



Ministry of Education, Culture and
Science of the Netherlands

**Preparation of the 2012 Joint
Report on the Implementation of
the Strategic Framework for
European Cooperation in
Education and Training (ET2020)**

The Netherlands

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A. CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES

QUESTION 1

Please provide a summary of the main education and training elements in your National Reform Programme (NRP).

National target

The national target for early school leavers is that, by 2020, the proportion of young people aged 18 to 24 without basic qualifications should be below 8%. The number of people completing higher education in the Netherlands has already exceeded the European target. It is expected that, by 2020, 45% of the working population aged between 30 and 34 will have an advanced qualification. The government welcomes this development and, in accordance with policy, is committed towards further improving the quality of education.

Policy designed to achieve the targets

The Netherlands is striving to secure a position in the world's top knowledge economies, with students gaining outstanding academic results. Improved quality of teaching and incentives for better performance are vital if this aim is to be achieved. The government's education policy focuses on creating the conditions under which pupils, students, teachers and institutions can excel. Particular emphasis is placed on core subjects, on increased teaching time, on excellent standards of teaching and on both knowledge and skills.

Proportion of graduates aged 30 to 34

The proportion of graduates in this age group in the Netherlands has risen dramatically in the past decade, from 26.5% in 2000 to 40.5% in 2009. The increase in this figure has been, and continues to be, achieved largely through autonomous growth and through encouraging students to complete their studies, more quickly in some cases, so as to increase the success rate.

Participation in higher education has expanded enormously in the past few years. At the same time, however, the dropout rate in higher education is still too high: the likelihood of success in both higher professional education and university education is below 70%.

In 2008, long-term agreements were concluded with universities and institutions of higher professional education, and approximately €80 million per year in funds allocated, with a view to boosting the pass rate in higher education. In the past few years a number of programmes have been set up with this aim in mind, focusing on aspects such as better supervision, more intensive teaching and improving the educational attainment of teaching staff.

Institutions of higher education can exclude students who have failed to gain sufficient credits. This is normally done in the first year and prevents students who have practically no chance of passing their course remaining enrolled to no purpose. More attention is also paid to the transition between secondary and higher education. Interviews with prospective students to help them choose the right course of study are currently being trialled. A total budget of €2.15 million for 2009 to 2011 has been earmarked for this initiative. A bill to tackle the problem of students who spend too long studying was presented to parliament on 1 February 2011. Under the provisions of this proposed legislation, these students will be charged €3,000 in addition to their normal tuition fees. One of the aims of the measure is to improve the success rate.

It is clear from the relatively high dropout rate in higher professional education, especially among students coming from secondary vocational education (almost 40% of whom had still failed to graduate after six years), that continuity of learning needs to be improved. Many factors indicate that the system is facing severe difficulties: these include the high dropout rate, the large and increasingly diverse intake, the difficulty of meeting the needs of part-time students and the ever-growing challenge in universities of combining good teaching for a large number of students with academic excellence. With this in mind, the Committee for Future-Proof Higher Education, chaired by former minister Cees Veerman, was consulted. The Committee's report is now being implemented and includes recommendations on giving institutions more scope to select students, government funding based on specialisation with fewer perverse financial incentives, and the encouragement of excellence.

The government intends to invest up to €300 million between 2011 and 2016 in intensifying teaching in higher education. Intensive supervision and syllabus design are

vital to ensure that students are motivated, challenged and dedicated. A more detailed set of proposals will be presented to parliament in June 2011.

Early school leavers

The Netherlands has been striving to reduce the number of early school leavers since 2001. The government has opted for a comprehensive approach in which central and local government, educational institutions and youth care services work together at regional level. This approach has had some success. The broader European target for early school leavers not only means preventing dropout in initial education; it also aims to ensure that individuals' talents are addressed and developed, and that their employment potential is exploited to the full. The percentage of early school leavers in the Netherlands fell from 15.5% in 2000 to 10.9% in 2009. The government is continuing to pursue a programme to tackle dropout in order to meet the national target.

