



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Culture

Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies
Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies

Brussels, December 2005

IMPLEMENTING THE 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010'

WORK PROGRAMME

2005 Progress Report



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Agenda

1.1. The Lisbon Strategy and education policy

The Lisbon Strategy has contributed significantly to the development of education policy in the Netherlands, as shown by the following:

- The central focus placed on the knowledge economy in the Lisbon agreements of 2000 has caused subsequent governments to invest more in education.¹
- The importance attached to science and technology as a result of the Lisbon agreements probably contributed to the 2003 coalition agreement's pledge to encourage students "to enrol for and complete science, engineering and technology degrees, if necessary by unorthodox measures".² A national plan was subsequently drawn up to achieve this goal.
- Following the establishment of the EU benchmarks (May 2003) a Dutch EU Education Benchmarks Action Plan³ was drawn up, setting out the national efforts needed to achieve these EU targets.

No national targets in the field of education were set in the Netherlands to increase investment in human resources.

National targets, however, have been linked to the EU-benchmarks. The above-mentioned Action Plan, which was also sent to the House of Representatives, indicates that the Netherlands will focus its efforts on combating early school leaving and increasing the number of science and technology graduates. The Netherlands already scores either reasonably well or well for the other targets, but in those areas, too, it has set its own national targets. It has been agreed that these targets will be monitored annually in the budgetary and accountability cycle of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (hereafter: the Ministry).

Increasing the number of graduates is extremely important for the knowledge economy. Efforts are therefore being made to increase the number of students transferring from secondary vocational education (MBO) to higher professional education (HBO). Throughput needs to be improved both directly, with MBO leavers moving straight on to HBO, and indirectly by upgrading the skills of people with MBO qualifications (both the employed and jobseekers) – through either part-time courses or courses combining working and learning. Students' careers are central to this process: they must be able to proceed easily from MBO to HBO (and from one stage of MBO to the next). In the process, the government needs where necessary to remove obstacles between the various

¹ See Balkenende I (2002) coalition agreement <http://www.regering.nl/regeringsbeleid/balkenende1/regeerakkoord/onderwijs.jsp> and Balkenende II (2003) coalition agreement: http://www.regering.nl/regeringsbeleid/bronnen/regeerakkoord/42_17366.jsp

² See Balkenende II (2003) coalition agreement: http://www.regering.nl/regeringsbeleid/bronnen/regeerakkoord/42_17366.jsp

³ Dutch EU Education Benchmarks Action Plan, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands, December 2003, http://www.minocw.nl/english/doc/2004/eu_benchmarks_en.pdf

education sectors. Of course, the knowledge society needs skilled and qualified workers at MBO level. So, in addition to furnishing students for HBO, MBO will continue to play an important role in its own right.

The aims and agreements ensuing from the Bologna process as well as the aims and agreements originating from “Lisbon” are topic in policy. For instance, recent Dutch legislation makes it mandatory to provide a Diploma Supplement with certificates issued to graduates of higher education programmes, in line with the Berlin agreements. National policy geared to increasing the number of science and technology graduates was already mentioned. The Lisbon ambitions also contributed to including the theme of quality in higher education and research in the Bologna objectives of the quality of higher education and research and the Lisbon and Bologna aspirations are mentioned in national policy memoranda. This makes them part of national policy.

In December 2004, 32 European countries, the European Social Partners and the European Commission adopted the Maastricht Communiqué in a follow-up to agreements made in the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training. The Communiqué sets out European and national priorities and the action to be taken in the next few years by all the member states involved. For the Netherlands this largely entails creating open, attractive learning environments, and developing teaching methods for vocational education. The professionalisation of teachers has been made a priority, in the Netherlands and in Europe as a whole. As far as implementation is concerned, the Netherlands will be linking the Maastricht Communiqué and *Koers BVE*, the policy document on vocational education and adult education (*Koers BVE*) drawn up in close consultation with the teaching field, which sets out vocational and adult education policy in the medium term.

1.2. European aims and national policy

The following problems occur when translating European aims into national policy:

- Such policy often already exists, but the aims are formulated or measured differently. It is not always desirable to replace national policy or aims (which often already have an entire monitoring and data collection system) with their European equivalent.
- Increasing autonomy is central to Dutch education policy. However, the speed of the European decision-making process takes no account of the time involved in coordinating with the field and other actors. During the Dutch EU presidency, the Ministry started regular “Europe talks” with representatives of the field with a view to overcoming these problems.

Visibility of the Lisbon working programme:

- The working programme was sent to the House of Representatives and discussed.⁴
- An information meeting was held (January 2003, co-financed by the EU) to inform the teaching field, and the working programme was also sent to

⁴ Parliamentary papers 21 501-06, no. 49

participants.

- The Dutch Education Council drew up an advisory report on the significance for the Netherlands of the EU benchmarks.⁵ The advisory report and the education minister's response⁶ were sent to the House of Representatives in 2003.
- An international meeting was held in the Netherlands for and by the Basic Skills working group.

