

## **OECD review: Skills beyond School**

### **National background report for the Netherlands**

This report was prepared for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science as an input to the OECD Review of Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training, *Skills beyond School*. The document was prepared in response to guidelines the OECD provided to all countries. The opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the national authority, the OECD or its member countries. Further information about the OECD review is available at: [www.oecd.org/education/vet](http://www.oecd.org/education/vet)

## Colophon

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## Foreword

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris is working on a project titled Skills beyond School. This project is about vocational education in the western world and is a follow-up to the Learning for Jobs study (2010). Although the Netherlands did not feature as a case study in Learning for Jobs, it is participating in Skills beyond School. On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), the Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (ecbo) has prepared the OECD's field-based country study, which has been taken place in March and May 2013.

Skills beyond School is an internationally comparative study primarily concerned with postsecondary vocational education. The term 'postsecondary' is seldom used in the Netherlands, however, and the more frequently employed term – 'post-initial training' (as part of lifelong learning) – is linked to various levels at which training is offered. In the Dutch situation, a strict definition of the term 'postsecondary' (i.e. ISCED level 4) would restrict the scope to 'specialist training programmes', which come under the statutory sector 'upper secondary vocational education'. For the purpose of this report, upper secondary VET refers to mbo, and postsecondary VET refers to bachelor's programmes, or higher professional education, as it is often referred in the Netherlands (unless indicated otherwise), which is in line with the terms used by the OECD. In addition, postsecondary VET includes specialist programmes that are specifically referred to as 'specialist programmes' or 'specialist training'.

This study also allows us to link the current policy discussion on the position of vocational education in the education system with the significance of publicly and privately funded secondary and higher vocational education. This is a topical issue, because the last two cabinets under the premiership of Rutte (2010–12; 2012–today) have been developing a new vision on the position of vocational education in the light of the changes in the labour market.

This report is based on a meticulous study of policy documents and descriptions of training programmes, as well as statistical<sup>1</sup> material from the various educational fields. Where possible, we use time-based comparisons, but the analysis is primarily based on recent developments.

The report is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 1, we describe the policy context in which the relatively autonomous vocational education schools at secondary and tertiary levels currently operate. For (post-)secondary VET, this involves translating the government memo 'Focus on Craftsmanship' into everyday practice.<sup>2</sup> Issues relating to the efficiency and quality of a range of training courses that preferably offers full coverage play a pivotal role in this, as does the relationship with the labour market in more and less innovative sectors. A 'revitalisation agenda' is also in place for higher (vocational) education, in which both the

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical information sources in this report. Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2012). *Key figures 2007-2011*. The Hague: OCW. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2012). *Jaarboek onderwijs in cijfers – 2011 (Yearbook education in figures – 2011)*. Heerlen/Den Haag: CBS. Use of electronic dataset of CBS (Statline) by compiling 'own' data: [www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl)

<sup>2</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (2011). *Focus op vakmanschap 2011-2015 (Focus on craftsmanship)*. Den Haag: OCW.

streamlining and promotion of training programmes for higher professional education and the quality of training programmes are points to consider.

The second chapter deals with upper secondary VET and postsecondary specialist training programmes as part of upper secondary VET. Subthemes include governance, the provision of VET, the differentiation in levels, programmes and learning pathways, financing and teachers in VET.

The third chapter discusses the route that follows after upper secondary VET. Here we deal with the discussion on hbo bachelor's and associate degree programmes, as well as with labour market certificates, such as the *meester* title, and related trajectories for post-initial training and lifelong learning.

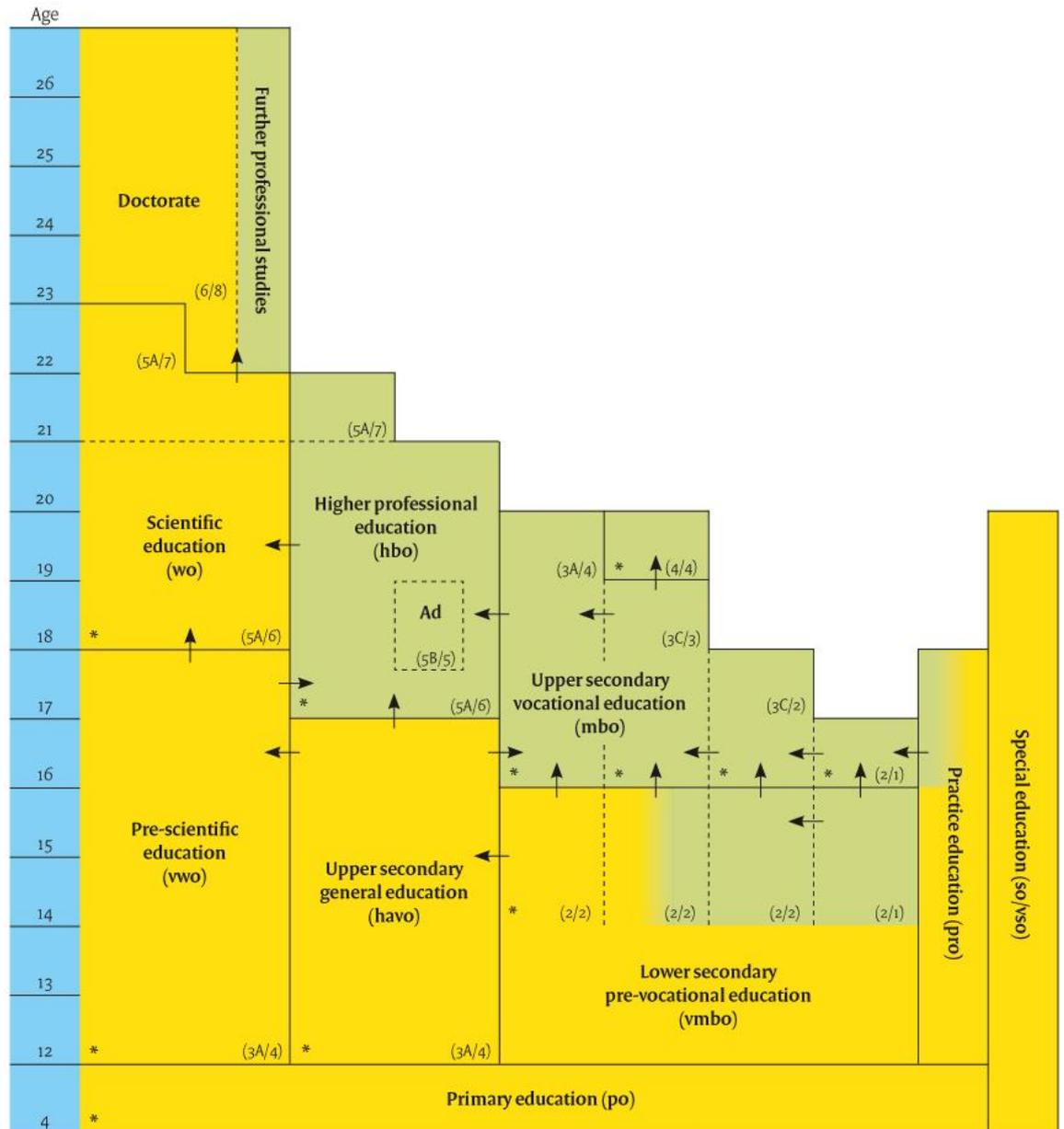
The fourth chapter looks back on the facts and findings presented in the three previous chapters and puts them into a critical and evaluative (developmental) perspective. The result of the entire comparative study will also feed the broader OECD Skills Strategy, an approach aimed at drawing more attention to education and further training.