The measures currently in place in the Netherlands to reduce school dropout rates are focused primarily on prevention: making sure that young people do not leave education without basic qualifications. The key measures here are:

1. *Emphasising complete registration of early school leavers, and proper, complete registration of absenteeism:* the system used to register early school leavers is to be tightened up, probably sometime in 2012. Some target groups, currently incorrectly regarded as early school leavers, will be included in the registration system. This will have the effect of making records of early school leavers more accurate, so that the problem can be analysed more effectively. Another aspect will be providing better records of absenteeism. All general and vocational secondary schools are now part of a digital system, and are required by law to report absenteeism by this means. Structural funding of €2 million is available for this purpose.
2. *Results-oriented voluntary agreements with schools and municipalities that act as regional registration and coordination centres for school dropout, which include incentives for schools to reduce the number of early school leavers:* schools receive a financial reward for each potential early school leaver who remains in education. Under this system, schools themselves are encouraged to take responsibility for pursuing a good early school leaver policy. Starting in the 2012-2013 school year, the performance payment, which is currently linked to an absolute reduction in the

number of early school leavers, will be converted into a payment linked to a relative percentage of early school leavers. This is a fairer reflection of the differing starting positions of schools, and takes account of the increase or decrease in student numbers over time.

3. *The regional incentive:* encouraging regional cooperation between schools and municipalities, with the involvement of youth care organisations and the business community. Municipalities that act as regional registration and coordination centres for school dropout play the key role, receiving funding to set up early school leaver programmes to develop policies aiming to:
 - facilitate smooth transition from pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) to vocational secondary education (MBO) via the experimental VMBO-MBO 2 course;
 - generate more scope for VMBO students who learn best working with their hands;
 - provide more made-to-measure training in order to prevent dropout;
 - expand the support service provided;
 - offer guidance and coaching, and better advice on the choice of studies and career;
 - keep young people at school longer by making education more attractive and incorporating sport and culture.

This grant scheme for programmes aimed at early school leavers has been in place since 2008. Structural funding of €80 million has been made available for measures 2 and 3.

4. *Additional provision for overburdened young people:* standard teaching is not sufficient to keep some early school leavers in education. They are under so much stress from various problems that they cannot cope with school, even though they certainly have the intelligence required. Additional provisions were introduced in the 2009-2010 school year to help keep them in the system. These combine normal lessons, leading to a basic qualification, with other forms of support and, if necessary, advice on finding employment. The aim is to help these young people get back on terms with their education so that they can eventually obtain a basic qualification. Structural funding of €30 million is available for this purpose.

5. Additional initiatives to combat early school leaving in the MBO system include more teaching time in the first year, intensive support, career advice and coaching. Structural funding of €150 million is available for this purpose.

B. EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

QUESTION 2

What measures has your country taken to reduce early school leaving?

Policy on early school leavers

Current policy on early school leavers is focused on secondary education, secondary vocational education and adult education. The target group is young people aged between 12 and 23 who are still attending school but have not yet obtained a basic qualification of any kind. Analysis of the data enables individual regions and educational institutions to identify which groups of young people drop out.

2.1 Measures to analyse current situation and monitor developments in early school leaving (e.g. data collection, surveys and research)

Introduction of the Education Database (*BasisRegistratie OnderwijsNummer: BRON*) and the online absentee registration system

A few years ago it was impossible to conduct an analysis of the problem of early school leaving. Data needed for this analysis was missing, incomplete and often out of date. This is no longer the case since the introduction of the Education Database BRON. This system collects data used for funding, and so provides a complete and reliable account of pupil numbers. It also provides information on national, regional and local pupil dropout figures. It is compulsory for schools to use this system, making it possible to monitor trends and draw comparisons between different regions, towns and even individual educational institutions. Important questions on early school leaving such as 'Which region or school is performing well and which is not?' can therefore be answered. The data are published annually.

A comprehensive process for reporting and dealing with pupil absenteeism is essential if the problem of early school leaving is to be tackled at source. To make it easier and quicker for local authorities and schools to report absenteeism, a single, online system was introduced nationwide in the 2008/2009 school year. Every user logs in to the same system in the same way. This enables efforts to be focused on ensuring that young people at risk of dropping out are retained within the education system. The

Absenteeism Reporting Act came into force on 1 August 2009 and requires that all secondary schools and schools for adult and vocational education use the online registration system. These two comprehensive registration systems give a fairly accurate idea of the numbers of early school leavers in the Netherlands. The Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA) also conducts an annual survey, with a qualitative focus, of young people who leave school without qualifications. The reason for dropout is one of the factors considered in this survey. In addition, data from Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal bureau voor de Statistiek: CBS*) provides insight into the links between early school leaving and issues unrelated to education, such as youth unemployment and crime.