EU-benchmarks: national and European data

1. Early school leavers

The European target is to reduce the percentage of those belonging to the 18-24 year age group, who are not following any education and are not in possession of a diploma from higher secondary education, to 10 % by 2010.

In 2000 the European average (25 member states) was 17,2 %, in 2004: 15,9 %. The Commission concludes that insufficient progress has been made.

The Netherlands adopted as targets, in the Action Plan EU-benchmarks, a percentage of early school leavers of 8 % by 2010 (a reduction by half as compared to 2000). In 2002 the percentage was 15,0 %. All surrounding countries perform better on this topic, with Denmark achieving, in 2004, with 8,1 % the best result. The new member states generally do well in this field. The Netherlands' progress is insufficient to reach the 2010 target.

2. Mathematic, science and technology students

The European target is a rise of 15 % in the number of graduates and Ph D-students in mathematics, science and technology (MTS) between 2000 and 2010. The Netherlands also adopted this 15 % target. Between 2000-2002 the number of graduates in MTS studies in Europe increased annually by 4,6 %, in the Netherlands by 4,3 %. This growth in the Netherlands is higher than in surrounding countries, but the absolute level of participation in MTS studies remains relatively low. The Commission, however, concludes that the target will be largely achieved if this trend persists.

At the same time the EU progress report shows that within the Netherlands the volume of graduates in MTS subjects, seen as percentage of the total number of graduates, remains virtually stable. Thus, it seems that the Netherlands' results are rather the outcome of a general increase in the number of students than of a relative shift to MTS studies.

3. Youth training level

The European target aims at, at least, 85 % of 20-24 year age group graduated from higher secondary education (2004: 76,4 %). In 2004 the European average remains still at 76,4 %. The Netherlands' target is equally 85 % by 2010 (2000: 72 %). The score in 2002 is 73,3 %. Especially the new member states achieve excellent results on this target. Progress is insufficient both within the EU and within the Netherlands.

4. Reading skills

The European target is a decrease of 20 % of the percentage of 15 year olds with low reading skills between 2000 and 2010. In 2000 the average percentage of pupils with low reading skills within EU-countries participating in PISA was 19,4 %. In 2003 this was

⁵ Education Council: 'Europese richtpunten voor het Nederlands onderwijs', May 2003.
http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/pdfdocs/advies_europese_riichtpunten.pdf

⁶ letter of 1 July 2003, Parliamentary Papers 22112, 21501-34, no. 281

19,8 %. The Commission concludes that it will be difficult to attain the EU-target. In the Netherlands the percentage of pupils with low reading skills was 9,6 % in 2000 and 11,5 % in 2003. With this score the Netherlands once again belong together with Finland and Ireland, to the three best achievers within the EU. The Netherlands thus attain the national target to maintain the excellent level – in an international perspective – of reading skills. The rise of the Netherlands' PISA score has a predominantly statistical background: the introduction of prevocational secondary education has led to the inclusion, within secondary education and thus within the PISA-sample, of pupils formerly attributed to special education. Without these pupils the Netherlands would have achieved the same score in PISA 2003 as it did in PISA 2000.

5. Life long learning

The European target aims at participation, by 2010, of at least 12,5 % of the 25-64 year age group in learning activities (in 2000: 7,9 %). The Netherlands linked to this a national target of 20 % (in 2000: 15,6 %). Participation in life long learning within the EU in 2004 was 9,4 %. The Commission concludes that the upward trend has to accelerate in order to attain the target by 2010. The 2003 average in the Netherlands is 16,5 %. This growth rate too is not sufficient to attain the national target. From an international perspective, however, the absolute level of participation in life long learning is high in the Netherlands. Virtually all surrounding countries have a considerably lower percentage of adults who receive training (the United Kingdom forms an exception). Scandinavian countries do quite well.

Additional remarks to these data

- Definitions used for international comparison may differ from definitions current in the national context. Thus, for example, the Netherlands' definition of early school leavers differs slightly from the EU-definition. The progress report on early school leaving shows a drop of 10 % in the number of early school leavers as compared to 2002. This drop will, in the long run, also affect the data based on the EU-definition.
- Quality of international data is susceptible to improvement. Specifically data from the EU Labour Force Survey, used in monitoring targets on early school leaving, training level and life long learning, suffer from changes in definition and tendency. Thus also the Commission in its report points out that e.g. participation in lifelong learning within the EU mainly results from changes in statistical definitions. Eurostat and member states are combining efforts to improve international data.
- In this report, recent (2003) Netherlands' data on life long learning and training level are lacking. Due to a revision of the National Statistical Office's Survey on the Labour Force, the data could not be forwarded to international institutions on time.

Chapter 2 Investing more, and investing more efficiently: concentrating on reforms in crucial areas

2.1. Priorities

The Strategic Agenda of the Ministry gives the national priorities, but has also been influenced by "Lisbon". The Ministry's four priorities are to reduce the shortage of teachers, increase the autonomy of education institutions, encourage innovation (which

will take the form of encouraging students to choose science and technology courses) and promote participation. The Strategic Agenda also includes strengthening the EU-dimension of the Ministry's policy. The Ministry's total budget for 2005 is €26.6 billion. A total of €700 million extra is being invested, with emphasis on the four priorities. There is convergence between national priorities, European objectives and the Lisbon aspirations. These will be outlined below.