Finally, we should like to make a personal note. Our colleague Karel Visser passed away on the eve of the first field visit of the OECD in March 2013, some days after delivering to them the first draft of this report. We will always remember Karel as a source of inspiration and reflection in our comparative analysis of systems of vocational education and training. We dedicate this report to him with deep gratitude for all his wise suggestions and ideas.

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# 1 Introduction: education policy and study routes

## 1.1 The Dutch education system



\* Corresponding adult education at this level.  
 Number between brackets: (ISCED-level/EQF-level).  
 → Transfer possibilities.

Education is compulsory for youngsters aged 5 to 16 years, as well as for those aged 16–17 on 1 August of any one year who do not have a general or vocational qualification at upper secondary level (in the diagram: at least vwo, havo or mbo2). This 'qualification duty' was introduced in 2008 in order to reduce the number of early school leavers.

After completing primary school at the age of 12, students continue their educational path in secondary education where there are different types of schooling to choose from. Secondary education consists of a more general component preparing students for higher levels of education, and a vocational one. The general component comprises upper secondary general education (*havo*) and pre-scientific education (*vwo*). Alongside these tracks there is a pre-vocational and a vocational secondary education track. After their first two years in lower secondary schooling, about one quarter of the students choose programmes that can be characterised as pre-vocational (part of preparatory secondary vocational education or *vmbb*). This is followed by upper secondary vocational education (*mbo*). The vocational track differs from the more general secondary education component in level and duration, programme orientation and learning pathway. We elaborate this further in Chapter 2.

Higher professional education or postsecondary VET (*hbo*) is open to students with upper secondary general education diplomas. Transferring to this type of higher education is also possible with a diploma at level 4 of upper and postsecondary vocational education. The majority of students with a secondary education diploma currently pursue a four-year bachelor's degree programme. In addition, two-year associate degree programmes (*Ad*) have been developed; these are explained further in Chapter 3.

The development agendas for upper secondary VET and higher professional education have been developed independently of each other. Both agendas, the exact impact of which is not known, have a bearing on the position and potential scope of postsecondary vocational education as a policy tool relevant to the labour market. In sections 1.2 and 1.3 we further discuss VET schools and policies, and in section 1.4 we address the world of hbo.

## **1.2 Historical overview: towards greater autonomy for VET schools**

The Dutch vocational education system has undergone various periods of development.

### *1850-1919*

During the first period, the first law concerning vocational education (the Industrial, Technical and Domestic Education Act) came into force. Additionally, the first technical schools and vocational schools, most of which were privately funded, were founded. The 1919 Act also provided for an apprenticeship system that was regarded as an alternative to vocational education in a day school context.

### *1919-1968*

Vocational education underwent explosive growth during the second period. The growth in secondary school attendance, which was primarily publicly funded, underscored the need for more cohesion between the various forms of secondary education. This resulted in the Secondary Education Act, which came into force in 1968. General secondary education, together with vocational education at lower, intermediate and higher levels, was an integral part of this act. This joint legislation positioned general education and vocational education as equal alternatives alongside one another with the possibility of reciprocal transfers. The apprenticeship system was given its own independent legal basis in the Apprenticeship Act of 1969.

### *1969-1996*

The third period saw continued educational expansion, which mainly concerned upper secondary vocational education and higher professional education. In the case of the latter, this third period lasted until 1986, although it did continue to grow after that. In 1986, higher professional education was provided for in a separate act and was 'liberated' from the constraints of secondary education. The idea of creating greater cohesion between higher professional education and scientific education dates back to the 1970s, but came to fruition only in 1993 with the introduction of the Higher Education and Research Act.

Vocational education at the secondary level also underwent emancipation during this third period, culminating in the Adult and Vocational Education Act in 1996 (*WEB: Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*). As far as vocational education is concerned, this legislation covers both the school-based learning tracks (including internships) and the apprenticeship system.

### *Since 1996*

The ambition of the designers of the *WEB* Act was to combine three objectives: education directed towards vocational qualification in relation to the labour market; socialisation and citizenship; and 'continued learning'. A second ambition was to enlarge the leeway and the action potential of relatively autonomous institutes. Different types of vocational education were integrated and placed under one roof, which led to economies of scale, a new type of governance (internal management and control, vertical and horizontal accountability relations) and competition between institutions.

The Wagner committee in 1982, the Rauwenhof committee in 1990, and the Van Veen I and II committees in 1992 addressed the importance of joint responsibility of social partners and schools for vocational education. As a result, workplace learning became an important part of the Dutch VET system. In the school-based track, at least 20% of the learning takes place at the workplace, and in the apprenticeship track at least 60% of the learning takes place in the company. Both pathways function in the market as communicating vessels: the same qualifications/diplomas can be achieved via both pathways. The *WEB* also divided tasks between the VET institutes and the Centres of Expertise on VET and the Labour Market (*Kenniscentra Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*). The sectoral Centres of Expertise on VET and the Labour Market are responsible for the development of the qualification structure, a task that will be centralised to the newly established S-BB in 2015/16.