2.2 Please indicate the priority areas your country is focusing on (e.g. target groups, educational sectors)

Specific target group

The Dutch policy is characterized by the absence of policies on specific target groups, at least at the national level. On regional level, regions can decide for themselves if they want to specify their policies on specific target groups. Based on the analysis of the figures, they can decide which specific target group needs extra attention. There is one exception. In 2009 attention focused on a more specific group of dropouts (overburdened young people) for whom a separate temporary grant scheme was introduced in the 2009/2010 school year. Overburdened young people are unable to cope with school because of multiple problems, and are therefore at risk of dropping out without basic qualifications. Schools in the region can make additional provision for this group, combining mainstream schooling (eventually leading to a basic qualification) with other forms of care and support and, if necessary, help finding employment. The present government will prolong this measure beyond 2012.

2.3 Measures to prevent early school leaving. Please mention the most effective measures taken at system level, at school level and in support of individual pupils/learners

Preventive policy approach at system level

Stumbling blocks in legislation have been removed at national (system) level to facilitate implementation of this approach:

- Introduction of basic qualification requirement (2007).
Young people are required to attend school fulltime until the age of 18 or until they have obtained a basic qualification. Since the 2008/2009 school year, there has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of 17-year-olds still in school;
- Experimental VMBO-MBO 2 learning pathway.
This experiment aims to integrate the last two years VMBO subjects (basic vocational programme) and MBO level 2 subjects into a single curriculum, taught at VMBO pupils' own schools. This makes it easier for them to transfer at a later date to MBO. The first courses started in the 2008/2009 school year, and the experiment will run until 2013. The present government has decided to continue and expand these experiments.
- Abolishing the limit for VMBO.
The restriction imposing a maximum limit of five years to complete VMBO will be abolished so as to allow young people every opportunity to obtain a qualification. A bill is being drafted and should become law as from 1 August 2011.
- Transfer of the task of monitoring schools' compliance with the Compulsory Education Act from the local authorities to the Inspectorate.
Schools that do not have an adequate policy on absenteeism can be fined by the Inspectorate. Local authorities remain responsible for monitoring compliance with the Compulsory Education Act by parents and pupils, and this task is carried out by the school attendance officer.
- Monthly reports on de-registered pupils without basic qualifications.
The Education Executive Agency (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*: DUO) produces monthly reports for local authorities and other bodies, showing how many young people at that point in time (the first of the month) have been de-registered without basic qualifications. The records contain statistics from 1 October 2010 onwards. These monthly reports are based on information supplied by educational institutions to the Education Database (BRON). The system is regularly updated to remove individuals who have re-registered. The young people referred to in these reports are potential early school leavers. Providing this data on a monthly basis helps local

authorities and schools react quickly and appropriately to prevent young people dropping out of school.

- Improving the accuracy of records.

A bill has been drafted to bring non-government-funded schools under the BRON and require their use of the online absentee registration system. As a result, pupils who move from government-funded to non-government-funded education will no longer be included in the statistics as early school leavers. The change is due to take effect on 1 January 2012. Another bill is being prepared to allow the exemptions that school attendance officers can grant under the terms of the 1969 Compulsory Education Act to be registered. The young people in question will then no longer be counted as early school leavers either. These changes will make the statistics on early school leavers 99% accurate.

Preventive approach in policy at school level

Dutch policy at school level on early school leavers is characterised by a preventive approach. Firstly, voluntary agreements have been concluded for the 2008/2011 period with schools and municipalities that act as regional registration and coordination centres for school dropout, with targets for reducing the number of early school leavers. Schools receive extra funding to help them meet these targets and can decide for themselves what measures to take. Examples include developing policies on the transition from pre-vocational to vocational secondary education, more effective career orientation and guidance, and working to improve individual needs provision.

