

2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission

Contribution of the Netherlands

April 2007; amended version September 2007

Chapter 1: presentation of the national strategy for lifelong learning

1.1 Current state of play:

1.1.1 *Was a lifelong learning strategy established in your country by the end of 2006, and if not what is the timetable for its establishment?*

The Netherlands' strategy for lifelong learning is not described in a one volume document. However, The Netherlands carry out a conscious policy for lifelong learning for the whole educational system aiming at a maximum participation in all educational sectors. The policy aims at coherence and continuity and the maximum participation of all potential participants up till the highest possible level. The priorities of the current government are on pre- and early school education as a basis for further education, pushing back early school leaving in secondary education, increasing the quality and availability of teachers, introduction of a duty to qualify for all secondary vocational education, making higher education more attractive by introducing for instance associate degrees and extending possibilities for mobility) (see 1.3). At the same time policy is aimed at establishing a logical coherence between all successive educational sectors and at taking away barriers between sectors by introducing continuous pathways from pre- and early education up till higher education. The government submits its lifelong learning policy periodically in contiguous, future oriented plans for each individual sector (Koers PO, Koers VO, Koers BVE, HOOP). Next to formal education opportunities for formalisation of individual persons' competences acquired in a non-educational environment are being developed (Erkenning van elders verworven competenties, EVC)

This lifelong learning strategy has been laid down in a number of interrelated policy documents. The most important of these are:

- *Koers PO* for primary education (<http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/brief2k-2004-doc-28790a.pdf>)
- *Koers VO* for secondary education (in English: http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/koersvo-doc-koersvo_agenda2010_en.pdf)
- *Koers BVE* for secondary vocational education (<http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/koersbve-doc-2004-koersbve.pdf>)
- *HOOP (2004)* for higher education (<http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/brief2k-2004-doc-3283a.pdf>)
(NB. These 4 basic Sector Strategy documents are revised every 4 years and thus are current till 2008)
- *Aanval op de uitval*, policy for combatting early school leaving (http://www.voortijdigschoolverlaten.nl/docs/OCW_AanvalopUitval_fldr2.pdf)
- *Leerkracht, teacher policy* (http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/rapport_leerkracht_2.pdf)
(NB. in September a specially government installed commission will issue its advice on teacher policy)¹
- *Leren en Werken Versterken* (Reinforcing learning and working 2005-2007 (http://www.leren-werken.nl/front/docs/leren_en_werken_pva.pdf, also available in English)

¹ The recommendation was issued on 12 September 2007; <http://www.minocw.nl/actueel/nieuws/35420/Advies-Commissie-Leraren.html>)

- *Toezicht in vertrouwen, policy on governance*
(<http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/Toezichtinvertrouwen.pdf>)
- The main points of the current government's policy for education (quality of education, teachers and early school leaving plus other spearheads for 2007-2011) can be found on <http://www.minocw.nl/hoofdpuntenbeleid/730/Over-hoofdpunten-beleid-OCW.html>
- The general basic principles for the current government can be found on <http://www.samenwerkenaannederland.nl/uploads/ik/cl/ikclUls8PZnZB7wvBquAIQ/Belidsprogramma.pdf>

Next to the revision of the Sector Strategy Documents every 4 years, a clear and coherent presentation of the current overall strategy is given every year in the Policy Agenda which is published together with the Budget every 3rd Tuesday in September.

1.1.2 *Plans for future adjustment, completion or modification of the strategy*

At this time there are no plans for adjusting, completing or modifying the strategy (cf. 1.1.1). Policy is aimed at keeping the strategy up-to-date with social and economical developments. A crucial point for constant attention is pre- and early school education. Next to this is the extension of the qualification duty to the age of 23. In secondary vocational education developments are in an advanced stage to introduce competence-based qualifications.

1.1.3 *Any obstacles encountered in the establishment of your strategy*

Not applicable (cf. 1.1.1).

1.2. *Comprehensiveness, coherence and relevance:*

1.2.1 *Which systems and levels of education and training are covered?*

The strategy includes all sectors of education, from pre- and early education up till higher education. Non-formal education is stimulated by the possibilities to validate competences acquired in non-formal and informal education.

1.2.2 *The challenges addressed by the strategy, including improving the efficiency and equity of education and training systems, and how these have been identified (evidence base).*

The challenges in the strategy are:

- assuring the good quality of education;
- guaranteeing the accessibility of education;
- the pursuit of excellence at all levels and the development of talent;
- allowing schools and institutions the room to develop the individual qualities of pupils and students.

The challenges were inventoried on the basis of other qualitative and quantitative analyses and interviews with stakeholders.

1.2.3 The priorities for action and policy development within the strategy, in light of these challenges.

The following priorities for action are included in the strategy:

- the availability of sufficient, properly qualified teachers;
- reducing the number of early school leavers by 50%;
- continuous learning lines from preschool through to higher education and research;
- preschool and early childhood education;
- developing and implementing an accessible educational infrastructure for lifelong learning.

1.3. Main policy measures:

1.3.1 The main policy measures in the strategy and how these fit together, including

1.3.2 Outline the measures designed to address progress towards the EU benchmarks, including any national targets in these areas

1.3.3 Allocation of resources to main policy measures, including any national targets for more / more efficient use of funds and the use of EU funds to support lifelong learning (e.g. Structural Funds, European Investment Bank)

1.3.4 Measures to change attitudes to learning

1.3.5 Strengthening evidence-based policy making, using a culture of evaluation, leading to innovation in education and training

1.3.6 Measures to target the needs of disadvantaged people (e.g. immigrants, ethnic minorities, the disabled)

- Strategy applies to both formal and non-formal education (see 1.2)
- Coherence is guaranteed by the introduction of contiguous learning lines and the tuning of all sectoral plans involved
- Flexibility is included:
 - in secondary education: learning support which enables pupils to receive extra (temporarily) help
 - in secondary vocational education: choice for full time education of block or day release
 - higher education: introduction of associate degree, world wide portability of grants
- implementation and dissemination is ensured by statutory regulations and by deliberation with the stakeholders involved (associations for the individual sectors)
- The Netherlands has agreed to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
- Possibilities are introduced to formalize non-formal competences acquired in non-educational situations (see 2.2)
- Guidance: Regional joint ventures are encouraged between the education world, local authorities and Centres for Work and Income, in order to realise combinations of

learning and working (work-based learning routes), the Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) and so-called learning-working desks (see 2.3).