From 2002 on, a transition took place from a qualifications structure based on detailed achievement levels (*eindtermen*), to an education system that was based on competences with the aim of replacing a fragmented, reductionist approach with a more holistic approach in which competence is regarded as the integrated ability to cope with complex tasks (Biemans et al., 2005). In 2012, 'competence-based education' was replaced by 'vocationally oriented education' (*beroepsgericht onderwijs*), in name avoiding the label 'competency'. Again, the qualification structure was redesigned to reduce the number of qualifications.

In terms of size, both the institutes for higher professional education and the institutes for upper secondary vocational education have gone through a process of scaling, creating major educational providers that have high levels of autonomy within a framework of general, statutory regulations – typical of the fourth period. The educational laws for these types of education provide a broad framework outlining key elements such as the general aims and objectives of VET, access and accessibility, design procedures and procedures

concerning the determination of qualifications, curricula and examinations, quality assurance procedures, regulations about the administration of publicly financed VET suppliers, procedures with regard to the recognition of private commercial VET suppliers, and financing. In the following chapters, we will come back to some of these subjects.

### 1.3 Current policy developments in VET

The first decade of this century saw social and political debate on the basic quality of upper secondary vocational education (mbo). Dutch VET received negative publicity because of students' complaints about the quantity and quality of classes. At the same time, teachers and other stakeholders expressed concerns about the way in which the mbo institutes were organised and managed. The Amarantis school even went bankrupt as a result of financial mismanagement. Also the Education Inspectorate expressed its concerns about a number of educational programmes that were performing 'very poorly'. Following this negative publicity, the Governability of Education Committee (led by Mrs Oudeman) was tasked with investigating the manageability of the mbo sector. In 2010, the committee published its recommendation under the title *Naar meer focus op het mbo* ('Towards more focus on mbo'). The minister for Education, Culture and Science (OCW) drafted the Focus on Craftsmanship action plan partly on the basis of this recommendation. In the meantime, also new rules for the horizontal and vertical governance of schools have been enacted.

#### *Focus on Craftsmanship*

The White Paper (*Actieplan*) 'Focus on Craftsmanship' (2011) focuses on upper secondary VET. Each type of education is faced with the challenge of enabling three, partially conflicting premises: accessibility, efficiency, and quality or effectiveness. While the emphasis in the first decade of this century was on improving the accessibility of educational programmes and the transition to higher types of education in the *vmbo-mbo-hbo* column, current policy developments have a stronger focus on efficiency and quality issues. The central message of the White Paper is that vocational education should be more efficient, in terms of both how it is organised within the education system and how it is managed. The 2011 Focus on Craftsmanship action plan should be viewed as an attempt to rejuvenate the system of upper secondary vocational education (mbo). In this light, the establishment of the Foundation for Cooperation between Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (*Stichting Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*, S-BB) in January 2012 (see also box 'The development of the qualification structure', p. 22) can be seen as the 'reevaluation of the public initiative', given the split between legal, public tasks to be implemented by S-BB and private initiatives that are led to the market.<sup>3</sup>

First and foremost, Focus on Craftsmanship includes measures that primarily focus on efficiency (and not, as the name might suggest, on what craftsmanship means). The measures largely concern the new funding model, a cascade model of input funding that discourages studying for a long period of time. As such, attention is being paid to the effect of (hidden) financial stimuli in the funding system and an attempt is being made to make education more attractive. In addition, there is the question of curtailing the length of training at the highest levels of upper secondary VET in order to achieve a faster transit through the vocational training column, whilst at the same time increasing the burden (for

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<sup>3</sup> See Ria Bronneman's 2011 dissertation.

some of the relevant programmes). Also centralised exams of key subjects<sup>4</sup> will be introduced in the near future.

Second, macro-efficiency has been put on the agenda. This will simplify the structure of job qualifications and remove overlaps in the educational offering. A key focal point is how to arrive at an optimum qualification minimum at the national and the regional level and create corresponding operable upper and postsecondary VET training programmes that are relevant to the national and the regional labour market. That ambition touches on issues relating to the breadth and depth of programmes and on the relationship with the sectoral and regional business community. In a 'shrinking' region with decreasing numbers of students (e.g. Zeeland), regional educational organisations in preparatory secondary vocational education (vmbo) and mbo work together, and there are administrative mergers. This goes to show that macro-efficiency is a key new focus area, which has been entrusted to the S-BB.

Third, there is a desire to revise the 'qualification files'. The requirements for a VET diploma are laid down in a qualification file. The qualification structure is currently under revision. From 2013 onwards, qualifications will be more clustered and there will be room for regional-specific education, taking into account economic differences within the regions of the Netherlands. As such, in the short term this overhaul is a key task for knowledge centres, directed by the S-BB, to reduce the overlap between qualifications.

More generally, nearly all qualification files have been overhauled. Their definition is being broadened, with a basic structure, profile modules and elective modules. Companies and educational institutions use the qualification files for the development of programmes and exams. In February 2015, 176 files and 489 profiles will remain, representing an almost 25% reduction in the number of files. Of these, 55 files are offered by almost all roc's; some 75 files exist for smaller education programmes and another 50 for particular regional specialisation programmes.<sup>5</sup>

All in all, the aim is to continue revising the structure of the qualification files and to align them better. This setup will also resolve the issue of estimating the transfer value of skills in the labour market. At the same time, there is a shared fear that vocational education will become focused on addressing general skills, partly because of the general efficiency criteria and the national requirements that are being set in terms of language and arithmetic (and English in mbo4).

The fourth and more indirect topic of the Focus on Craftsmanship action plan is the relevance of the qualification files for the labour market. It is expected that the process of flexibilising the qualifications (with a basis structure, profile- and elective modules) with more choices for participants to devise their own career will continue, so that the sector can play an important role in defining the job market relevance of the courses. The plans anticipate a debate on the pending mismatch on the job market, due to both the ageing of the work force and the educational choices of new students in VET.

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<sup>4</sup> The Netherlands is dropping down the PISA scale, and there are deficiencies in language and arithmetic. See the ecbo report by Houtkoop et al. for a more extensive discussion (2011). The PISA discussion is complex (CPB, 2011). The fact that more highly-developed Asian countries (Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea) are taking part, and that the Netherlands can now also rank practical education (Scheerens, 2012), is also relevant.