Reducing the shortage of teachers

Tackling the shortage of teachers is a top priority. Demand far outstrips supply. It is currently estimated that by 2007, there will be 10,400 vacancies. Efforts are being made to reduce this to 2,200. The profession needs to be made more attractive by providing better support for teachers, better supervision for lateral-entry teachers and more in-service training, and by improving the quality of teacher training courses.

Increasing autonomy

As seen from an international perspective Dutch schools have a high degree of autonomy. At the same time, they have a lot of rules to cope with. The Ministry proposes to reduce the administrative burden for both institutions and individuals (schoolchildren, students and parents) by a quarter by 2007. This will be done largely by abolishing rules, requiring information on the same topic less frequently, and coordinating reporting obligations to various institutions. The impact of the new measures in all sectors of education will also be made visible by means of a "barometer".

Financial and administrative structures will be (or have been) modified in line with the new approach. A block grant funding system was introduced in secondary education a few years ago. In primary education this will be introduced by 2006.

Part of the education support funding which used to come directly from central government has been transferred to schools under the National Education Support Activities (Subsidies) Act. Secondary schools can now decide what support services to purchase. In primary education this process is being prepared.

Innovation

A plan has been devised to reduce the shortage of science and technology graduates and research & development personnel. It contains measures extending from primary education to the labour market, and should lead to a 15% increase in science and technology graduates.

"Knowledge circulation" is an important and innovative strategy increasingly applied in higher education. It consists of a package of measures geared to increasing knowledge "yield". A post has just been created at Utrecht University of Professional Education to promote the application of this strategy, which could give higher professional education, and higher education in general, a huge boost.

Participation

In order to succeed, you have to take part. By 2006, the aim is to cut the number of early school leavers by 30% of the 2002 figure, and by 50% in 2010. To prevent school dropout now and in the future, the Ministry is working with all parties involved on themes such as safety, integration, combating educational disadvantage and updating

basic secondary education.

Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) was introduced a few years ago for pupils in the 12 to 16 age group. Taking four years to complete, it offers four learning pathways: 1) a theoretical programme, 2) a combined programme, 3) a basic vocational programme and 4) a middle-management vocational programme as well as practical training. The aim is to provide pupils at all levels with the right education, thus promoting participation.

A start has been made on making the vocational and adult education sector target-oriented and performance-driven. Here, too, in the 2004-2006 starting period, emphasis is on participation. This is in line with the fact that the four relevant indicators (three for reducing early school leaving, one for strengthening lifelong learning) yield data on participation.

Some important investments in the four priorities:

- working in teaching – €100 million extra was released in 2005 for making teaching more attractive. This will increase to €241 million in 2007;
- introduction of block grant funding – €57 million extra was released in 2005 for the introduction of block grant funding in primary education. This will increase to €98 million in 2007;
- innovation – €14 million and in 2005 for the “Delta action plan” to increase the number of science and technology graduates, €15 million for ICT up to and including 2006;
- safety in schools – almost €50 million was released in 2005, to increase to almost €90 million in 2007.

The European Structural Funds can also be used for Dutch education policy. Under objective 3 of the European Social Fund, the Ministry applies for grants for projects aimed at:

- combating early school leaving;
- strengthening day release schemes;
- integrating work into practical education and making special secondary education work-focused.

For projects for the further training of the workforce, municipalities and education & research funds apply for European Social Fund (ESF) grants from the *Agentschap SZW*, which is part of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. The Education Ministry recently decided to broaden scope for applying for ESF grants for education projects. Use of EU funds is also an important factor in higher education, research and science policy efforts to establish a knowledge society. The EU Framework Programmes on research are particularly significant.

2.2. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring, evaluation and research proceed along different lines, and are discussed below.

The bi-annual cohort of primary education (PRIMA cohort)

Since the 1994-1995 school year, a scheme has been in place to map teaching performance in years 2, 4, 6 and 8 of primary school, making it possible to compare the performance of different classes and link this to features of teaching and school policy.

Primary education evaluation programmes

The Ministry has commissioned a four-year evaluation programme, to be carried out by BOPO, a programme committee on policy-oriented research into primary education which falls under the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

The 2005-2008 programme has four main tracks:

- the link between mainstream and special education;
- the social and institutional context of schools;
- quality assurance, innovation and school development;
- the conditions needed for effective administrative relations.

Under these four headings, 24 research projects have been set up.

The five-year cohort of secondary education (VOCL cohort)

Every five years, a cohort is set up of 20,000 pupils in the first year of secondary school. Data is collected on them; they are tested and tracked through secondary education, MBO and higher education up to the labour market.