- Mobility in higher education is increased by the introduction of world wide portability of grants; next to this there is the introduction of a new grants programme (Huygens Scholarship Programme) This national programme aims to offer internationally competitive scholarships to attract, retain and send out the top talent that is needed to develop the Dutch knowledge society. The HSP will be open at the bachelor's and master's level to all incoming students from all countries (see 2.4).
- For the EU benchmarks the Netherlands have set national targets (see below and footnote 2)
- Learning partnerships with stakeholders (policy-makers at national, regional and local levels, social partners, learners and representatives of civil society) are developed for adults (see 3.1.7).
- Pre- and early school education has major attention in present lifelong learning policy (see. 3.2.1)
- Measures are taken and integrated to improve equity in a variety of fields (see 3.1.3)
- With a view to strengthening the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation, the Dutch government has implemented a number of measures (see 3.3.1)
- There is policy aimed at the position of teachers and teacher education. Primary and secondary schools receive additional resources for the professionalisation and support of education staff. The agreement is mainly aimed at expanding the possibilities for further development for teachers and other education staff within the school. Performance agreements have been adopted between the Ministry of OCW and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad) and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) to improve the quality of teacher training; this particularly applies to the maths and language skills of students at teacher-training colleges for primary education (PABO) and to the quality assurance of in-school training.

More specifically the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of OCW) has taken the following measures (among others) to make progress, including in the area of the EU benchmarks:

- Availability of properly qualified teachers:
 - The Ministry of OCW has made performance agreements with the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad) and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) to improve the quality of teacher training; this particularly applies to the maths and language skills of students at teacher-training colleges for primary education (PABO) and to the quality assurance of in-school training.
 - Proper harmonisation of the supply and demand of teachers, particularly at the regional level.
- Tackling early school leaving in general, reducing the number of early school leavers by 50% and ensuring that at least 85% of young people obtain basic qualifications². Early

² Next to these targets, the other national targets on EU benchmarks are: maintaining the reading skills at current level (9% of 15-year-olds to have scant reading skills), increasing the number of

school leaving (i.e. leaving school without obtaining a basic qualification, in other words education to at least level 2 of senior secondary vocational education [MBO]) is a serious weakness in the performance of the Dutch education system. The percentage of early school leavers aged 18 to 24 as compared to the total number of young people in this age group dropped from 15.5% in 2000 to 12.9% in 2006. Through the measures below, the government is striving to reduce this percentage from 12.9% to 8% in 2010:

- further development of preschool and early childhood education (cf. 3.2.1);
 - proper registration, a sound truancy policy and enforcement of compulsory school attendance to prevent unnoticed absences;
 - a customised approach by schools, special needs institutions, the Centre for Work and Income (CWI), social services, judicial authorities and employers to assist unemployed early school leavers in finding work or returning to school. In 2006, the Ministry of OCW concluded agreements with 14 regions aimed at reducing the number of early school leavers by 10% in the 2006/2007 school year.
 - the introduction with effect from 1 Augustus 2007 of the so-called “qualification obligation” for all students aged up to the age of 18 (cf. 3.4.6).
 - extending guidance counselling for special needs students in secondary vocational education.
- Simplifying transfers between primary, secondary and secondary vocational education (the so-called continual learning pathways).
 - Reducing the number of rules passed down by the Ministry of OCW (governance plan, cf. 3.1.1).
 - Preventing and reducing learning disadvantages through the further development of pre-school and early childhood education (cf. 3.2.1).
 - Further development of post-initial training, cf. 2.2 and 2.3

The Netherlands sets great store by a policy based on facts and evaluation. Evidence-based policy is the objective. To strengthen the scientific basis, the Ministry of OCW has set up a “knowledge chamber” in which the Minister discusses the priority issues in educational policy with representatives of the world of educational research and stakeholders. The Ministry is formulating themes at the strategic level for which there is a need for knowledge, subsequently, the knowledge institutions indicate whether they can meet the demand. Based on their own expertise, they can also indicate any themes missing from the Ministry’s agendas and point out where scientific substantiation is (partially) lacking in policy documents. The Netherlands has taken the initiative at the European level of investigating whether it is possible to act together with other countries in this context.

1.4. *Development, implementation and dissemination of the strategy.*

1.4.1 *Coordination and consultation mechanisms involving all relevant stakeholders.*

graduates in maths, science and technology by 15% in 2010 and increasing the participation rate in lifelong learning to at least 20% in 2010. Furthermore, an additional national target is set aiming at 80% of the labourforce (25-65 years of age) to have a basic professional qualification in 2010 (2006: 77.3%).

The Ministry's lifelong learning policy is always drawn up based on talks with and visits to stakeholders on an ad-hoc basis. This is a system that the Ministry of OCW has had in place for years regarding the determination of sector policy strategies that are set down for every education sector once every four years. Last time (2004), the Sector Documents were drafted after the Minister personally made a nation-wide consultation tour, speaking with as many stakeholders involved as possible (also parents and even young children). The Ministry also consults closely with all stakeholders concerned when determining these strategies, using among others a forum on the internet.

1.4.2 *Implementation arrangements, including publicity and dissemination.*

As a rule, the Ministry disseminates policy strategies widely.

Chapter 2: Implementation of transversal policy objectives

2.1 *The establishment of national qualification systems and frameworks (in line with the European Qualifications Framework), and the elimination of obstacles between levels and systems.*

The Netherlands has agreed to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). A steering group representing various departments of the Ministry of OCW has already been established for the national implementation of the EQF. The education sector is involved in an international pilot aimed at testing the functioning of the EQF.

2.2 *Identification and validation on non-formal and informal learning.*

The development and introduction of the Recognition of Acquired Competencies [RAC, in Dutch abbreviated to EVC] is in the hands of the education sector. Since 2001, the Knowledge Centre for Accreditation of Prior Learning in the Netherlands [Kenniscentrum EVC] has been supporting education providers and employers in the development of RAC. Introduction on a large-scale is not yet a reality. A quality code set down in an agreement between the Ministry of OCW and the sector is intended to identify and validate the assurance of the quality of the recognition process for non-formal and informal learning.