<sup>5</sup> See the S-BB website for the full list; accessed 18 July 2014.

In Dutch education policy, the level 2 mbo diploma has always been a key benchmark and a threshold value for an 'entry' or 'starting qualification' for good and sustainable prospects in the labour market. A shift in the rating of this diploma in the labour market has become visible in recent years. Generally speaking, the higher the education level, the higher the position you attain.<sup>6</sup> Although the opportunities for participants with an mbo2 diploma are still far better than those with level 1 diplomas, big differences occur between graduates with level 1 and 2 diplomas and those with level 3 and 4 and bachelor's qualifications. To put it differently, the 'threshold value' of level 2 is decreasing and shifting towards mbo level 3.

#### *Cooperation between VET and the labour market: the S-BB and KBB*

The Netherlands has a long history of cooperation between VET colleges and representatives from business and labour, dating back to the first vocational schools in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to 1954 when the first sectoral body was established. Since then, processes of rationalisation and scale enlargement have occurred, although the basic structure of school-based (*bol*) and apprenticeship (*bbi*) programmes has remained intact.

In the Netherlands, there are 17 Centres of Expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market, each organised around one sector or branch of industry. The centres have been appointed by the Dutch Ministry of Education to perform legal tasks in the field of VET:

1. The development and maintenance of the qualifications structure for upper secondary VET. The qualifications structure is developed via full consultation with employers and educational institutes that are then supervised by a committee composed of representatives of industry and education.
2. The accreditation of training companies and the monitoring of the quality of these companies.

Until 2012, Colo represented the interests of the Centres of Expertise on regional, national and international levels. In 2012, at the request of the Ministry of Education, Colo was replaced by the Foundation for Cooperation on VET and the Labour Market (*S-BB: Stichting Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*). The S-BB is responsible for the cooperation between vocational education and the labour market, and provides the Ministry of Education with advice on VET policy. Within the S-BB, vocational education and trade and industry work together on themes such as the VET qualification structure, examination, work placements and the efficiency of the offer of training programmes.

For the Netherlands, this is an important improvement and change within the organisational structures of the VET system. All parties involved in vocational education and training work closely together and try to reach consensus within the S-BB. The aim is to increase the commitment of all parties to improve the quality of VET. Education and the labour market are equally represented on the S-BB board.

After the Government Expenditure Revaluation Operation (2010) stated for the first time that the budget for the Centres of Expertise could be significantly reduced, the government (unexpectedly for many) announced an 80% budget reduction for the statutory tasks, since

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<sup>6</sup> ROA (2011). *School leavers between education and labour market 2010*. ROA-R-2011/7. Maastricht: ROA.

the Centres of Expertise tasks were to be run 'more efficiently'. This is, for instance, to be done by way of a centralisation of the qualification structure development, with the S-BB being given the key to formulating policy. From 2015/16, the arrangements concerning the Centres of Expertise will be privatised, and the public tasks will be allocated to the S-BB. The fine-tuning between VET and labour market representatives will take place within eight 'sector chambers' covering sectoral issues. These sector chambers are to be developed within S-BB.

### *Labour market developments*

In line with much international research, the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) is increasingly drawing attention to a certain degree of dichotomisation in the labour market: there are more low-level and high-level jobs but fewer at the intermediate level, hence there is a strong difference between jobs at the bottom and at the top level of the labour market. The cut-off point between the more and the lesser privileged in the labour market is shifting upwards: jobseekers without basic qualifications have difficulty finding work, while the prospects for those with mbo3 and mbo4 are fairly good. In light of the ageing demographic, there are sufficient jobs in healthcare, technology and logistics but young people (including those from ethnic minorities) too often opt for retail trade and economics. Socially speaking, this mismatch is expensive as it demands reskilling or further training as well as flexibility.

This in itself is part of the much wider discussion on some central principles related to the changes occurring in labour market governance: a more active approach will be taken to prevent unemployment (now more than 8% and double-digits for youngsters) and to help people into new jobs, preferably before they have to claim unemployment benefit. In April 2013, the government therefore negotiated with the social partners a wide social pact. The measures amount to the following: simplification of dismissal laws and reduction of unemployment benefits, whereas employees threatened with redundancy will be entitled to compensation that can be used for training for a new job or outplacement. Also the social infrastructure of the labour market will be further redesigned with emphasis on prevention to employment and enabling 'school to work' and 'work to work' transitions. The negotiating partners, the government, employer's associations, and the trade union hope to improve the general macro-economic climate and to enhance investment in new jobs and prevent further public sector curtailment.<sup>7</sup>

### *Knowledge and Innovation Agenda*

This is all part of a much wider agenda that has been emerging since the first decade of the new century. Since then, the various cabinets have been working on a Knowledge and Innovation Agenda (KIA), promoting in a general way a knowledge economy, the ambition being that education and science in the Netherlands achieves a global top five position. In the last government policy statement, this is classified as reinforcing the 'solidarity, optimism and strength of the Netherlands'. Everyone must contribute and nobody should be excluded from the social potential of opportunities.

One of the most salient dimensions of the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda is the so-called Top-sector Agenda. At the heart of this approach is cooperation between businesses,

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<sup>7</sup> The financial impact of the agreements is that if recovery continues and the economy picks up this year, the cabinet expects that no additional cuts (4.3 billion) will be needed in 2014 to bring the budget deficit up to or below 3% of GNP.

scientific institutions and regional authorities. The first *human capital agenda* has been set up in nine sectors.<sup>8</sup> This human capital agenda includes concrete deliverables by players (what, how, with whom, preconditions). It is noteworthy that this new top sector structure has not been directly aligned with the national sectoral classification for education and the labour market as we know it in vocational education (Van den Toren et al., 2012, 2014).

For years, attempts have been made to increase the number of participants in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) studies, as major shortages in technical directions are imminent. To that end, since 2004 the National Platform Science and Technology (*Platform Bèta Techniek*) has introduced a large number of projects to the entire education system, from primary schools through to universities. The task is to bring secondary technical vocational education to the attention of students in primary and general secondary schools, making that type of education more attractive by introducing innovations in upper secondary vocational education, and to show that technical occupations offer plenty of job opportunities.

