

EQAVET Peer Review in the Netherlands on ‘Student involvement and the role of teachers in the improvement of quality in upper secondary VET’ - Flash Report

EQAVET Peer Review in the Netherlands

The seventh EQAVET Peer Review in 2023 took place on 17-19 April 2023 in Utrecht, hosted by CINOP, an international education research, project management and consultancy enterprise which houses the Dutch EQAVET NRP. Six EQAVET Network members from Belgium-fr, Bulgaria, Finland, Malta and Slovenia acted as peers. The Peer Review focused on developing a more inclusive approach to student involvement and strengthening the role of teachers as a connecting factor between student and VET institution. The feedback from peers, based on experiences from their own vocational education and training (VET) systems, will help the Netherlands to enhance the quality culture in VET.

Student involvement and the role of teachers in the improvement of quality in upper secondary VET

To kick-off the meeting, the hosts introduced the Dutch NRP EQAVET and its role in the VET system and quality assurance in the Netherlands.

The Dutch NRP EQAVET and Quality Assurance in upper secondary VET

CINOP, an educational consultancy and research foundation, has hosted the Dutch National Reference Point (NRP) since 2009. CINOP works with VET institutions and other VET stakeholders on various topics including quality assurance (QA), flexibilization, curriculum development, training and team development, data analysis and lifelong learning.

In the Netherlands, the Adult Education and Vocational Education Act (WEB) gives strong autonomy to VET providers including on internal QA. They are responsible for describing the quality of the education connected to their own ambitions set up in coordination with their stakeholders. The Education Inspectorate fulfils the role of an external supervisor, checking whether minimum requirements for basic education are met and quality assurance is in place. The current Inspectorate framework has five pillars: improving system quality, accountability in management, guaranteeing quality, stimulating quality and tailored supervision and is revised every four years.

The Inspectorate investigates schools every four years based on the framework, focusing mainly on governance. Every year, the Inspectorate also works on specific topics in targeted schools and produces special reports to provide input to the Ministry and other relevant stakeholders. Lately, student wellbeing has been an important topic, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Education encourages the development of a stronger quality culture with increased initiative and responsibility for quality for VET providers, who must set up their own internal QA system. This development is fuelled by the Vision on quality assurance in 2025 document from the Dutch Association of upper secondary VET colleges (MBO Raad) and the expected updated Inspectorate framework in 2025. The focus for national organisations is to create a shared understanding of what QA is, developing strong learning capacities to improve quality and increasingly involve the stakeholders in QA. The Dutch NRP EQAVET aims to support VET providers in this process by organising sessions, developing tools and sharing

knowledge. Current topics and activities include sessions with education teams and QA employees to strengthen their role in QA, develop sessions with VET institutions to strengthen the involvement of students in QA and the quality cycle, as well as research and innovation on the reports of the Inspectorate, the use of data for QA (e.g. graduate tracking) or the involvement of work placement companies in QA.

Introduction on student involvement in VET and QA

The hosts presented two different organisations working with VET providers and students.

1. Dutch Association of VET colleges (MBO Raad)

The Dutch Association of upper secondary VET colleges (MBO Raad) represents the 57 publicly funded VET colleges from the Netherlands with around 500,000 VET students. MBO Raad is the voice of the VET sector, as it promotes their collective interests and acts as an employer organisation and an intermediary between VET colleges and the government, professional branch organisations, industries and other relevant stakeholders. MBO Raad also provides VET colleges and their stakeholders with guidance, data and advice on policymaking and changes in legislation as well as promotes innovation.

Between 40 and 50% of students in the Netherlands opt for a VET pathway after secondary school. The graduation rate in VET is high with 77% and the percentage of NEETs (youth Not in Employment, Education or Training) is low. 40% of the graduates from MBO level 4 (EQF level 4) decide to continue their studies at a university of applied science to obtain a 2-year Associate Degree (EQF level 5) or a 4-year bachelor's degree (EQF level 6), which can lead to a master in university (EQF level 7)..

Schools have the freedom to elect the programmes they offer and how to develop them. Funding is allocated through a lump sum based mainly on the number of students and for a small part on the graduation rate, while additional subsidies may be obtained for particular purposes, such as expensive equipment in specific sectors. The size of schools varies greatly from 300 to 30,000 students with an average around 15,000 students and has an impact on the opportunities to develop projects and initiatives to foster the involvement of students. The size of schools is currently on the rise, often as a result of mergers taking place.