The quality code defines what is generally accepted as RAC, whereby a qualification obtained through a RAC pathway has the same value across the Netherlands. Since 1 January 2007, the quality code has included the possibility of fiscal RAC arrangements for employers and employees. In addition, the RAC assessors will compile a list of RAC providers and their competencies.

2.3 *Widely accessible lifelong guidance policies and systems.*

The Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working, an interdepartmental joint venture (established in March 2005) between the Ministry of OCW and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, is charged with advancing lifelong learning. The aim is to encourage regional joint ventures between the education world, local authorities and Centres for Work and Income, in order to realise combinations of learning and working (work-based learning routes), the Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) and so-called learning-working desks. The subsidy arrangements of the project group are aimed at increasing the number of RAC pathways and at more effective efforts for optimising the connection between learning and working. The application of RAC procedures takes place both within and outside the secondary vocational education and higher professional education sectors, e.g. in a number of sector-specific collective labour agreements. The project group has already been able to make agreements for setting up 20 regional learning-working desks and over 24,000 work-based learning routes and 20,000 RAC pathways for employers and job seekers. A learning-working desk is a facility in a region which everyone is entitled to approach for independent information and advice regarding RAC, training and choice of career or occupation.

In addition to the learning-working desks, an internet portal was introduced in 2006 that provides information about study programmes, occupations, courses on offer, work placements/ learning-working placements and job vacancies in the Netherlands, aimed at a

wide audience of every age group, and at the least suitable for people with no basic qualifications. The project group's national campaigns focus the attention of employers, employees and job seekers on learning and working.

2.4 *Measures to reinforce transnational mobility in all sectors, including through the removal of administrative and legal obstacles, the implementation of Europass, or by the provision of financial or other support.*

The aim of the *BAND* (Bilaterale Austausch Niederlande Deutschland) programme is to structurally strengthen cooperation between the Netherlands and Germany through (subsidising) bilateral exchange projects in education.

Since 2005, students have been able to compile a personal portfolio using Europass documents. The implementation of Europass is in the hands of a consortium of eight parties led by the Dutch Information Management Group (IB-groep).

From September 2007, students desiring to follow a study abroad – in full or in part – will not only be entitled to take their student grant with them to European countries, but also to all countries outside Europe. In this way, students have maximum freedom to choose a programme that best suits their needs and wishes.

In recent years, the Ministry of OCW has implemented a number of measures aimed at strengthening transnational mobility in higher education. Student grants can now be transported worldwide. The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and higher education institutions have drawn up a code of conduct for international students. Furthermore, there is regular interdepartmental consultation on student migration. In 2005 the Europass was implemented.

With effect from 2006, the Ministry of OCW introduced a new programme: the Huygens Scholarship Programme (HSP). This national programme aims to offer internationally competitive scholarships to attract, retain and send out the top talent that is needed to develop the Dutch knowledge society. The HSP will be open at the bachelor's and master's level to all incoming students from all countries. The Netherlands is cooperating with current EU candidate Member States in the area of education and research. To further encourage this, PhD candidates from these countries will also be eligible for the HSP. The HSP grants are equally distributed between higher professional education and academic university education. A portion of the budget – about 20% – is designated for talented Dutch students who desire to follow a course of study abroad. In this regard, the Ministry of OCW has a subsidy arrangement with the students and not with the institutions. One of the starting points of the HSP is the reduction of the current administrative burden compared to that of existing scholarship programmes.

As of 1 January 2009, institutions will have access to Knowledge Scholarships [Kennisbeurzen] for internationalisation.

Chapter 3: Implementation of policy objectives in schools, higher education, vocational education and training and adult education

3.1 Elements that must be reported at all levels (schools, higher education, vocational education and training and adult education)

3.1.1 *Governance and leadership of education and training institutions (e.g. organisational and administrative reforms, autonomy and accountability measures, public/private initiatives).*

Increasing the autonomy of schools and institutions

The objective for all education sectors is to increase autonomy and to deregulate by reducing the administrative burden through the removal of unnecessary obstacles, lack of clarity and complex legislation, by abolishing furnishing and equipment stipulations, strengthening the position of teachers and, where possible, that of pupils and students, and allowing room for institutions' own educational initiatives within the framework of clear administrative relationships.

- This governance policy has already been significantly developed in secondary education and secondary vocational education.
- In secondary education, lump sum funding has now also been introduced for practical education whereby the administrative burden has been reduced for the entire secondary education sector. Other initiatives aimed at reducing the administrative burden in the secondary education sector are:
 - o setting down a limited number of dates on which the government confronts the education sector with legislation and regulations;
 - o an integrated annual document focusing on accountability and reduction of the burden of questionnaires from the Education Inspectorate;
 - o in addition, in recent years the Ministry of OCW has been working on regulations for the secondary education sector aimed at reducing the administrative burden and achieving deregulation:
 - for instance, the introduction of learning-plus schemes for poverty problem accumulation areas instead of the ethnic minorities arrangements;
 - the introduction of the education number, enabling institutions to report more efficiently on the study progress of their pupils;
 - the simplification of planning regulations whereby various procedures for receiving permission for the expansion of buildings will be abolished;
 - the government will decentralise the setting of fringe benefits in the secondary education sector with effect from July 2007.
- In the primary education sector too, significant measures have been taken in the domain of reducing the administrative burden:
 - o lump sum funding was introduced with effect from 1 August 2006 resulting in the abolishing of countless administrative procedures in respect of government financing. Schools no longer need to make declarations and the lump sum removes the barriers between budgets and other expenditure restrictions. There is a single budget for school boards and in this way complete freedom from financial policy has been achieved for the primary education sector;

- the setting of fringe benefits for the primary education sector was also decentralised as of 1 August 2006 and this has created more room for customised working at the institution level. The decentralisation of the terms and conditions of employment in the primary school sector is expected to take place as of 1 January 2009.

Accountability

Bearing responsibility goes hand in hand with being held accountable. Greater individual responsibility for school boards therefore should go together with assuring proper accountability for the way in which this responsibility is borne by schools. Good governance involves both the relationship between the government and the institutions and governance within the institutions themselves. In other words, the internal relationship between checks & balances.