The results are monitored and published each school year. Schools are paid for reducing the number of early school leavers, according to the no cure, no pay principle. Account managers in the regions, who liaise between educational institutions, municipalities, regions and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, provide feedback on experiences and results. This approach is directed primarily at regions and individual schools.

Schools and care institutions: pupil support advisory teams

Schools, health services, social services, school attendance authorities, youth care services and the police work together in pupil support advisory teams, so that help can

be given promptly to those who need it. Support may focus on students with emotional, behavioural, developmental or learning difficulties, but can also be targeted at their families and the school. The aim is to expand these teams for pupils with multiple behavioural problems and/or special needs in secondary vocational education. In future, every school for primary, secondary, secondary vocational and adult education will be required to have its own pupil support advisory team.

2.4 Measures to compensate early school leaving. Please mention the most effective measures taken.

Getting early school leavers back to school

Early school leavers are channelled back to school or work-study placements by the municipalities which act as regional registration and coordination centres for school dropout (*Regionaal Meld- en Coördinatiepunt*: RMC). The municipalities collaborate with youth care services, educational institutions and Centres for Work and Income in order to create the appropriate conditions for early school leavers to return to school and/or work. The aim is to ensure they acquire at least a basic qualification. Steps are being taken to make it easier for young people to enrol mid-course. Recent figures from Statistics Netherlands show that about a quarter of early school leavers eventually return to school.

VAVO and adult basic education

VAVO (adult general secondary education) gives learners a second chance to obtain a VMBO (theoretical pathway), HAVO (senior general secondary education) or VWO (pre-university education) certificate. Adult basic education teaches elementary skills in language and mathematics (including Dutch as a second language). The municipality is responsible for funding these forms of adult education by means of the participation budget.

Training measures by employers

Many early school leavers drop out because they have found a job. If it is impossible to get these youngsters back to school, their employers are held responsible for their further development and training. It is essential that these young employees have the opportunity to obtain a basic qualification while working or before starting a job.

Employers are encouraged to take responsibility for providing training by means of instruments such as tax incentives, deductions in social insurance contributions, development and training funds managed by the social partners, or grants from the European Social Fund (ESF).

For Lifelong learning and EVC see the answer to question 7.

C. TERTIARY EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

QUESTION 3

What measures has your country taken to increase tertiary (or equivalent) education attainment?

Measures to increase tertiary education attainment

The measures are described in the National Reform Programme (see the answer to question 1).

D. MOBILITY

QUESTION 4

What measures has your country taken to promote learning mobility?

4.1 Measures to promote outgoing/incoming learning mobility of students in different education sectors (schools, VET, higher education, adults)

Promotion of mobility in primary education

For several years now, the European Platform has been satisfactorily running a number of grant schemes on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to promote the mobility of pupils, teachers and schools. The report on internationalisation of education in the Netherlands, published in 2009, found that almost 8% of primary schools were actively involved in internationalisation in the 2008/2009 school year (exchanges, early foreign language teaching, etc.), with support from the European Platform. This figure is up on that reported for the previous school year, and is very close to the target of 8% (2009 estimate). Schools focus on links with Germany, France, Italy and Flanders in particular.

Promotion of mobility in secondary education

The nature of mobility in Dutch secondary education depends on the age of the children concerned. Pupil exchanges have been common for some time now in the upper years of secondary school (years 4, 5 and 6), and a considerable number of pupils in the fourth year of senior secondary general (HAVO) and years 4 and 5 of pre-university (vwo) education have participated in such exchanges. Another notable trend is the growing popularity of dual-language learning programmes. More than a hundred of the 532 secondary schools in the Netherlands now offer an international programme.

Promotion of mobility in vocational education

In January 2009, the then State Secretary for and now Minister of Education, Culture & Science, Marja van Bijsterveldt, presented the internationalisation agenda for secondary vocational education (MBO) to the House of Representatives of the States General. The agenda contains measures to strengthen the international outlook of secondary

vocational education in the Netherlands, and thus to increase the learning mobility of MBO students and teachers.