In the field of vocational education, the overall idea is to better match qualifications and training programmes with labour market needs. Thus also programme innovation remains a key topic, for which cooperation between education institutes and the regional business community is imperative. For instance, because of imminent shortages (expected after the crisis), technical education will have to be made more attractive. A relevant development in this context is the national compact concluded in May 2013 between the government, leading companies, trade unions and institutes of education. This compact – the Technology Pact 2020 – sets out agreements on career opportunities, internships, a shorter learning pathway for practically inclined students, options for co-funding by businesses, and reducing the dropout rate in technical education by improving the educational structure and ensuring the closer supervision of students.

The National Platform Science and Technology has developed a programme to foster new forms of cooperation between vocational education and the business community. The aim is to achieve advantageous tax arrangements for the inflow of students, to foster entrepreneurship, and to pay more attention to science and technology in secondary education and teacher training programmes.

So far, this has led to the establishment of about 20 'Centres of excellence' at hbo level and 15 'Centres for innovative craftsmanship' at mbo level. The plan for the centres is to start operating independently in five years' time. Experiences so far indicate that despite an enthusiastic start, it is not easy to develop the centres. In this school setting, further efforts are needed to develop the emphasis on entrepreneurship, and to ensure sufficient commitment from the business community and a clear business component in education.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding the success of all these, partly innovative efforts, there is a long way to go. There is discussion about the numbers of new technical personnel in demand. Some

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<sup>8</sup> Agri-food, horticulture and base materials, high-tech materials and systems, energy, logistics, creative industry, life sciences and health, chemistry, water. These top sectors receive money from the government to execute research or applied research programmes in public-private partnerships between knowledge institutions and the business community.

<sup>9</sup> See [www.platformbetatechniek.nl](http://www.platformbetatechniek.nl). In a related context, various forms co-makership have been developed around hybrid learning environments. Some of these are more school-based while others are more work-based (see Aalsma, 2011; Zitter and Hoeve, 2012; Smulders et al., 2012; Delies, 2009).

estimate that in order to have a large enough qualified technical workforce in the future, about 40% of mbo participants would have to choose a technical course (also given the upgrading of the economy). According to the predications of ROA covering replacement and job growth, 28,000 technicians should be trained each year in the period 2011–16, most of them at vmbo and mbo level.<sup>10</sup>

#### 1.4 Higher professional education (postsecondary VET)

Higher professional education (postsecondary VET) is a self-regulated subsystem in Dutch education, with strong sectoral bodies for policymaking, a particular system of accreditation and quality assurance (NVAO) and its own employer's association (comparable to those in VET). The basic constitution of these schools is defined in the *Wet Hoger Onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, 1992) which distinguishes hbo institutions as polytechnics or universities for applied sciences from universities aiming at scientific education and research. Today, hbo institutions are called *Hogescholen*, a name that was previously also used for what we now call universities.<sup>11</sup>

Some 40-50 Hogescholen offer a broad range of educational programmes that are financed by the government. In addition, a similar number of substantially smaller and more specialised private Hogescholen are recognised but not financed by the government. To access an hbo bachelor's education programme, a degree in either mbo (at level 4) or havo/vwo is needed.

In line with the European Bologna agenda, higher professional education has its own development agenda, involving the streamlining of study programmes down to some 50 broad-based bachelor's programmes. There is an on-going debate whether hbo needs to profile itself more towards the academic world or to the field of business (this is discussed in Chapter 3 as well). In the early 2000s, a new professional category of hbo lectors was introduced in order to upgrade the research quality of teaching departments in the Hogescholen (conducting practice-based, applied research), while also aligning programmes more with the local and regional business community.

The current Strategic Agenda on Higher Education, Research and Science *Kwaliteit in verscheidenheid* ('Quality in diversity') (Ministry of OCW, 2011) and the Cabinet's Rutte II's coalition agreement include policy plans to make higher education accessible, excellent and future-proof. Changing approaches [with proposed legislation introduced]:

1. An improved but stricter study climate. The government wishes to reduce the number of dropouts from higher education, shorten study periods (aiming at students graduating in a shorter period of time) and encourage students to make the right choice in terms of their preferences.
2. A recognisable, functional educational offering with a greater profile and greater differentiation in education.

This change in approaches followed the recommendations made by the Veerman committee (2010), which urged three forms of differentiation, namely differentiation in structure (e.g.

<sup>10</sup> ROA, 2011, *De arbeidsmarkt naar opleiding en beroep tot 2016*. Maastricht: ROA.

<sup>11</sup> We emphasise that in the hbo discussion we refer to hbo bachelors, in addition to the master programmes that also exist.

number of ADs), differentiation between institutes (profiling) and differentiation in educational offering (e.g. excellence programmes, 3-year bachelor's degrees for VWO students). It is expected that student numbers will increase even further in the coming few years and that the diversity of the student population will also increase. The institutes choose the subjects they are good at. These are then laid down in performance agreements with the minister.

Over the next few years, institutes will be given some space to experiment with setting binding study advice in the second and third years of a course. In 2014, application deadlines will be advanced to 1 May and students will have to participate in activities related to the study of their choice, such as a trial study period or an interview at an educational institution. If prospective students apply after 1 May, the educational institution will decide whether to admit them. To encourage students to graduate in a shorter period of time, a bill has been drafted to introduce a system of student loans.

This profiling in terms of study performances is also reflected in the programmatic and level differentiation of each school, for example, the extent to which associate degrees and/or master programmes are on offer alongside bachelor's programmes. Focusing on such specific profiles is also at stake, so that universities of applied sciences can effectively distinguish themselves from one another and go on to develop into self-labelled 'knowledge institutes' that champion innovation and applied research and act as communication partners for innovative businesses. For example, the government's Top-sector approach and the related Technology Pact support the establishment of particular schools of excellence (Centres for Expertise) in particular areas such as automotive, chemicals, high-tech systems and water management.

A broad study of part-time higher education (Casteren, 2012) found that the courses on offer are not flexible enough and are insufficiently demand-driven to meet the requirements of adults and employers. Over the past few years, the number of students entering part-time education has halved. The government sets great store by a flexible educational offering to be able to meet the needs of the job market. Therefore, in the spring of 2013 it set up an external committee (the Rinnooy Kan committee) tasked with making a recommendation on the preferred developments in policy, frameworks and financing. The committee's primary focus is on higher education, but a follow-up phase could address the issues in mbo. We turn to these issues in Chapter 3. First, we discuss postsecondary VET.