In the higher education sector, the Minister of Education is responsible for the performance of the higher education system but is not responsible for the administration and management of the individual institutions. Therefore, the Minister must have proper, reliable information available on the performances and that means that the government is tightening up the ways in which institutions are held accountable. In this approach, the institutions themselves are responsible for good governance – including the internal monitoring of the institution – and they will have to be increasingly accountable to their social environment (horizontal accountability).

Currently, the secondary education sector is experimenting with various instruments in respect of horizontal accountability.

Vertical supervision by the government remains, but the Education Inspectorate will be using this instrument proportionately and selectively, according to the degree to which the institutions have organised their internal supervision, whereby smoothly running programmes or institutions are less often and/or less comprehensively inspected or reviewed. “Allowing room” therefore means that the accountability and supervisory burden for the institution concerned can be reduced and that sound annual reporting will be sufficient for the state.

The role and task of the government

As the government steps back, it must in its turn ensure that it does not fence in the room and freedom created with replacement rules as this would negate the intended effect of deregulation. To minimise this risk, the primary and secondary education sectors are developing an internal bureaucracy monitor. This monitor is an instrument that offers schools the room to work on reducing their red tape. Schools and their organisations are developing this instrument themselves. In this context, work is currently being done in the secondary education sector on developing a “code of good governance” that is expected to be finalised in the autumn of 2007.

Within the framework of deregulation, in cooperation with other ministries, the Ministry of OCW is developing alternatives to legislation and regulations whereby the government will only use legislation and regulations as the final tool for achieving policy objectives.

In coming years, these governance principles will be anchored in legislation.

To this end, in the near future a bill on good governance for the primary education and secondary education sectors will be submitted to the Lower House.

3.1.2 *Stimulating private investment from enterprises, households and individuals.*

Given that education must be accessible for everyone, the government pays the bulk of the costs. The rest is paid by pupils, participants and students or their parents. Their financial contribution consists of two items: school costs or study costs and school, course or tuition fees. School costs are the costs connected to the school and teaching, such as expenditure on books, travel expenses and the voluntary parents' contribution.

The government has no policy aimed at stimulating private investment in primary and secondary education.

School fees have been abolished with effect from the commencement of the 2005/2006 school year. Thus, there are no statutory costs for pupils in primary and secondary education. This also applies to pupils in special primary and secondary special education and to sixteen and seventeen-year-olds in vocational training courses (BOL) within secondary vocational education. In October 2006, the Dutch Lower House adopted a motion on providing school textbooks free of charge in the secondary education sector. The Minister of OCW has indicated that this motion will be implemented. The main reason for supplying free school textbooks is to lower school costs for parents. The intention is that secondary schools will purchase and pay for the textbooks.

Statutory regulations apply to sponsoring in the primary and secondary education sectors. In addition to these statutory regulations, the government has concluded the *Convenant Sponsoring* [Sponsoring Agreement] with stakeholders in the education sector. The *Convenant Sponsoring* does not contain statutory regulations but rather sets out collective agreements between the partners about how the education sector and the stakeholders should deal with sponsoring in primary and secondary education.

In order to bring young people in secondary vocational education into more contact with entrepreneurship during their study, in November 2005 the *Leren ondernemen* [Learning Entrepreneurship] partnership was launched with the aim of actively disseminating and expanding good practices. The government establishes structural regional and sectoral joint ventures to stimulate combined learning and working routes and to create preconditions to facilitate work-based learning routes.

In higher education, students have to pay tuition fees. There are statutory regulations on tuition fees and students pay these fees to the education institution (academic university or university of professional education) once they have been admitted into a full-time programme. Tuition fees are compensated by a supplementary grant. Students who do not receive a supplementary grant may take out a loan.

Students who have reached the age of 30 have to pay tuition fees set by the institution itself. These tuition fees also apply to foreign students who are not nationals of EU/EER Member States or who are not entitled to receive student grants and to students who are enrolled in work-based learning routes or part-time programmes.

Within the framework of the Educational Experiments Act, for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years, the Ministry of OCW has granted five institutions the authority to charge

higher tuition fees for particular programmes. To be granted this leeway, the programmes in question must have added social value. In other words, these programmes must offer students something extra compared to standard programmes and thereby distinguish themselves in terms of quality.

3.1.3 *Widening access, and improving equity of participation, treatment and outcomes, especially for disadvantaged learners (e.g. migrants, ethnic minorities, the disabled).*

In the Netherlands, the parallel existence of different structures for pupils with special needs has led to a lack of clarity concerning the responsibilities within the primary and secondary education sectors. As a result, many (too many) pupils fall through the cracks. The introduction of a duty of care / obligation to deliver results in fit for purpose education could offer a solution. Based on the obligation to deliver results, school boards would be given the responsibility of offering a fit for purpose educational programme for each enrolled pupil. This could be at the school itself, or, if the school cannot offer such a programme, at another school (in the neighbourhood). The intention is to couple the obligation to provide results to significant deregulation, among other things, by simplifying the special needs assessment procedure and the requirements set down for cooperation.

In the Netherlands, some pupils enter primary education with educational disadvantages. The policy on eliminating educational disadvantages focuses on the early identification and combating of disadvantages in the primary education sector. Therefore, for children between the ages of 2.5 and 6, the government is strengthening the position of early childhood education. Bridging classes are also in place offering intensive language teaching to children with a significant Dutch language disadvantage. The intention is that in 2009, 36,000 pupils will have participated in bridging classes. Moreover, in the coming school years, pilots in the area of language policy will offer schools additional possibilities to improve the language disadvantages of their pupils.

In accordance with the weighting system, children whose parents have a low educational level will receive a higher weighting than children whose parents have a higher educational background. Primary schools will receive additional funding for these children.

Secondary schools that have to deal with an accumulation of problems (a plurality of problems expressed in an increased risk of truancy, delays in the school career, early school leaving, criminality and/or youth care problems) will receive additional funds within the framework of the learning plus schemes for secondary education. The objective is to contribute to the reduction of early school leaving, to maximise school performances and to be able to deliver more tailored work. To determine which schools are experiencing such an accumulation of problems, the starting point is the "accumulation area" indicator of Statistics Netherlands and the Social and Cultural Planning Office. Whenever 30% of the pupils (both ethnic minority and native Dutch pupils) originate from such an area, the school will receive additional funding for a two-year period.