The agenda puts MBO into a clear perspective, with a view to the short and medium-term prospects at national, European and international level. The agenda identifies the following four targets:

- to strengthen the international outlook of secondary vocational education in terms of qualification structure and curriculum, through both *internationalisation@home* projects and contacts abroad;
- to attract international students to the Netherlands and encourage Dutch students to acquire part of their education abroad by making better use of European and national incentive schemes;
- to strengthen European cooperation, focusing in the immediate future on deploying instruments that have been developed at EU level;
- to improve the image of Dutch vocational education in Europe and further afield.

The following factors are relevant to the second target mentioned above, concerning the international mobility of MBO students:

- In developing the qualification structure, the Secondary Vocational Education Council and the Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (KBB) (*Centraal Orgaan van Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het bedrijfsleven*: COLO) will devote more attention to the international dimension, placing sufficient emphasis on foreign language teaching and the importance of work placements abroad.
- In 2009, on the basis of an assessment, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science considered whether it would be expedient to provide greater scope for MBO students to undergo training abroad using portable grants and loans. It has since decided to proceed in two stages: as from the 2010/2011 school year, the list of countries for which grants and loans are portable has been expanded to include not only Germany and Belgium but also France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Sweden. Once the relevant legislation has been amended, probably from the 2012/2013 school year onwards, the list will include the entire European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland.

- The number of MBO work placements abroad will be gradually increased. The Netherlands supports the emphasis on learning mobility and is willing to bring its own aims for secondary vocational education into line with the European benchmark, which has yet to be determined.
- European instruments such as Europass and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) will continue to be implemented.
- The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will encourage Dutch educational institutions to take part in international competitions such as Wordskills and Euroskills, and will urge them to use the network that has been created around these competitions (national skills organisations, affiliated to the European Skills Promotion Organisation (ESPO)) to forge closer international links.
- Four worldwide pilot projects were launched in 2009 to help institutions develop contacts inside and outside Europe with a view to exchanging experience. The sectors involved are commerce, catering, logistics, engineering and technology, safety/security and easy-access care in four focus countries: France, the United Kingdom, Turkey and India. The projects will run for three years, with a budget of €720,000.

Promotion of mobility in higher education

The Government has introduced an internationalisation agenda for higher education 'Grenzeloze Goed' (The Boundless good) at the end of 2008. The agenda identifies relevant trends and priorities in order to prepare Dutch education and research for the future and position it internationally. Mobility is one of the priorities. Mobility involves giving Dutch students and pupils the opportunity to spend part of their programme abroad and making it attractive for foreign students and pupils to do the same in the Netherlands.

The government has earmarked €10 million to 2011 for incoming and outgoing mobility of outstanding students. Student finance is portable, so that entire degree programmes can be followed abroad, provided they are of high quality. Government-funded higher education institutions are entitled to fund scholarships for students provided their stay abroad improves the quality of teaching at the institution that provides the scholarship.

4.2 Measures to promote outgoing/incoming learning mobility of teachers and other education professionals in different education sectors (schools, VET, higher education, adults)?

Promotion learning mobility of teachers and other education professionals

An enthusiast teacher or trainer can be an important motivator for young people to undertake a mobility period abroad. Teacher mobility is a tool for promoting the mobility of young people. Teachers who can relate their own experiences abroad are ambassadors for the mobility of their own pupils and students. Mobility can also enrich the teacher's own career and help him or her acquire new professional skills and competences.

In the first instance, it is up to employers and employees to make firm agreements about the latter's duties and work pressure. Teachers in the Netherlands are given sufficient leeway in their annual workload for continuing professional development and training. Schools are awarded funding for training and continuing professional development in their lump-sum financing. The teacher makes specific agreements with his or her supervisor about how this is to be achieved.

Many universities of applied sciences, however, indicate that they find it difficult to increase staff mobility. The Government therefore intends to develop a pilot mobility programme that will give teachers in higher education an opportunity to spend a period teaching abroad. Teachers will be selected on the basis of excellence.

Teacher mobility in primary and secondary education is supported by means of individual grants and funding provided through the European Comenius Programme and the Dutch Promotion of International Orientation and Cooperation Programme (*Programma voor Bevordering Internationale Oriëntatie en Samenwerking: BIOS*). The Government calls on the European Platform to run these programmes, which allow more than 7000 teachers annually to take part in international exchanges, go on a work placement or study visit abroad, and enrol in post-graduate courses.