Upper-secondary VET qualifications (MBO) are offered at four different levels (corresponding to EQF levels 1-4) and as two different learning pathways, a work-based pathway (WBL) and a school-based pathway (SBL). Each pathway generally works on a 4-day/1-day basis. Both strands are part of one qualification structure which allows for transition from one pathway to the other. In 2017, 380,000 students were in the school-based pathway while 120,000 students in the work-based pathway. Most of the students are concentrated in MBO levels 3 (26%) and 4 (54%). Only 3% of students are in level 1 as it is mainly aimed at students who did not complete high school.

2. National Youth Organisation and Interest Group for upper secondary VET Students (JOB MBO)

The National Youth Organisation and Interest Group for upper secondary VET Students (JOB MBO) was created in 1998 to represent the rights and interests of all upper secondary VET students in the Netherlands. JOB MBO is constituted of a board of VET students and student council representatives, supported by policy officers and a guest lecturer. JOB MBO represents VET students at ministerial and political level, as well as in the media to better promote the image of VET students. JOB MBO also trains the student councils to raise awareness on their rights and help them with their duties and challenges. JOB MBO is engaged

in developing student participation to allow for an inclusive representation of the diversity of students in VET schools.

Since 2011, VET colleges have been legally required to have student councils. Student councils need to be elected each year to ensure continuous dialogue with the students who are considered as key stakeholders for education quality. There are currently 58 student councils in the Netherlands, 48 of which are members of JOB MBO. Student councils have four main rights:

- ❖ right of approval on policy changes that the school wants to introduce;
- ❖ right of advice on policy changes initiated by the school;
- ❖ right of information to be provided relevant documents for their understanding;
- ❖ and right of initiative.

JOB MBO launched the project 'You Decide' in 2010, which aims to promote the development of a culture of student participation, which has since entered different phases. During phase 2, the project aimed to professionalise student councils with workshops and trainings on organisation, lobbying, negotiation strategy, representation of their fellow students and to raise awareness on their rights. Phase 3 focused on the main obstacles faced by student councils and identified the need to develop the culture of participation and give a clearer role to the student councils. Phase 4 focused on researching alternative ways for students to participate and give a stronger support base to student councils. Four main components of remaining challenges were identified:

- ❖ develop an informal culture of participation where all students feel heard to supplement the formal student councils that only suit a small proportion of students;
- ❖ develop a wide range of forms of participation to appeal as many students as possible, (e.g. student panels);
- ❖ provide infrastructure to students such as available spaces to gather and discuss and acknowledgement of their investment, as student participation is on a voluntary basis;
- ❖ and use the already available networks in the student population.

Peer discussion

The Dutch host presented the challenges linked to student involvement and the role of teachers. An important aim for the next several years is that VET providers further engage in quality goals with their stakeholders, which should be more involved. This aim is supported by the Ministry of Education, the Education Inspectorate, the MBO Raad, the Quality Network for upper secondary VET colleges (Kwaliteitsnetwerk mbo) and the VET colleges themselves. Challenges related to the increased participation of students include to revise a system which is too focused on formal channels of participation and appeals only to a limited number of students, address the under-representation of minorities, the sometimes negative image of participation for students and the difficulty for schools to involve students. When it comes to teachers, the Vision on QA in 2025 document highlights their responsibility for quality, as education teams are in the lead for quality. However, in reality, teams often struggle to embrace this responsibility, are not yet used to working systematically and cyclically on QA and are not sufficiently supported by school support services. This lack of ownership results in a struggle for teachers to translate students' input into actions.

At the end of the meeting, the peer reviewers shared their initial feedback. A comprehensive feedback report will be drafted in the next weeks.

The EQAVET Peer Review initiative 2022 - 2023

The [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) called upon the EQAVET Network to develop a specific methodology for EQAVET peer reviews, with the objective to support the improvement and transparency of quality assurance arrangements at system level in the Member States. Over the course of 2021, with the support of DG EMPL and the EQAVET Secretariat, the EQAVET Network agreed on a joint methodology and prepared a Peer Review Manual.

The Quality Assurance National Reference Points (EQAVET NRPs) from 21 Member States have agreed to take part in the first phase of the EQAVET Network's peer review initiative. The Dutch Peer Review was the seventh out of twelve Peer Reviews that are scheduled to take place in 2023, following nine Peer Reviews in 2022.