The government encourages the establishment of community schools by providing information on the internet, offering practical manuals and having research conducted. A community school is a structural cooperation between various institutions surrounding the children. It is a joint venture between a primary or secondary school and, for example, a child care centre, play school, or cultural or sports institution, but also with youth care or special

needs institutions. Which partners will cooperate in community schools is decided at the local level, whereby tailored provisions are made that expand the development opportunities of the children concerned. The estimation is that there are currently 750 community schools in the Dutch primary education sector and just under 400 in the secondary education sector.

In recent years, the Ministry of OCW has supported projects aimed at opening dialogue about and tolerance of homosexuality. For instance, there are regular regional meetings organised at which key figures in education are brought together to establish the network necessary to keep this item on the agenda. An example of such projects is *De Vrolijke Schooldag* [The Gay School Day] project that encourages schools to set down the state of affairs at their school regarding diversity policy, and to think about follow-up measures to improve this policy.

A structural facility, the website www.gayandschool.nl, was commissioned by the Ministry and is implemented under the auspices of the Centre for School and Safety. The website and its helpdesk provide schools with information, and on request, with advice on this subject.

Regarding higher education, the results of a study carried out in 2005 show that there has been a slight improvement for the disabled in comparison with 2001 in the degree of hindrance encountered in following a course of study in this sector. On the other hand, the results also show that solutions for certain obstacles were lacking in many larger institutions in 2005. In light of the nature and scope of the problem, in 2005 the government decided to make additional resources available to higher education institutions up until 2009 to enable them to take the measures needed, to conduct research into the outcomes and success of these measures, to maintain qualitative support to institutions and students by an Expertise Centre and to carry out a communication campaign to make problems and existing solutions better known and to advance understanding.

A target in the higher education sector is to improve both the intake and yield of ethnic minority students up to the level of native Dutch students. To this end, the government has set aside additional funds and has concluded performance agreements with 21 higher education institutions. Furthermore, there are a number of other projects aimed at offering ethnic-minority students equal opportunities in higher education, such as the ECHO Award for successful ethnic-minority students and the UAF to allow refugee students to study.

3.1.4 *Measures to address gender aspects in education and training.*

The Ministry of OCW, the programmes and the projects are all devoting attention to gender equality in education and training with the emphasis on a greater intake of girls and women into the exact sciences and technology disciplines and a better transfer of women to higher positions in education management. Other aspects of gender equality such as unseen distinctions made according to gender in interactions in the classroom and advancing the participation of men and boys in care and teacher training programmes are receiving less attention. Recent research argues for this.

Among other things, the programme for the broadening of science and technology in primary education (VTB) devotes attention to target groups that are under-represented in science and technology occupations. VTB includes emancipation and gender issues in its knowledge

and information provision to schools. The objective of this is to encourage awareness of the possible differences in the actions of teachers and pupils in lessons in which technology plays a significant role.

In recent years, the Secondary Education Council has received a subsidy to implement a programme to ensure more women move up to management positions. This resulted in the *Convenant professionalisering en begeleiding van onderwijspersoneel* [Agreement on the professionalisation and support of education staff] for the primary and secondary education sectors. This agreement sets down a number of agreements between the Minister and employers' and employees' associations about the professionalisation and support of staff in the education sector. This agreement was signed in the summer of 2006.

Few specific measures have yet been taken in the secondary vocational sector (MBO) regarding the advancement of gender equality. In the *Glazen Muur* [Glass Walls] project attention is paid to the transfer of girls from pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) to MBO courses with a male image (like technology).

In terms of the total quantitative participation in higher education, gender inequality disappeared many years ago. However, there is a constant imbalance in the distribution of participation in individual sectors and disciplines. An expertise centre that provides advice and support with regard to removing gender inequality at the institution and higher levels— in particular in the exact sciences and technological disciplines in higher education – continues to provide support. Since 2005, resources provided by the European Social Fund made it possible to finance a project intended to promote the choice of exact sciences and technology at the decision moments in the educational and working careers of girls. This is done by utilising realistic information, additional guidance counselling, contact with role models and by informing, counselling and advising education institutions, lecturers and employers.

The participation of women in higher positions in knowledge institutions is increasing but is not yet sufficient. It is worth noting that the results of the policy implemented will only be reflected in the statistics in several years time. The proportion of women in scientific positions has slowly but surely increased since 1990. A rising trend can be seen of women winning through to the positions of university lecturer, senior university lecturer and professor. Women make up 40% of successful PhD candidates. One of the main barriers in transferring lies between the position of university lecturer and that of senior university lecturer. There is little growth in the numbers of lecturers and the appointment of senior lecturers to professorial chairs leads to a low number of female senior lecturers.

At the European level, the Netherlands still rates poorly regarding the appointment of female professors. The 2006 Female Professors Monitor that was published in October shows that although the percentage of female professors increased last year from 9.3% to 9.9% (in 2000 it was only 5%), compared to the rest of Europe this percentage is still low.

3.1.5 *The use of learning outcome based approaches for the definition and design of education and training objectives, standards and curricula, and their relevance to the needs of society and the economy.*

In 2004, together with schools and education specialists, the Ministry of OCW set 58 new attainment targets for primary education (cf. 3.2.2). The attainment targets for special education will be set in the coming school year. The (possible) introduction of learning standards for primary education will be covered in the wider discussion about the accountability of schools for learning outcomes. Attainment targets and learning standards contribute to the quality of education and to a guaranteed minimum level by the end of primary school (year 8; 11-12 year-olds).

In secondary vocational education, learning-working pathways lead to a qualification in secondary vocational or higher professional education or to a certificate recognised by the trade or sector concerned. Recognised qualifications or certificates contribute to the mobility of workers on the labour market by providing demonstrable proof of competencies. The quality code introduced for the recognition of acquired competencies (RAC) on 14 November 2005, provides for the assurance of the quality of the RAC procedure and this increases trust in the instrument.

In higher education, the institutions are responsible for their own programme objectives, programme standards and curricula. They are also responsible for coordinating these elements with the relevant stakeholders.