4.3 Steps to identify and reduce the obstacles to learning mobility?

One of the main obstacles that students mention when preparing for a study abroad, is the lack of targeted information about programmes in other countries. The Dutch Government therefore supports the idea to study the feasibility – in addition to existing European initiatives – of an accessible database with information about the European educational programmes that is actively updated and used by educational institutions and actively brought to the attention of students and training companies.

The task of mainstreaming mobility will require a pro-active policy on the part of institutions, supported by government facilities such as portable student grants and loans and cooperation at EU level on removing legal obstacles and facilitating such matters as recognition quality assurance and classification of institutions/programmes.

E. NEW SKILLS AND JOBS

QUESTION 5

What measures has your country taken to improve the assessment of future skills requirements matching since 2009?

5.1 Recent measure to improve skills forecasting (in addition to information provided through Eurydice in June 2010)

The Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (*Kenniscentra Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven: KBB*) are responsible for developing qualification profiles. A qualification profile describes the skills that students must have acquired by the end of their course in order to be equipped for a job. Qualification profiles must be approved by representatives from the field of education and the business community (joint committees). The centres of Expertise (KBB) retain responsibility for developing and updating qualification profiles in their sector. The umbrella association COLO sets the general direction and coordinates the activities of the individual centres of expertise (KBB). This process is supported by the government, which conducts regular studies of labour market trends and how these affect skills requirements. The Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (KBB) examine whether the profile is relevant to the labour market and whether it overlaps with an existing profile. In other words, they first ascertain whether there is a need for a course of training for a particular occupation and the related skills. Important in this connection is the school leavers' survey conducted by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA), which is part of Maastricht University. This survey tracks cohorts of school leavers with secondary vocational qualifications.

The reinforcement of cooperation between education sphere and employers' representatives can also be observed in the area of higher education. The target is to ensure that the workforce with high-level skills also respond to current and future labour market challenges. The curriculum of each study programme is developed in cooperation with labour market representatives. They take part in the *beroepenveldcommissie* – a forum for dialogue between universities of applied sciences

and the labour market. Different issues relating to the skills match are addressed in this forum.

In the Netherlands, universities of applied sciences are financially encouraged to develop students' transferable skills. Since 2008, the national government has invested €30 million to stimulate entrepreneurship in primary, secondary, vocational and higher education.

5.2 Recent measures to take the results on board in education and training planning processes, information and guidance.

Qualification profiles

The qualification profiles for the 2011/2012 cohort were officially approved by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in March 2011. Information is available on a dedicated website www.kwalificatiesmbo.nl.

New action plan for secondary vocational education

A new action plan for secondary vocational education (MBO), focusing on skills and covering the 2011-2015 period, was presented to parliament in February 2011. Under this plan, the government assigns overall responsibility for developing and updating the qualification structure to the newly created Education-Business Alliance. From the 2012/2013 school year onwards, students doing vocational training will not have to choose a specific course from the outset, but will first be able to enrol in fields of training containing modules from courses with related content. This measure should reduce the number of early school leavers.

The action plan retains open access to level 1 MBO courses. These courses are regarded as foundation courses and will have a special position within the system. From the 2011/2012 school year onwards, MBO courses will be shortened to three years and classroom time will be increased. Once every three years a comprehensive survey will be carried out to ascertain how satisfied the business community is with the results of the MBO reforms. The findings will be published as a separate section of the annual benchmarking exercise conducted by the Secondary Vocational Education Council.

From 2012 onwards, the MBO action plan will provide for a 'performance kit' with resources enabling targets to be agreed with individual MBO institutions.

The government wants institutions to focus on providing effective vocational training at regional level. At present, competition between them is causing fragmentation, with an adverse effect on quality. Educational institutions need to work together with regional businesses to select a portfolio of training courses. It is important that provision be tailored to the needs of business in the region and dovetail with the key economic areas identified in the government's memorandum on business.

Educational institutions are responsible by law for the training they provide and must therefore work with one another and with the business community to reach agreement on concentration and distribution of tasks. A pilot project is being set up to assist them, and arbitration by the Education-Business Alliance is being introduced. The government refuses on principle to assume responsibility for planning provision. As it points out in the action plan, we do not live in a centrally planned economy, so secondary vocational education focuses mainly on the regional economy.