Early school leaving

Early school leavers are monitored by designated RMC municipalities,⁷ who report annually to the Ministry. Institutions for secondary vocational education have been asked to formulate plans for combating early school leaving and promoting lifelong learning. These can be used to test whether the Lisbon goals on these subjects will be met by the Netherlands. The institutions' performance will be monitored annually.

Education Inspectorate/external assessment

The Education Inspectorate monitors the quality of education by regularly inspecting schools. It reports annually on the quality of education.

International comparative research

Dutch primary schools are periodically involved in international comparative research (TIMSS, PIRLS), as are secondary schools (TIMSS, PISA and EU comparative surveys – for instance on the teaching of English). Annual indicators can be found in *Education*

⁷ RMC = Reporting and Coordination Centres

at a Glance, while the Eurydice publication *Key Data* provides indicators and descriptive information.

Chapter 3 Implementing a coherent and comprehensive strategy for lifelong learning

3.1 Main outlines of policy/measures

In its Action Plan on Lifelong Learning of November 2004⁸ the government set out its aims for achieving lifelong learning in the Netherlands. They are in line with the Lisbon aims on vocational education and training.

To achieve these aims, efforts will be required on many fronts. Lifelong learning affects everyone. Strategies touch on the policy fields of many different ministries – education, the labour market, integration and social cohesion – and also on the responsibility of social partners and the education field. On 1 March 2005, an interministerial Project Department on Learning & Working was set up to devise a joint strategy focusing on society's needs. Combining the Ministries of Education, Culture & Science, Social Affairs & Employment, Economic Affairs, Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality, and Justice, the Department's task is to ensure cooperation and coordination with all relevant social stakeholders, such as social partners and education institutes, in joint action to achieve objectives in the field of vocational education and training. It will tour the country in order to bring together local, regional and sectoral parties, and to promote achievement of the goals set for lifelong learning and courses combining working and learning.

3.2. Lifelong learning and compulsory schooling

Compulsory schooling lays the basis for lifelong learning. In this context, the following policy areas are significant:

- Policy on educational disadvantage / educational opportunities policy, with the following priorities:
 - early childhood education;
 - supporting school careers;
 - combating early school leaving;
 - adequate command of Dutch.
- Personal budgets for children with special needs, with emphasis on parental responsibility and freedom of choice.
- Amended attainment targets that offer more scope for differentiating between pupils, and which are clearly linked to the key competencies of the EU working group on basic skills.
- Investing in ICT. An interministerial action plan on ICT is currently being devised. See also 3.5.1.

⁸ *Actieplan Leven Lang Leren*, Parliamentary Papers 2005-2005, 27406, no. 32 House of Representatives

3.3 Towards the labour market: individual, target group, society

When devising measures to promote lifelong learning, the government is guided by the following:

Individual

- The individual is central to policy measures on lifelong learning. Workers and non-workers alike are expected to take responsibility for their own learning careers. Measures therefore focus on making the learning climate more attractive and on removing obstacles to learning.
- It is difficult for businesses and individuals to make the right choice of course because of a shortage of information about the courses on offer. If people are to make optimal use of the training on offer and make the right choices, they need information that is comprehensive, independent and clear. An “open online training marketplace” will therefore be set up.
- If individuals are to adopt a more proactive stance towards their own schooling and deployability on the labour market, they need to have sufficient say about the type of training they will receive. An important element is the financial scope for making the right choices. Ways of making the funding of education and training more demand driven will be researched and promoted. This will include introducing a system of “study entitlement” in higher education, and an experimental approach to establishing the extent to which “individual learning accounts” (savings accounts that can only be used for funding training) might help to encourage people with low qualifications to take up courses of training.
- From 1 August 2005, a performance grant will be introduced in the two highest full-time variants of secondary vocational education. Students will be given a grant in the form of a loan, which will be written off if they successfully complete their schooling. This creates an incentive to stay in school – pupils are encouraged to choose the right form of education and to get their diploma. At the same time, students’ rights will be strengthened by a package of measures including a greater say in their education, and better information and career guidance.

Target group

People don’t always find it easy to develop their own potential. Policy will therefore also focus on encouraging specific target groups. Priority will be given to young people with no initial qualifications, members of ethnic minorities, jobseekers and the illiterate. Certain groups (young people who have completed MBO – whether employed or jobseeking – including those with technical skills) will be encouraged to upgrade their skills to remedy shortages on the labour market.

This tailor-made approach for target groups is outlined below:

- *courses combining working and learning for unskilled workers/jobseekers*

Courses combining working and learning are a very useful way of getting certain target groups back into learning. They are largely organised at the workplace and are geared to the needs of the individual and the job. Learning mainly focuses on equipping

individuals to take part in the work process on a long-term basis and/or gaining vocational qualifications or upgrading to higher job levels. The largest gains can be made in the group with the lowest qualifications and those without an initial qualification, because the need for training (for long-term labour market participation and thus to meet economic growth targets) is greatest for them, whereas this group makes the least use of post-initial education. The combination of working and learning is moreover a “low-threshold” variant of training. Credits based on non-formally acquired competencies (see also 3.4) will be extremely important for the courses envisaged here.