3.1.6 *Quality assurance systems*

School boards in the primary and secondary education sectors are themselves responsible for the quality of the education provided. Schools must meet a number of quality requirements (certified teachers, offer courses in accordance with attainment targets, set working methods down in a school plan, set down accountability in a school guide). In the primary education sector, cohort studies track the development of groups of pupils and periodic measurements set the levels for the different subjects.

Primary and secondary schools are accountable to the government for the quality of their education through the Education Inspectorate. The Inspectorate reports on this in a school report that it publishes on the internet and processes in aggregated form in the annual Education Report. The government itself also conducts studies into the quality of education.

The revision in 2006 of the assessment standards developed in 2002 by the Kwaliteitscentrum Examinering [Quality Assurance Centre for Examinations] allows these standards to be used within competence-oriented, key-task focused professional practice education.

Over the past two years, higher education institutions and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) have worked hard on the further introduction of the accreditation system. By 2010, all existing programmes must be accredited. Interim evaluation shows that the accreditation system, with a few critical comments, is functioning as expected. The Ministry of OCW together with NVAO, institutions and other stakeholders (students, employers) is searching for a new, simpler and less burdensome model of accreditation that must be operational by 2010. In 2007, an international NVAO evaluation will take place within the framework of the ENQA. The standards and guidelines set down by

the education Ministers in Bergen (2005) will form the guideline.

3.1.7 *Developing learning partnerships with stakeholders (policy-makers at national, regional and local levels, social partners, learners and representatives of civil society).*

The Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working is a joint venture between various ministries that in one way or another are involved in adult education (cf. 2.3). This cooperation ensures coordinated action in the area of lifelong learning.

The task of the Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working is to establish regional and sectoral joint ventures aimed at advancing combinations of learning and working. The joint ventures mainly consist of representatives from municipalities, provinces, social partners, education institutions, Centres for Work and Income (job creation) and companies.

3.2.1 *Increasing investment in and strengthening pre-primary school education,*

Pre-school and early childhood education (in Dutch abbreviated to VVE) involves children under the compulsory school age and can if necessary continue through the initial compulsory schooling years. The children participate in educational programmes that stimulate their development and combat and prevent educational disadvantages. This increases the chances of these children to have a proper school career and later a good social career.

- Play schools and on occasion child day care centres offer the pre-school component of the VVE programme. In the pre-primary school period, 46% of the target group children are reached.
- Primary schools offer the early childhood education component of the VVE programme. In the early primary period, 69% of the target group children are reached. The municipalities are responsible for the early primary school period.

Using the resources made available by the municipalities and school boards, municipalities and schools are expected to reach 70% of the target group children by 2010. For the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 school years, the government has provided municipalities with an additional budget, the use of which should enable 70 % of the target group to be reached in the course of 2009.

3.2.2 *Modernising school curricula and assessment arrangements (inter alia to address learning outcomes and the attainment of key competences).*

In 2004, together with schools and education specialists, the Ministry of OCW set 58 new attainment targets for the primary education sector – both mainstream and special education – that went into effect in the 2005-2006 school year. As of August 2006, nursery classes have been working with these targets and in August 2009 they will be applied across the entire primary education sector.

For each learning domain, the Ministry identified the objectives that are essential for the development of pupils of primary school age. In addition, it was determined which objectives promote a smooth link with secondary education. For Dutch language and arithmetic/maths the attainment targets are more precisely described than for the so-called factual and expressive subjects for which more room is allowed for the school itself to determine content.

In respect of the former attainment targets from 1998, the number of attainment targets per learning area has been reduced.

Learning lines and interim targets have been developed for schools that would like support in translating the attainment targets into daily education practice. A learning line indicates for a particular learning area how children of a particular starting level can arrive at the attainment target. The interim targets are important moments in the learning line. The use of learning lines and interim targets improves teachers' possibilities for tracking the development of their pupils. Moreover, it provides them with a guideline for achieving the attainment targets.

Since 1 August 2006, 58 broad attainment targets have been in force in the secondary education sector. These attainment targets set down the aspects to which schools should devote attention in the first two learning years. Schools should elaborate the attainment targets in their education programme for the different groups of pupils at different levels. The schools determine themselves the structure of the lower school programme: in the form of subjects, cross-curricular learning areas, projects or otherwise.

For pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO), the modernisation of the curricula has been fleshed out through the broadening of the attainment targets. The Secondary Education Act (WVO) only contains an amended curriculum for the VMBO learning-working pathways (a pedagogic-didactic concept within the basic vocational programme). These pupils follow an almost completely occupation-oriented programme.

To strengthen the continuous learning pathway from VMBO to MBO, projects have been launched with the aim of better harmonising the VMBO and MBO curricula and thus arrive at a single, integrated learning pathway.

Over the past two years, exhaustive discussion has taken place about a new set-up for the second stage of pre-university education (VWO) and senior general secondary education (HAVO): the subject clusters. New subject clusters will go into effect as of 1 August 2007. The structure of the subject clusters has been amended so that there is no longer significant fragmentation of subjects at the expense of depth. The exam programmes of the individual subjects have also been modified to create the possibility of more depth and to achieve a better balance between knowledge and skills.

3.2.3 *Addressing the specific learning / training needs of teachers (including pre-primary school) to enable them to cope with their changing roles in the knowledge-based society.*

On 30 June 2006, the Minister of OCW concluded the *Convenant professionalisering en begeleiding van onderwijspersoneel in het primair en voortgezet onderwijs* [Agreement on the professionalisation and support of staff in primary and secondary education] with education sector employers' and employees' associations. As a result of this agreement, as of 1 August 2006, primary and secondary schools receive additional resources for the professionalisation and support of education staff. The agreement is mainly aimed at expanding the possibilities for further development for teachers and other education staff within the school. The agreement contains arrangements about maintaining competency requirements and about training and professionalisation in relation to the Education Professions Act and the competency dossier. These arrangements have been further elaborated in the decentralised collective labour agreements.