Action plan to combat poor literacy

A new action plan to combat poor literacy will be presented to parliament in 2011. The former action plan, which was due to expire at the end of 2010, has been extended for one year.

Macro-efficiency

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science uses various tools to regulate educational provision. The so-called 'macro-efficiency' test is designed to ensure that there are not too many graduates in a field for which there is no demand in the Netherlands. In order to stimulate new jobs, the Ministry decided that education programmes for jobs in developing areas of the economy have a greater chance of being approved than education programmes leading to traditional jobs.

F. EDUCATION BUDGETS

QUESTION 6

How has the economic and financial crisis affected education and training budgets in your country (please refer to developments in particular education sectors, if appropriate)?

The recession has had an impact on the resources available for general and vocational education. The government has proposed cutting the budget for government-funded higher education institutions by €270 million as of 1 September 2011. Thereby it has also had an effect on public finances, which has led to priorities being adjusted, as highlighted in the coalition agreement. Resources have been made available in the short term for a youth unemployment action plan, a work placement 'offensive' in secondary vocational education (focusing on retaining as many placements as possible with recognised providers) and a programme to encourage students in secondary vocational education to consider taking more advanced courses to prevent them entering the labour market too early. However, it has now become clear that public finances need to be overhauled, which means that the budget for general and vocational education has not been increased.

In addition to a reduction in grants and a wage freeze, the new priorities for education, including agricultural education, are as follows:

Focus areas (in million euros)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	Long term
PO Expansion of early school leavers target group	30	50	50	50	50
PO/VO/MBO Enhancement and harmonisation of testing	70	70	80	80	80
PO/VO/MBO Professional development of teaching staff	100	150	150	150	150
PO/VO/MBO Performance-related pay	10	20	40	80	250
PO/VO Gifted pupils	20	30	30	30	30

PO/VO Language and numeracy	20	20	0	0	0
PO More bridging classes and summer courses	40	50	50	50	50
VO/MBO Additional provision and local schools	30	30	30	30	30
MBO Enhancing quality	0	150	150	150	150
HO More contact hours	50	130	210	230	300
Quality drive	70	180	220	270	270
Innovation and research	90	90	90	90	90
Total	540	980	1,100	1,330	1,450

Adjustments (in million euros)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	Long term
Councils and institutes	20	20	20	20	20
PO	10	130	240	350	350
VO	0	50	110	140	140
MBO	0	110	160	310	330
HO ^{*)}	62	388	393	443	543
Research and innovation	90	90	90	90	90
Total	540	980	1,100	1,330	1,450

^{*)} including student grants

PO Primary education

VO Secondary education

MBO Secondary vocational education

HO Higher education

G. LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGIES

QUESTION 7

What progress has your country made in the development and implementation of a coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy?

7.1 Does your country have such a strategy (please indicate where it is laid down)

The interministerial Learning and Working Project Department (PLW) was set up in 2005, with staff from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The unit's remit was to decide on specific measures to promote adult learning. The targets are identified in two documents: *Reinforcing Learning & Working; Action Programme 2005-2007* and *Carrying on with Learning & Working; Plan of Approach 2008-2011*.

Implementation of the EU-LLP in the Netherlands is going well. The Dutch National Agency for the LLP consists of three organisations that – long before the LLP was introduced – earned their spurs in various sectors of the Dutch education system: Nuffic for higher education, CINOP for vocational education, and the European Platform for schools and adult education. Their extensive knowledge of the specific part of the education field in which they operate has contributed to successful implementation of the LLP. With successful implementation in mind, the Dutch government is keen to maintain a national LLP agency consisting of these three organisations – at least for the duration of the current programme.

7.2 Please briefly refer to the main measures addressing the principles of shared responsibility, effective financial mechanisms, flexible pathways and quality initial and targeted continuing training

Lifelong learning and prior learning assessment and recognition

A nationwide regional and sectoral infrastructure for learning and working, in which educational institutions, the government and the business community work together, has been set up with the aid of central government funding. The various partners involved in the learning and working process are responsible for achieving the goals, while the government creates the enabling conditions. The aim of lifelong learning policy is to

enable people to develop their potential and to respond flexibly to changes within society and the world of work. The government provides tax incentives to make lifelong learning more attractive, doing so on the basis of specific targets for the number of programmes combining work and study.