- *illiterates*

Extra efforts are being made to encourage illiterates to learn, using local and regional initiatives to reach the target group more effectively, a tailor-made approach for specific groups and greater involvement on the part of industry and civil society organisations.

- *working/jobseeking MBO graduates*

To reduce the shortage of highly skilled workers, attempts will be made to steer youngsters with secondary education qualifications into tertiary education. This will involve making agreements with secondary and higher education bodies. Greater efforts will also be made to promote the indirect flow of workers or jobseekers into higher professional education. The trend towards more demand-driven education (individual learning pathways) will be promoted by removing legislative obstacles. Funding will be made more flexible, and a system of study entitlement will be introduced. The function of short programmes in higher professional education will also be looked at.

Society

The approach to lifelong learning involves not just devising new policy, but also reinforcing and linking up with civil society initiatives. The advantage of doing so is that a social base has already been established. By supporting these initiatives, implementation is strengthened at local and regional level, while good practices can be promoted all over the country.

Lifelong learning is promoted by supporting concrete social initiatives and projects. These are mainly regional and local initiatives to promote social cohesion and learning among hard-to-reach groups such as at-risk youth, ethnic minority women and the long-term unemployed. Cooperation between formal and informal forms of education (for instance regional training centres, agricultural training centres, public libraries, adult education centres and educational broadcasting channels) and between education and industry forms an important part of this process.

3.4. Curricula, abilities, career

One important way of promoting lifelong learning is to make changes to curricula, which involves using the extensive education support structure in the Netherlands. As of last year, schools can apply for funding to carry out any innovative projects that they have developed themselves.

With regard to competencies and lifelong learning, it is important to work towards a competence-centred qualification structure in secondary vocational education. In the Netherlands this structure has four levels of training and two learning pathways and all secondary vocational education programmes form part of it. However, the qualifications are too diverse and the teaching objectives prescribed in too much detail. The

consequence is that minor changes in the labour market immediately necessitate changes in the qualification structure.

The aim is to develop a new, competence-centred qualification structure over the next few years. Its main features will be transparency, flexibility and sustainability, and it will contain a comprehensive package of recognisable and viable qualifications, for which there is a support base both in industry and in vocational education. The focus will be on translating exit qualifications into competencies, the main differences being that competencies will be formulated more generally and will be explicitly related to their practical application.

The validation of non-formally acquired competencies in the Netherlands will be in line with the Common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning drawn up by working group H.

The Netherlands will also take account of the Maastricht Communiqué's priorities for closer European cooperation in the field of vocational education and training when developing activities in the field of lifelong learning.

In the coming period there will be a stronger focus on career guidance, and adult and vocational education institutions will receive extra resources for this purpose in 2005. Efforts will also be made to increase knowledge of this subject and to disseminate knowledge and good practices.

3.5. ICT

Much has recently been invested in ICT in schools, not only money, but also encouragement and facilitation. The principle is to give educational institutions scope – within the boundaries of quality and accessibility – for taking responsibility for the reforms that society wants, including the application of ICT. In recent years, ICT budgets have increasingly become part of regular budgets in all education sectors. The government has an important role as facilitator.

This role is visible in the Ministry's ICT policy for 2003-2005 and parameters are being put in place for the use of ICT in education: sufficient financial resources for schools and colleges, Internet infrastructure, upgrading teachers' ICT skills, offering educational, Web-based material and software, and improving knowledge and experience of ICT in teaching. From 2005 onwards, ICT teaching policy will be integrated in education and innovation policy.

At the moment, an interministerial ICT action plan is being fleshed out. Its aim is to improve broadband performance over the 2005-2007 period. Where teaching is concerned, the aim is for ICT to contribute to innovative education geared to the needs of individual pupils, teachers and managers, but also to social trends and needs. One of the focal points is ensuring high-quality material, so as to be able to make good use of current facilities in the learning process and thus increase the learning yield. There is also scope for reducing the administrative burden – which schools perceive as too heavy – by improving the administration system.

3.6 Lifelong learning: where we are now: areas for improvement and obstacles

The Netherlands scores well on lifelong learning. In 2000, participation of the adult workforce (25 to 64-year-olds) was 15.6%. In that same year, the European average was 8.5%. The European target for 2010 is 12.5%, while the Dutch target is 20%.

The number of early school leavers is high, compared to top-performing countries. In 2000, 15.6% of 18 to 24-year-olds dropped out without an adequate labour market qualification – i.e. they did not have a certificate of senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university education (VWO) or level 2 of secondary vocational education (MBO-2). The Netherlands aims to reduce this figure to 8% by 2010.

At present, 74% of the adult labour force between 25 and 64 has an adequate qualification of the type listed above. This figure is too low given the demands of the future knowledge society and consequent changes to the occupational structure. By 2010, 80% of this group should have one of the three above certificates.

The number of 22-year-olds with a higher secondary vocational education certificate also needs to be raised, from 73% in 2000 to 85% by 2010.