3.2.4 *Measures to reduce early school leaving, to increase rates of completion of upper secondary education, to reduce the proportion of low-achieving 15 year olds in literacy, and to increase the take-up of mathematics, science and technology subjects (EU benchmarks).*

Every year, data from the Labour Force Survey (EEB) is used to monitor the proportion of young people aged 18-24 without basic qualifications who have not participated in either regular education or in courses or other short programmes during the previous 4 weeks. From 2000 to 2006, the total number of 18-24 year-olds without basic qualifications and not attending school fell. This drop is not sufficient to achieve the Lisbon objectives by 2010 (halving the number of early school leavers in the 18-24 years age group compared to 2000). These figures clearly show that together, schools, employers, support facilities and other parties involved still have to make a significant effort. The municipalities will play an important, coordinating role in this respect.

As part of the working agenda of the *Aanval op de uitval* project [Combating School Failure, 2006], agreements were concluded in 2006 with the 14 municipalities with the highest dropout rates. In 2007, this should lead to a reduction of 10% in new and existing early school leavers. The Dutch Lower House agreed to the introduction of the qualification obligation, which, if approved by the Upper House, can go into effect in the 2007-2008 school year. The qualification obligation requires all young people up to the age of 18 who have not obtained basic qualifications while of compulsory school age, to follow a complete education programme until they obtain a basic qualification (cf. 3.4.6). Other examples of implemented measures are the strengthening of pre-school and early childhood education, the expansion of guidance counselling for pupils with special needs in secondary vocational education and the acquisition of additional internship places.

In 2004, in order to increase the number of higher educated persons in the exact sciences and technology sectors (by 15% by 2010), the Ministers of Education and Economic Affairs drew up a Delta Plan for Science and Technology that the Lower House accepted and that has been implemented since that time. The Platform Bèta Techniek [Science and Technology Platform] plays a central role in this programme that initiates actions at school and institutions throughout the entire education sector, from primary education through to higher education, with the aim of increasing the appeal of choosing science and technology disciplines. This programme will run up to and including 2010 (cf. 3.3.4).

The programme for the extension of science and technology in primary education (VTB) forms the basis for the action plan. In 2008, 2500 primary schools will have started to introduce and expand science and technology lessons. VTB schools will receive a financial incentive for a period of three years. With this financial contribution and support from the local Regional Support Centre, schools will organise and integrate science and technology into their programmes, organisation and education policy. There are currently over 1330 VTB schools. From September 2007, there will be room for a further 600 new VTB schools.

3.3.1 *Measures to reinforce the knowledge triangle between education, research and innovation.*

With a view to strengthening the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation, the Dutch government has recently implemented the following measures:

- The *RAAK* scheme [Regional Attention and Action for Knowledge Circulation] aims to reinforce the knowledge bridge function between universities of professional education on the one hand and the business community and society on the other. The scheme provides funding to set up cooperation projects between universities of professional education and small and medium-sized businesses and social sectors. The scheme has been so successful that demand has outstripped supply.
- The *Subsidieregeling Innovatievouchers* [Innovation Vouchers Subsidy Scheme] was launched in 2006 with the aim of bringing small and medium-sized business entrepreneurs into contact with knowledge institutions and using existing knowledge to improve their products, production processes or services. Companies can be granted subsidies to have the knowledge institutions carry out short-term studies. Here too, demand has outstripped supply.
- In 2005, the NWO first implemented the Casimir Programme. The focus of the programme is to have science and technology researchers from public knowledge institutions work temporarily for companies and vice versa.
- In November 2005, the Learning Entrepreneurship Partnership was launched; the aim of this partnership is to encourage entrepreneurial skills and an enterprising attitude in education.
- Moreover, in 2007 a number of Centres for Entrepreneurship were established at universities of professional education or academic universities. From 2007, funding is structurally available for university lecturers and knowledge networks.
- On the initiative of the innovation platform, funds for *Smart Mix* have been available since 2006. This programme encourages cooperation between businesses, social institutions and knowledge institutions.

3.3.2 Any participation targets and measures to achieve them?

The Dutch government aims to have more of its population highly educated to advance a successful, internationally competitive knowledge society. In 2020, 50% of the professional population aged 25 to 44 will have a higher education. According to the statistics, in 2004 higher education graduates accounted for almost 36% of the Dutch professional population in the 25-44 age bracket.

The Netherlands has almost achieved the target of 50% participation in higher education: the expectation is that 50% of the population born in 1988 will have entered higher education. The participation level of the group aged up to 23 years is currently 44%.

The transfer from secondary vocational education and secondary education is running smoothly. The transfer rate is now relatively high (secondary to higher education about 87%, secondary vocational to higher professional education about 50%, 34% of which transfer directly and the rest with a delay of one or more years). The number of persons who have at least completed upper secondary education (HAVO, VWO and MBO level 2 or higher) is continuing to increase (from 58% in 1996 to 65% in 2004). There is, however, a great deal of social concern about the quality of education at all levels and about the quality of the intake into higher education. In the coming years, the government will therefore make additional investments in the quality of the education provided.

A comparison with OECD figures for the age groups of 25-34 and 35-44 shows that the percentage of higher education graduates places the Netherlands in the middle bracket in the international context.

3.3.3 *Measures to increase excellence*

An increasing amount of attention is being given to children with special gifts (highly intelligent, artistically gifted, talented in sport and talented in entrepreneurship). The policy for highly intelligent children focuses on good cooperation between the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) for primary education and the Protestant Educational Advisory Centre (CPS) for secondary education. Work is being done to establish a nationwide network of so-called talent profile schools. The network of *LOOT* schools (*LOOT*: National Consultation Board for Top-Class Sports and Education) that focuses on pupils who are gifted in sports, will be expanded. Schools can also submit an application for development as a cultural profile school. These schools focus on the cultural education of gifted pupils.

The development of programmes that challenge ambitious and exceptionally gifted students is receiving additional financial stimulation in the *Ruim baan voor talent* [Room for Talent] programme. Within that context, in 2005 experiments were launched with programmes that – contrary to the law – selected students and/or increased tuition fees. The aim is to learn whether selection and/or differentiation in tuition fees are good instruments to raise the quality of programmes. The experiments will end in 2007, whereupon the government will decide whether or not to legalise the possibilities of student selection and tuition fees differentiation. In 2006, also in the *Room for Talent* programme, financial support was given to the development of programmes that specifically *do not* select students and/or differentiate tuition fees, the so-called honours programmes.