## 2 Upper secondary VET

As has become clear from the previous chapter, the Dutch education system consists of roughly two main pillars, one oriented towards general education (havo-vwo), the other towards vocational education (vmbo-mbo). Both are layered and transitions between the two tracks are fairly limited. 'Early tracking' appears early in the secondary level. If one opts for the general track, one is likely to graduate there, and then to continue studies in the hbo or academic world. Students in the vocational track earn their grades in one of the programmes of VET, before entering the labour market or enrolling in hbo.

### 2.1 Preparatory vocational secondary education

When students finish their primary education at the age of 12, they can choose either the vocational or the more general track. Preparatory vocational secondary education (vmbo) prepares students for mbo and upper general secondary education (havo). Vmbo takes four years and there are four learning pathways:

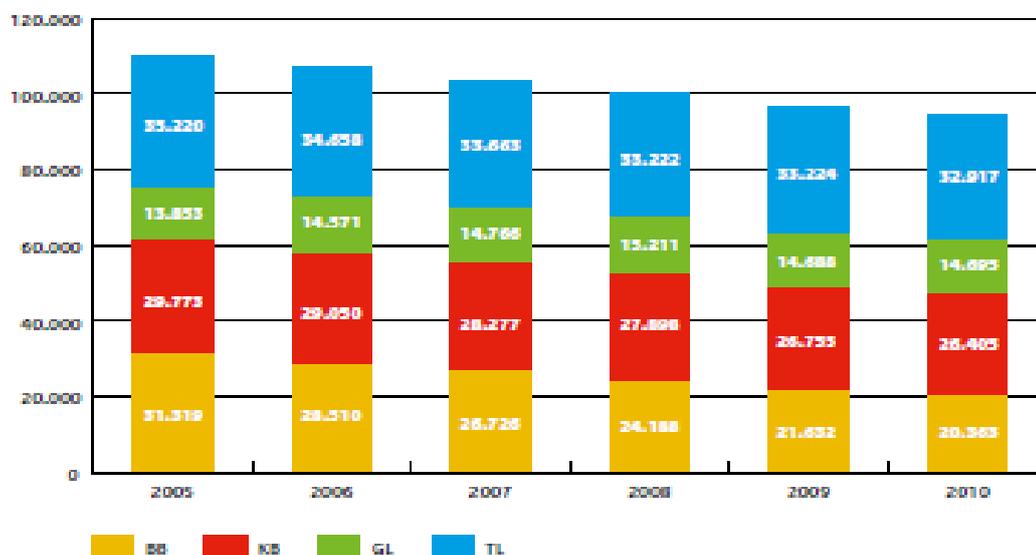
- basic vocational pathway (*basisberoepsgericht*, BB);
- advanced vocational pathway (*kaderberoepsgericht*, KB);
- the combined pathway (*gemengde leerweg*, GL);
- the theoretical pathway (*theoretische leerweg*, TL).

Students with a BB diploma usually enter mbo institutes at level 2, while students with diplomas in the other pathways start mbo education at level 3 or 4.

Approximately 90% of vmbo students go on to enrol in mbo. Over the last few years, the number of students in vmbo has declined. In the academic year 2005/06, a little over 110,000 students went on to the third year of vmbo. In 2010/11, that figure dropped below 95,000. Except for the combined learning pathway, all the pathways are experiencing falling participation. Participation in the BB learning pathway decreased by nearly 40% between 2005 and 2010 (Ministry of OCW, 2012).

Over the last number of years, several initiatives have been taken to reduce school dropout in the transition from VMBO to MBO. For example, particular inclusive study programmes have been developed to combine 4 years VMBO plus 2 years of MBO (under the label VM-2). Currently, the VMBO-curriculum is being redesigned into a particular learning route for craftsmanship (*vakmanschaproute*) and one for technology (*technologieroute*). How this will work out in practice remains to be seen, though we know from research that students sometimes vote with their feet to choose their own optimal routes. We add that many of these revisions in secondary education contain their own governance principles, which seem to be unconnected to the reforms going on in VET, which we will analyse now.

Changing intake in the learning pathways in figures (cohorts 2005–10)



## 2.2 Provision of VET programmes

Subsidised programmes in VET at upper and postsecondary level are offered by 43 regional, multisectoral training centres (*roc: regionale opleidingscentrum*), 12 specialist trade colleges (*vakscholen: each specific to a certain branch of industry*), 12 agricultural training centres (*aoc: agrarische opleidingscentrum*) and four other schools. The aoc's are separately financed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. In addition, private, non-subsidised providers can offer VET programmes on condition that their programmes are recognised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Consequently, upper secondary VET is an open system. Moreover, the subsidised educational institutions can also offer contract educational activities, paid for by employers/employees.

The student population of upper secondary VET is highly heterogeneous and the construction and design of upper secondary VET is defined by three system characteristics, namely differentiation according to level, programme and learning pathway (see sections 2.4 to 2.6).

## 2.3 Governance

The Adult and Vocational Education Act (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsopleiding, 1996*) grants upper secondary VET schools relatively ample space for policymaking. The school has full control over the deployment of teaching staff, the educational programmes offered, industry-specific training portfolios in the region, the organisation of education and the choice of collaboration partners. The school management is also responsible for deciding how to allocate the annual lump sum grant from the ministry in the school budget, for example how much to allocate to personnel costs, materials, housing and reservations for investments in the near future. An auditor's report provides an annual insight into how the

subsidy was spent. 'The government decides "what" and the school "how"',<sup>12</sup> as a well-known education slogan in the Netherlands goes. Although that might not be completely accurate, it does typify the free hand that mbo schools have.

Governance is often defined in an internal, a vertical and a horizontal axis: the internal axis stands for the organisation of internal management and control, the vertical axis for school–government accountability relations, and the horizontal axis the (accountability) relations between the school and its local stakeholders. Governance relations are regulated by law (in the General Adult Education and Vocational Education Act – WEB) and in a Code for Governance (MBO Raad, 2009).

*Internal monitoring and control:* upper secondary VET schools have small executive boards (CvB) with one chairperson and one or two associated posts (corresponding to the central management of a company) and an internal supervisory board (corresponding to the board of supervisors in a large company). Middle management is accountable to the executive board. The participation of students, teachers and parents in decision making is regulated in the Act on Works Councils (WOR; *Wet op Ondernemingsraden*).