The Netherlands faces a shortage of highly qualified workers, notably science and technology graduates and engineers. The number of Dutch graduates in these subjects is low compared to the other EU member states: 5.8 graduates and PhD students per thousand inhabitants between 20 and 29 years of age. By 2010, the aim is to increase this figure by 15% to 6.7 per thousand inhabitants. For higher education as a whole, the aim is to increase young people's participation to 50% by 2010.

The importance of lifelong learning is acknowledged at all levels in the Netherlands, and priority is attached to maximising participation. However, some obstacles need to be overcome, notably:

- relatively large numbers of pupils leave school early in the Netherlands and this has a knock-on effect for learning later in life;
- too many of the adult labour force do not have an adequate employment qualification (see below);
- there is a more specific shortage of highly skilled workers – notably science and technology graduates and engineers;
- in very many respects the leap from formal to non-formal learning pathways (with recognition of non-formally acquired competencies, etc) has not yet been made, which is reflected in a lack of cohesion in learning pathways and courses combining working and learning.

Chapter 4 Reforms in higher education

4.1. Main outlines of policy

The introduction of a two-cycle system progressed relatively quickly. The two-cycle Bachelor-Master system, with 60 ECTS credits a year, was introduced in the 2002/2003 academic year. The process is being monitored and changes will be made if necessary. Since the new system started, 80% of all programmes in the higher education system have been offered in the two-cycle structure (with the exception of PhDs, which form the third cycle).

In late 2004, a legislative amendment was introduced, requiring higher education institutions to supply all students with a Diploma Supplement (automatically and free of charge), in Dutch or English.

The following measures are expected to increase the competitiveness and international appeal of the Dutch higher education system:

- Programmes are frequently offered in a language other than Dutch (mainly English, sometimes German).
- Attention is being paid to increasing the transparency of European higher education institutions, with special emphasis on the different procedures whereby students select universities. The EU has subsidised a pilot project on the typology of institutions.
- The internationalisation of quality assurance has been strengthened, particularly with a view to programme transparency.
- A great deal of attention has been given to the transferability of student grants and obstacles affecting this. In this context, the survey by the European Commission of legal factors is important.
- A seminar has been organised on mobility, geared to increasing knowledge of student finance and related problems. It will also look at promoting typology and at the internationalisation of quality assurance.
- ICT is being promoted.
- In the debate about strengthening higher education in the Netherlands, much emphasis is being placed on developing different programmes and profiles, with a view to making Dutch institutions of higher professional education and universities more attractive and competitive. Many Dutch higher education institutions also take part in international consortia. The new three-cycle structure offers scope for developing new, high-quality and internationally recognised Master's programmes with selective access. In 2003 and 2004 universities developed programmes of this type, having received special grants for this purpose. The Ministry recently commissioned a survey to assess the excellence of higher education at international level, along the lines of the existing system for assessing academic research. It will also look at the pilot project on the typology of higher education and the work of UNESCO-CEPES on the criteria on which ranking systems and league tables are based.

4.2. Quality assurance

The Higher Education Act gives universities and institutions of higher professional education considerable freedom to organise quality assurance as they wish. All of these bodies are responsible for internal quality monitoring and for evaluating their own teaching and research. Responsibility for the quality of higher education lies with the institutions themselves, the Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) and the Education Inspectorate. The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) is mentioned in paragraph 6.1.

The Netherlands introduced an accreditation system in 2003. Courses have to be

accredited in order to qualify for government funding or recognition. The NVAO has been given the task of accrediting both new and existing courses, and it drew up the relevant framework in 2003. The quality of a course must be judged satisfactory before it can be accredited. Accreditation is valid for a six-year period. New courses can only start if the NVAO approves the quality of the plans.

4.3. Higher education and lifelong learning

Cooperation between the Open University (distance learning) and regular higher education institutions is facilitated by special funding. The partnership is aimed at promoting e-learning and distance learning. A short higher education cycle will be reintroduced on an experimental basis, in a bid to attract employees and employers in small and medium-sized businesses. The new university funding system based on “study entitlement” is expected to make the system more demand driven, rather than supply driven. A policy document on lifelong learning was sent to the House of Representatives in November 2004. It looked at the short higher education cycle, the new funding system and efforts to achieve substantial growth in the number of students in the 25-64 age group by 2010. Universities and institutions of higher professional education are competent to provide post-initial courses at Master’s level, and do so.

Between 2001 and 2004 the Ministry funded a national knowledge centre whose task was to devise ways of assessing non-formally acquired competencies in employment sectors, secondary education and higher education, and to communicate this knowledge. In 2005 the knowledge centre will focus on those parts of the labour market not yet familiar with these assessments, on guaranteeing and controlling the quality of assessment procedures, and on identifying legislative obstacles. For the Ministry, quality guarantees are crucial. New legislation will give the new examination committees the task of supervising procedures, including assessing non-formally acquired competencies. Higher education institutions will probably need help in developing these procedures.