3.3.4 *Measures to increase the number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology (EU benchmark).*

The 2003 National Science and Technology Action Plan, aimed at arriving at more higher education graduates in the fields of science and technology, encompasses an approach that focused on the whole chain from primary school through to the labour market with the objective of achieving 15% more graduates in higher science and technology disciplines by 2010 compared to 2000 (cf. 3.1.4). The interim target is to achieve a 15% higher intake into these programmes in 2007 compared to 2000. To this end, in 2004, an implementation organisation was set up, the *Platform Bèta Techniek* [Science and Technology Platform]. Currently, hundreds of companies and sectors, 1300 primary schools (in the future increasing to 2500), 250 HAVO/VWO schools in the secondary education sector, 50 VMBO schools (which will grow to 100-150), an increasing number of Regional Training Centres (ROCs) – currently 12 and in the future some 25 – and all academic universities and universities of professional education are working with the science and technology approach. The initial results have been predominantly positive: the participating schools, knowledge institutions and companies are enthusiastic. Experts believe that 85% of primary schools and the large majority of secondary schools are on the way to achieving the desired final

outcomes. For the higher education sector this applies to 8 of the 11 participating academic universities and to 10 of the 18 participating universities of professional education.

The intake results in higher science and technology education are:

- in 2006, the interim target for academic universities of a 15% increase in intake compared to 2000 was more than met with a growth of 21.7%. The output target was also achieved: +29.5%.
- The universities of professional education (HBO) performed less well: the intake in 2006 fell by 7.5% and the output by 1.2% compared to 2000.
- In the higher education sector as a whole, in 2006 the intake rose by 1.6% and the output by 7.1% compared to 2000. The expectation is that in higher professional education too the targets will be met, but later than had been planned.

3.4.1 *Measures to improve the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training and of adult education.*

A trial was started in 2004 involving competency-oriented professional programmes based on competency-oriented qualifications profiles. The development of a new qualifications framework and the new programmes and exams based on this framework, ensure a better link with the labour market and the needs of society. In the 2005-2006 school year, some 10% of the total number of pupils in secondary vocational education entered an experimental programme.

3.4.2 *Measures to reinforce the link between VET and labour market needs including early identification of skills needs, improving the relevance of curricula and qualifications.*

The 2005 innovation scheme adds substance to the goal of contributing to the innovation of vocational education within the context of strengthening the relationship between education and the business community. The aim is to strengthen the learning careers of the participants through projects implemented at the regional/sectoral level in joint ventures involving schools/institutions of vocational education, companies and possibly other organisations. In 2006, a total of 23 projects were funded on the basis of the *Subsidierегeling innovatiearrangement 2005* [2005 Innovation Subsidy Scheme]. To solve the internship placements problem in secondary vocational education, over 20,000 additional internship and simulation places have been realised for participants who are difficult to place. These participants receive intensive guidance counselling.

3.4.3 *Opening up pathways to further and higher education.*

A number of measures have been implemented to enhance the link between VMBO and secondary vocational education. For instance, in 2006 a project was launched in which young people who had not yet enrolled in a secondary vocational education programme were counselled over the summer months to enable them to make a choice from the courses offered by the Regional Training Centres. Furthermore, projects were started aimed at improving the conditions needed for the smooth transfer of education and special needs data. The *Intensiveringsprogramma Kwaliteit Zorgadviestteams* [Intensification Programme for the Quality of Special Needs Advisory Teams] devotes express attention to the transfer of special needs data at the transfer moments in the learning career of pupils.

The harmonisation of the training programmes and study counselling of the secondary vocational education and higher professional education sectors will improve the transfer of students from secondary vocational to higher professional education. This would offer MBO graduates who transfer to related HBO programmes the possibility of shortened learning paths. The Regional Training Centres and universities of professional education can themselves make agreements in this respect.

3.4.4 *Addressing the specific learning / training needs of vocational and adult teachers and trainers to enable them to cope with their changing roles in the knowledge-based society*

The further strengthening of an integrated staff policy was mentioned in the previous report. The introduction and development of a competency-oriented qualifications framework for the secondary vocational education sector sets different requirements for the organisation of learning processes and consequently requires different competencies from teachers. The further strengthening of an integrated staff policy at institutions is aimed at developing the competencies of the school staff and maintaining the competencies of teaching staff. There have been no changes to this item since the previous report.

3.4.5 *Measures which reinforce social partner involvement in training, in particular sectoral approaches to skills and qualifications.*

The approach of the Netherlands is demand oriented: the wishes and needs of employers are the starting point. A training institution or a company advisor determines the training needs of the company and the individual staff members in consultation with the employer. A RAC procedure measures the previously acquired competencies and determines what additional training is needed to obtain the desired qualification. The training institution is expected to deliver tailored work. This is not yet always achieved but the institutions are working hard to improve their methods so that the needs of the (regional) business community can actually be met.

3.4.6 *Enhancing access and opportunities for learning among the disadvantaged, and alternative pathways, including for early school leavers.*

One of the measures to further reduce the number of early school leavers is the qualification obligation. The Lower House has adopted the legislative proposal for the introduction of this measure. To find a suitable position on the labour market, young people need to have at least a basic qualification: a HAVO, VWO or MBO level 2 diploma. Additional measures are aimed at participants at MBO levels 1 and 2. For instance, in 2004/2005, programmes to qualify for work were introduced that have a broad orientation on the labour market. These programmes are largely aimed at young people who do not know what they want to do and have dropped out of school early, with the intention of guiding them back to the education system.

The internship scheme *Stagebox* also has the aim of providing suitable internship places for participants at MBO levels 1 and 2 and to supply them with additional guidance counselling during their internships.

3.4.7 *Measures to increase the rate of adult participation in lifelong learning, and to reinforce key competences among adult learners and older people whether employed or not (EU benchmark).*

The approach of the Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working (cf. 2.3) is intended to encourage learning among the less-educated whereby the emphasis lies on the small and medium-sized business sector. Fiscal measures aimed at obtaining basic qualifications and RAC support this activity. Training from secondary level to a higher level is also a priority. Employers are eligible for compensation for the related school costs. Furthermore, in 2006 a two-year short programme was launched in the higher education sector: the so-called Associate Degree. The expectation is that this programme will appeal to employed people with a secondary school education who would like to reach a higher education level but find a four-year programme too long.