graduation, 3) social climate, 4) educational results, 5) quality assurance and ambitions, 6) financial management and other legal requirements. Work-based learning is part of this framework. For private funded VET schools categories social climate and financial management are not applicable. A new framework and method has been implemented as of August 2017. In this new framework the inspectorate uses at first information about the quality of education that is given by the provider itself. The inspectorate uses this information on condition that the information is reliable. The information provided, the quality assurance of the provider itself and a meeting with the board and a committee (with teachers, managers and quality assurance employees) of the provider is the starting point for the research of the Inspectorate. From there the inspectorate will evaluate the education and evaluate if the information given by teachers, students and learning companies is congruent with information given at management level. The Inspectorate also does thematic monitoring. In addition, of the supervision role the inspectorate has, the inspectorate also has an encouraging role, to contribute to further enhancement of the quality of education. The inspection issues a yearly report about current state of the quality and of the quality assurance of the whole educational system (not always representative), including VET. The working method of the Inspectorates continues to develop. The Inspectorate is working on a new framework. On the website www.onderwijsinspectie.nl more detailed information in English is available.

5 System of quality assurance at provider level

VET providers have to formulate sufficient specific and measurable goals for education in a structured manner, based on the institution's mission and strategic policy. Sufficient continuity in teaching and management staff is an important aspect of these goals. To reach goals providers and teams of teachers work according to the PDCA-cycle. The providers and the education programmes regularly assess, in a reliable manner, the progress and achievement of the goals set. In this evaluation independent experts and stakeholders are involved. If necessary, education programmes take measures for improvement geared to the outcomes of the assessments in light of the goals set. The quality assurance and attendant tasks, authorities and responsibilities are clearly defined, sufficiently communicated and embedded in the organisation of VET providers. VET providers are obliged to maintain a sufficiently functioning dialogue regarding quality with internal stakeholders and persons responsible, as well as with external stakeholders (student associations, learning companies f.e.). This dialogue comprises accountability regarding the quality provided and its improvement.

6 Quality evaluations on national level

Two important monitors to evaluate quality of VET done on national level are the JOB monitor and the BPV monitor. The JOB Monitor is an external quality assurance assessment tool and is coordinated by Youth Organization Vocational Education (Jongeren Organisatie Beroepsonderwijs, JOB), a national organisation that represents the interests of VET students and is 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. Based on 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. Results of the JOB monitor are also available on provider level and course level. Both the VET providers and the Inspectorate attach great importance to the JOB Monitor. Almost all providers participated in this survey. The focus of the survey is with emphasis providing information for improving quality. It is not meant for benchmark aims. With the BPV Monitor, VET providers and the labour market continuously measure the quality of apprenticeships per educational course, school and sector. Students, the trainer-on-the-job need to fill in the questionnaire after the apprenticeship.

On initiative of the MBO Raad (the council for VET providers) there is a yearly monitor of the results, where success rates of the VET institutes are included. The aim of this benchmark is to give insight in the performance and financial results of the sector on individual VET provider level. This way 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. There are also monitors available for measuring the satisfaction of companies and the satisfaction of teachers and staff. .

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 information, the S-BB developed information leaflets with this information for all educational programs commissioned by the Dutch ministry.

7 Quality culture

In the Netherlands, quality culture is regarded as an important aspect of quality assurance. Quality culture refers to a particular mindset in regards to quality and efforts to improve quality. It describes the accepted, unified and mostly tacit way in which a group (a team of teachers, a department or a school) strives to deliver quality in its teaching, as based on a set of underlying collective values and shared interpretations and conceptualisations. A quality culture is expressed in a group's language, standards and customary behaviours. In organisations and teacher teams there may, in many cases, be both an overarching culture and multiple subcultures. A quality culture does not exist in isolation. It has to be underpinned by a quality assurance system and requires quality awareness and quality behaviour. To foster quality culture, VET providers are expected to pay explicit attention to their quality culture. Quality culture is one of the standards of the Inspectorate.

8 EQAVET in the Netherlands

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the MBO Council have been involved in EQAVET developments since 2004. When the EQAVET framework was delivered, the Netherlands had already had a system of quality assurance in VET in place. Most descriptors and almost all indicators of the EQAVET framework are part of the Dutch quality assurance system. The main goal of the NRP EQAVET in the Netherlands is to stimulate quality assurance at national level, provider level and teacher level according to the EQAVET-framework, in close cooperation with stakeholders.

9 Quality network of VET providers

In different organizations and different networks VET providers and quality assurance advisors of VET providers work together on peer learning, audits and professionalisation. One of these networks is the Quality Network (www.kwaliteitsnetwerk-mbo.nl) in which almost all VET providers of the publicly funded VET schools participate. This network is partly funded by the ministry of education. The aim of the network is to bring quality in VET to next level by learning from and providing feedback to each other. One of their activities is audits. As a VET provider they support each other in evaluating the quality. The private schools in VET are united in a trade association for private financed schools, which is called NRTO (www.nrto.nl). The NRTO has launched a quality mark in 2017. A supplier with this quality mark has to meet quality requirements and has been tested for this by an external certification body. A supplier with the NRTO quality mark has to meet requirements as: transparency about products and services; clarity about the learning outcomes of education and training; measuring customer satisfaction; use expert teachers, trainers and advisors; invests in the expertise of its staff; strives for continuous improvement.