4.4 Research and society

University professors have a dual task: carrying out research and teaching. The extent to which eminent professors lecture to more junior students varies from institution to institution. In 2004, universities launched an accredited Research Master’s programme (120 ECTS credits) which is more specific than the other Master’s courses, such as those linked to a third (PhD) cycle and a research career. Besides regular teaching staff, institutions of higher professional education employ a small number of *lectoren* – professors – who combine teaching with applied research, in partnership with regional industry. 41% of R&D investment is spent in the public sector (higher education and research institutions; source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS)). According to OECD figures, industry-funded R&D expenditure in the public sector and semi-public sector amounts to 12.1%. National statistics show that universities’ external revenue amounted to 593 million euros in 2001, 26% of which came from government, 26% from industry, 12% from international sources and 35% percent from non-profit organisations.

4.5. A look ahead: priorities and obstacles

Priorities are to:

- promote the knowledge society;
- create an international profile for higher education in Europe and internationalise

the higher education market;

- set up a challenging higher education system in which students from different social backgrounds take part.

Thought has been given to the system of accrediting courses of study. The present system will be retained, but it will be necessary to restrict costs and manage procedures more effectively. The general challenge is to maintain and promote a competitive higher education system which is accessible on the basis of merit and which provides high-quality, internationally recognised teaching and research – while remaining within budgetary constraints.

Higher education reforms are bringing the achievement of Lisbon targets a step closer. At the same time, however, there are obstacles:

- Reforms cost money, and there will always be budgetary constraints. Even the recent, sizeable extra financial commitment cannot compensate for this.
- Another potentially serious obstacle – but hopefully a temporary one – has to do with the different social roles assigned to higher education institutions. Efforts to meet the great demand for high-quality education for people of all ages by scaling up higher education means that quality is under threat, so administrators have to make choices.

Chapter 5 Improving the quality and appeal of vocational education

Recent years have seen the introduction of the five *Europass* documents. In 2005 and 2006 the National *Europass* Centre (NEC) will be promoting their use. A *Common Quality Assurance Framework* was recently set up and in 2005 the various parties involved will be drawing up a plan for its national implementation. As regards the validation of non-formal learning, in 2001 the government set up a national knowledge centre (see above) to promote the recognition of acquired competencies, with funding extending to the end of 2005. A great deal of knowledge and experience has been acquired, which will have to be applied more widely in future. From 2005 onwards, the government will be providing extra funding for career orientation and advice to strengthen the position of pupils in secondary vocational education.

In 2003, 15% of Dutch nationals between the ages of 18 and 24 (202,000 individuals) did not possess an initial qualification for the labour market. However, the number of early school leavers aged 12-23 reported by schools and registered at 39 regional Reporting and Coordination Centres declined in 2003 by 10% (from 70,500 to 64,000). This is a hopeful trend. The Dutch government is currently using an interministerial approach combining a package of measures to prepare young people better for the requirements of the labour market. Extra funding will be provided from 2005 in an effort to increase the number of early school leavers re-entering education or combining work and training (around 20,000 a year). Efforts will also be made to enable the transfer from pre-vocational secondary education to secondary vocational education to run more smoothly. This will include developing a new policy on pupils at risk of dropping out of school.

Concrete measures to strengthen the quality and appeal of vocational education include:

– *abolishing the “related studies” penalty*

Regulations penalising students transferring from one course of study to another course classified as related (by depriving them of a year’s grant) were abolished on 1 March 2005. This should create scope for developing more flexible pathways, facilitating transfer from secondary vocational to higher professional education.

– *associated degree courses*

On 5 April 2004 the House of Representatives adopted a motion allowing two-year study pathways to be created within Bachelor’s courses. During the debate on the budget in the House of Representatives on 4 November 2004, the State Secretary for Education pledged to set out in the short term how short programmes could be incorporated into higher education. Experiments with these types of course will start in 2006/2007.

– *flexible admission of students who have completed the third level of secondary vocational education*

This project will enable certain candidates to be admitted to courses of study even though their educational qualifications do not satisfy requirements. The focus here is on students who have completed level 3 of secondary vocational education. The project will test whether students meet alternative requirements (at least equivalent to completing level 4 of secondary vocational education or senior general secondary education/pre-university education).

2003 saw the introduction of a demand-driven funding system for the training of teachers in adult and vocational education. Institutions now receive a budget to purchase such courses for their teachers, which means that they can influence the content. *Koers BVE*, a policy document outlining medium-term plans for adult and vocational education, refers to the development of teachers into entrepreneurial professionals. The introduction of a competence-centred qualification structure that places different demands on the organisation of the teaching process also demands other competencies of teachers. Efforts to strengthen institutions’ integrated personal policy focus on developing teachers’ competencies and maintaining their expertise.

As indicated above, within the qualification structure it is primarily the task of the social partners to join with schools in developing and maintaining the qualifications needed for the labour market. The planning of courses will no longer be organised nationally, but regionally. Vocational education institutions can decide together with regional industry what courses the region needs.