*Vertical monitoring and control:* the Education Inspectorate is in charge of external supervision, checking whether statutory provisions are being met and that a quality assurance system is in place. A specific point of concern for the education inspectorate is the quality of exams in terms of content and procedures. Supervision is proportional in nature: it is stricter where deficiencies are found, and the required improvements are monitored by the inspectorate.

*Horizontal dialogue:* The executive board is also expected to use self-chosen tools to render horizontal account to stakeholders who are important to the school: employers, local government and other organisations in their region (MBO Raad, 2009). These forms of horizontal dialogue might become more important in the future, since the government aims to introduce performance-related budgets on issues such as school dropout, student study success (value-added) and workplace training, making satisfaction and cooperation among stakeholders essential.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.4 Level differentiation in upper secondary VET

Upper secondary VET consists of programmes at four levels with different access criteria and transfer possibilities for further learning:

*Mbo level 1* 'assistant training' (*assistentenopleiding*) lasts between six months and a year. It prepares participants to carry out simple executive tasks (ISCED level 2; NLQF/EQF level 1). There are no restrictions on access. Progression to programmes at mbo level 2 is possible. There are a few sector-specific programmes, as well as a broader work-oriented programme

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<sup>12</sup> The Dijsselbloem Parliamentary Inquiry Commission, which was installed in 2007, investigated the implementation of educational innovations introduced in the 1990s and explained why these innovations became controversial. The commission introduced the distinction between the 'what' and 'how', making government responsible for 'what' and schools for 'how'.

<sup>13</sup> These performance-related budget elements (labelled 'quality agreements') were first announced in the Government Declaration of October 2012, and have been agreed upon in an Administrative Accord (*Bestuursakkoord 2014*), negotiated between the minister of OCW and the MBO Raad (dd. 11 July 2014).

for vulnerable groups (assistant with a job market qualification: *arbeidsmarktgekwalificeerde assistent*); it is an entrance qualification for the labour market. There are 25 different mbo level-1 qualifications. This mbo1 courses will be replaced by entry level courses in August 2014.

*Mbo level 2* 'basic vocational education' (*basisberoepsopleiding*) generally lasts two years and prepares for executive tasks (ISCED level 3C short; NLQF/EQF level 2). This level is the 'official' minimum qualification level for the labour market, the term 'official' in this context meaning that it is related to the definition of early school leaving, which, politically speaking, is regarded as a desirable minimum for every citizen. Access requirements: at least a basic preparatory secondary vocational education diploma (*vmbo*); completed assistant training (mbo level 1); at the moment, under certain circumstances no access requirements apply, but this will change in the near future. Progression to mbo level 3 programmes is possible; about 50% of mbo2 graduates go on to study at a higher level. There are 150 level-2 qualifications.

*Mbo level 3* 'professional education' (*vakopleiding*) lasts three years (or one or two years after completion of an mbo level-2 programme). It prepares people to carry out tasks independently (ISCED level 3C long; NLQF/EQF level 3). Access requirements: a preparatory secondary vocational education certificate/diploma (excluding basic pre-vocational education), or proof that the first three years of upper secondary general education or pre-university education have been successfully completed. Progression to programmes at mbo level 4 are possible, as are middle management training programmes and specialist training (see below); more than one third of mbo3 graduates go on to study at a higher level. There are 199 level-3 qualifications.

*Mbo level 4* 'middle management VET' (*middenkaderopleiding*) lasts three or four years; in the near future the duration of almost all these programmes will be reduced to three years (see section 1.3). These programmes prepare people to carry out tasks independently and with more responsibility (ISCED level 3A; NLQF/EQF level 4). Access requirements: the same as for mbo level 3. Progression and transfer to higher professional education is possible (see Chapter 3). There are 238 level-4 qualifications (including postsecondary VET).

*Mbo level 4* 'specialist training' (*specialistenopleiding*) lasts one to two years (ISCED level 4; NLQF/EQF level 4). Access requirements: completion of a programme at mbo level 3 or 4. Progression to higher professional education, especially the dual or part-time pathways, is possible. The duration of these programmes will be reduced to one year in the near future.

#### *Entry-level courses*

One of the measures in the Focus on Craftsmanship action plan is to end the non-threshold inflow at level 2 in the near future. Entry-level courses are being introduced to replace the courses at level 1, and these courses will be positioned separately from the level 2–4 courses. This policy change was prompted by the huge intake of students without diplomas into the VET institutes and the intensive supervision that some of these youngsters require. This had a major impact on the financial resources of institutes and their organisational capacity, adversely affecting teaching at levels 2–4 (Oudeman committee, 2010).

The entry-level course leads qualifying youngsters to level 2 (basic qualification). But youngsters who are not able to enter that level are steered towards the job market. The entry-level course is limited to those who cannot be admitted to the level-2 courses directly. Youngsters with a secondary education (VO) diploma or dropouts from the level-2 course cannot be admitted to the level-1 course, but can be admitted to level 2. Also binding study advice will be introduced so that institutes may demand a learning performance from youngsters aged 18 and over.

In 2012, enrolment in mbo once again fell slightly more in comparison with the year before, to 477,000 (excluding green education). The largest of the three educational routes was fulltime vocational training (bol-ft), with 335,000 students (70% of total enrolment). The majority of students in bol-ft take courses at levels 3 or 4 (79%). Enrolment in the dual or apprenticeship pathway (bbi; 137,000) fell slightly as well compared with 2011 (by 4%). Enrolment in part-time vocational training (bol-pt) fell by 33% to 5,100 (Ministry of OCW, 2013).

**Table 2.1 Students in vocational education by level and learning pathways, 2012; (excluding green education) numbers x 1000**

<i>Number of students</i>	<i>School-based pathway</i> <b>358.0</b>	<i>Apprenticeship pathway</i> <b>136.9</b>
Level 1	11.0	7.8
Level 2	59.9	47.6
Level 3	78.5	51.5
Level 4 – middle management	185.7	30.0

Source: Ministry OCW. *Key figures 2008–2012*

## 2.5 Programme differentiation in upper secondary VET

Each VET programme has a qualification structure that is based on the industry/sector job structure it prepares students for. Existing programmes are offered in four sectors: green/agriculture, technology and engineering, economics/services, and health/welfare. Each sector includes various branches of industry/business.