The government has made grants available to enable prior learning assessment and recognition and set up training and employment helpdesks. This system for validating formal, non-formal and informal learning is undergoing further development. Increasing awareness and enhancing the quality of prior learning assessment for validating formally, non-formally and informally acquired skills, with a view to increasing the mobility and long-term employability of the Dutch workforce, contributes to shared responsibility. In this regard, the Netherlands is ahead of other countries, although there is still room for improvement in the present system. Legislation is currently being prepared to create a comprehensive quality assurance system for prior learning assessment and recognition.

As a second-chance option for early school leavers aged between 18 and 23, an extra 20,000 learning and working placements have been created, both of a dual nature and based on prior learning assessment. This is part of a more comprehensive scheme to provide for a larger group of employees.

A National Qualification Framework (NQF) is being developed. After acceptance by the Minister of Education, implementation will be started. This framework will be compatible with the European qualifications framework.

Promoting the mobility of teaching staff in vocational education

The National Agency (*Nationaal agentschap*) vigorously promotes the use of funding under the Leonardo da Vinci programme to pay for work placements for teachers in secondary vocational education.

Lifelong learning and EVC

Lifelong learning policy is aimed on people to develop their learning capacity and to respond flexibly to changes within society and the world of work. The responsibility for achieving the goals lies with the various partners involved in the learning and working

process, but the government creates the enabling conditions. The government is offering tax incentives to make lifelong learning more attractive and has made grants available to enable prior learning assessment and recognition (EVC) and create training and employment helpdesks. As a second chance option for early school leavers aged between 18 and 23, an extra 20,000 learn-work arrangements are created. This can be either arrangements with a dual character or EVC arrangements. This ambition is part of a more comprehensive scheme to create arrangements of this kind for a larger population of employees.

H. OTHER SIGNIFICANT REFORMS IN THE PRIORITY AREAS

QUESTION 8

What progress has your country made in making reforms in the priority areas not directly addressed in questions 2 – 7? (Please indicate relevant priority area and give a short description)

Reforms in the priority areas for secondary education

The 2008-2011 quality agenda for secondary education contains six policy priorities. Improving basic language and numeracy skills is the top priority and is also being addressed in other sectors of education.

Most schools are providing more teaching in language and numeracy, and diagnostic tests and remedial programmes are now available. The benchmark levels that pupils should attain in examinations is laid down in the relevant legislation.

Another priority is to introduce community service for all secondary schools. Every secondary school pupil will have the opportunity to do a week's community service, for example voluntary work or social work. The aim is to build citizenship.

Reforms in the priority areas for higher education

Excellence is an ongoing concern. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science set up the Sirius Programme in 2008 as an official initiative to address the issue. The Ministry invited all universities and universities of applied sciences to submit a plan for the promotion of excellence, either independently or in collaboration with other institutions. The bulk of the Sirius budget (€61 million) has been earmarked for the Bachelor's programme that was launched in 2008. The Master's programme has started in the spring of 2010. These funds provide the first incentive to inspire excellence in the top 5% of students. The Sirius Programme has a double focus: first, on institutions' goals, their vision for the whole institution and their performance (including the feasibility of performance targets); and second, on the learning function of the programme as a whole.

I. PROPOSALS FOR THE PRIORITY AREAS OF THE SUBSEQUENT PERIOD

QUESTION 9

Under the 4 broad strategic targets, described below, the Council also defined midterm priority areas for the period 2009-11. Which mid-term priority areas would your country wish to cooperate on during the next cycle (please indicate order of priority – high, medium, low)?

9.1 Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality

1. Expanding learning mobility
2. European Qualifications Framework
3. Lifelong Learning Strategies
4. Partnership

9.2 Improving quality and efficiency of education and training

1. Professional development of teachers and trainers
2. Basic skills in reading, mathematics and science

9.3 Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

1. Early leavers from education and training

9.4 Enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

1. New Skills for New Jobs

9.5 Other comments