Chapter 6 Consolidation of the European dimension of education and training

6.1 Promoting mobility by removing obstacles

The Netherlands has always set great store by mobility as an important means of improving the quality of education and training in the member states and promoting international cooperation. It accordingly attaches great importance to the measures cited in the Mobility Recommendation of 10 July 2001. Its national report on this recommendation and the mobility action plan (June 2003) pointed out that it was already complying with these measures.

Since 2003, various steps have been taken, including the following measures:

- A two-cycle system applicable to over 80% of higher education programmes was introduced in the 2002/2003 academic year (in line with the Bologna process).
- Institutions of higher education are now obliged to provide all students with a free Diploma Supplement.
- The National Accreditation Organisation has been transformed into the supranational Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) has been set up with other European accreditation organisations, with a view to achieving mutual recognition of accreditation decisions by the end of 2007.
- Foreign students and knowledge migrants will be given visas faster and much more cheaply (in the case of a five-year course, being reduced from €1620 to €624).
- Efforts to attract foreign students have been stepped up. The number of countries in which the Netherlands sets up education support centres (in non-EU countries) is to be dramatically increased. The current system of scholarships for foreign students will be reviewed in 2006, with emphasis on promoting the quality of incoming mobility (Huygens programme and knowledge scholarships).
- When promoting mobility in vocational education, priority is currently given to increasing transparency and recognition of professional qualifications (the Copenhagen process). During its EU Presidency in 2004, the Netherlands devoted a great deal of attention to this (see chapter 1.1).
- The policy of internationalising primary and secondary education will be continued. The national programmes fostering international orientation among pupils and between teachers have been renewed. A new programme focuses on promoting bilingual education (supplementing Dutch with English, French or German), strengthening language teaching, introducing language teaching at an earlier stage and using native speakers as language assistants. A new primary education programme (BUURLANDEN) focuses on ICT as a means of virtual mobility.

Some of the main obstacles to achieving policy targets are:

- The shortage of teachers and the difficulty of finding supply teachers. Moreover, pupils have very full curricula and only limited time for going abroad.
- Problems in enabling students to take grants with them to other EU countries. The risk of abuse inherent in European legislation is impeding national measures to make grants transferable. The Netherlands put the need for a European approach on the agenda of its EU Presidency in 2004, after which a working group was set up under the direction of the European Commission.

6.2. Mobility works

The Alkmaar-based European Platform for Dutch Education, which supports schools in matters of pupil and teacher mobility in Europe, is functioning well. Schools are

equipped with computers and Internet access so that they can achieve virtual mobility by maintaining contact with foreign schools. Some good model projects have been set up.

In addition to applying for international mobility grants from European sources (Socrates) teachers can also apply for Dutch government grants.

The Netherlands is involved in a number of mobility programmes. They include an exchange programme with Germany known as BAND (*Bilaterales Austausch Programm Niederlande-Deutschland*). Its aim is to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in the field of vocational education by subsidising bilateral exchange projects. The Ministry attaches importance to continuing these partnerships in the long-term, and setting up new ones. The European Leonardo da Vinci Programme is geared more to the individual, since it provides scope for individual placements. The Ministry is closely involved in this programme and provides a significant amount of funding. The Euregio programme targets schools in the border region, and provides small grants for short activities.

Cinop, the Centre for the innovation of education and training, in its role of international advisory bureau specialising in educational training, has been asked by the Ministry to draw up a list of the obstacles affecting cooperation with border regions. The purpose is to solve problems caused by Dutch education legislation, given that it should be facilitating rather than obstructive. The main obstacle to teachers' international mobility is the shortage of teachers and problems in finding supply teachers. Pupils have very full curricula and only limited time in which to go abroad. The more advanced the form of education the greater the international mobility among pupils.

6.3 The European dimension in education

The European Union is for the benefit of citizens, and this was stressed once again during the Dutch EU presidency in 2004, when active European citizenship was placed on the agenda.

The government has initiated legislation (in the form of attainment targets) with a view to embedding the concept of European citizenship in primary and secondary education. Moreover, it is promoting mobility by providing funding to the European Platform for Dutch Education. It is also encouraging participation in EU education programmes. The ELOS (Europe as a Learning Environment in Schools) project, started by the European Platform, links Dutch and European schools in a network intended to reinforce the European learning environment for schools and pupils. In Dutch-German border areas, projects with German schools focus on strengthening a common European component in education.

The main policy lines for strengthening the European Dimension in education consist of:

- increasing knowledge and awareness of Europe and European citizenship in the curriculum;
- promoting mobility, including virtual mobility, through national and EU programmes;
- enabling pupils and students to “cash in on” their experience through the *Europass* and a European certificate (still to be developed).

The Netherlands has a national facility for training teachers, unconnected to the European contribution via Socrates.

Scope for further development has already been indicated above. The general aim is to strengthen the European dimension, most notably its significance for active citizenship within Europe. However, the fact that an overloaded curriculum allows very little scope for such activities forms a major obstacle.