The qualification structure used to comprise 237 qualification files with 612 exit differentiations/diplomas. This number will be reduced to 176 files with 489 diplomas in August 2015 (on a voluntary basis) or August 2016 (statutory basis).<sup>14</sup> Each qualification describes the requirements for the diploma, which is output related to a specific vocation or group of occupations, to citizenship and further learning. The aim of the on-going review of the qualification structure, which is to become effective from 2014, is to arrive at an optimum reduction in the number of qualifications.

<sup>14</sup> Information about the qualification structure and practical learning: [www.s-bb.nl](http://www.s-bb.nl)

## The development of the qualification structure

A ministerial report entitled 'Professional profile and curriculum development' (*Beroepsprofiel en leerplanontwikkeling*) was published in 1986. This report distinguishes three steps in defining the content of upper secondary VET, a development pattern that is now over a quarter century old. Although all that has changed a couple of times since then, the same jargon is still used. The three steps are:

### Step 1: observing the workplace resulting in occupational profiles

This step first maps out what occupations there are at sector or trade level and how they are interrelated: an occupational structure.

A closer look at each occupation or group of occupations leads to the drafting of vocational profiles (sometimes also known as vocational competence profiles). Workplaces are observed and future developments are taken into consideration to address the questions of what the essence of an occupation or group of occupations is, what tasks and activities are important and/or occur frequently, what the level of complexity of the work linked to these tasks is and what responsibilities are involved.

Vocational profiles should, in principle, be legitimised by the social partners of the relevant industry so that they can serve as a valid source of information for drafting and detailing qualifications.

### Step 2: drafting qualifications

This step first involves drafting a framework of qualifications, that is, which qualifications are distinguished and how they are interrelated, with qualifications being based on or related to one or more vocational profiles.

The next stage is to work out a qualification or group of qualifications in more detail. The qualification files (previously called 'learning outcomes document') are the outcome of this step. These can be referred to in curricular terms as 'expected' curricula that, where target and content are concerned, are valid at the national and the sector level. This is about defining what a person (a beginning professional) has to 'know and be able to do' to get a diploma. A qualification file consists of the description of one or more related occupations, indicating what sets of professional knowledge, skills and attitudes are needed to perform the required duties. In current qualification files, this information is translated into core tasks, work processes, performance indicators, and related knowledge and skill components.

Because secondary vocational education is about attaining a threefold qualification (i.e. for the occupation as such, for social performance and for 'continued learning'), the qualifying aspect of the qualification should be detailed in both the qualification file and the other two qualification domains.

### Step 3: curriculum and test development

In step 3, the qualification files adopted by the government give direction to programming and testing in secondary vocational education. First of all, secondary vocational education schools make the first move, but this also involves organising the input of training companies. Testing and exams are primarily a school affair, although they can make use of external exam suppliers. Significant progress has been made with preparations for obligatory central exams for Dutch and arithmetic.

**Table 2.2 Participation in mbo programme orientation, 2010–11; in %.**

	(100)
Green/agriculture	4
Technology	26
Economics/services	34
Health/welfare	34
Combination of sectors	2

Source: CBS, Yearbook education in figures – 2011.

The output of first-year students (school year 2005/06) after five years was 75%: three quarters of them earned one or more upper secondary vocational education diplomas either in their chosen or in another special area. Of this group, 6% attended education in 2011; 18% left upper secondary vocational education without any qualifications. Dropout levels are concentrated at the lower levels of upper secondary VET; for instance, the return on the mbo1 training course for assistants with a job market qualification is 60%.

## 2.6 Differentiation in learning pathways in upper secondary VET

There are two learning pathways in upper secondary VET: school-based fulltime or part-time programmes with practical periods in enterprises (*bol: beroepsopleidende leerweg*), and an apprenticeship pathway that combines learning and working (*bbl: beroepsbegeleidende leerweg*). In the school-based pathway, the practical period in companies makes up at least 20% of the study time and in usually more; in the apprenticeship pathway, training takes place in a company during at least 60% (usually 80%) of the study time. Both pathways function in the market as communicating vessels: the same qualifications/diplomas can be achieved via both pathways. Participants in the school-based pathway are mainly youngsters, while almost 50% of those following the apprenticeship pathway are aged 24 or older and more than one third are 30 or older.

### Workplace learning

Students in upper secondary VET conclude an education agreement with their school. In addition, students, schools and training companies enter into practice agreements stipulating what has to be learned in the workplace and the supervision involved. In the apprenticeship pathway, participants also have an employment contract as employees.

The 17 Knowledge Centres referred to above have the statutory task of recruiting sufficient training companies, which are listed in a training company register. The potential companies are screened for their suitability in terms of the practical component of the mbo courses, to which end the knowledge centres employ an approval regulation (accreditation of training companies). Moreover, the centres promote the quality of the companies by offering courses for practical trainers in the companies. Some 800 training advisors in the various knowledge centres are currently engaged in recruiting and promoting quality.

There are over 220,000 recognised training companies with over 300,000, mostly certified, practical trainers who supervise participants in the workplace. After graduating, 52% of the students on school-based learning pathways are offered a job by their training company. In the apprenticeship pathway, this percentage is far higher (83%), as these participants already have an employment contract with their company. After graduating, people looking for work often find jobs quickly: 79% from the school-based pathway and 93% from the apprenticeship pathway found jobs within three months (2009).

Almost two thirds of participants in the apprenticeship pathway are men, as technology courses dominate this training type. At level 1, 57% opt for a combination of learning and working; at level 2, 49% do so, and at level 3, 42% do so. 15% choose this at level 4, although the apprenticeship pathway dominates in specialist training programmes (see 2.5, table 2.4).

**Table 2.3 Participation in mbo: learning pathways**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Total number	452,000	489,000	525,000	530,000
Bol pathway	66%	72%	66%	67%
Bbl pathway	34%	28%	34%	33%

Source: Ministry OCW, *Key figures 2007–2011*

## 2.7 Statistical data on specialist training

After 2005, participation levels in specialist training courses at mbo4 level dropped. These programmes have their origins in the pre-1997 apprenticeship system, which had three levels: the primary (now mbo2), secondary (now mbo3) and tertiary apprenticeship system (now mbo4). By stacking up training programmes, participants in the apprenticeship system were able to reach a higher level along this craftsmanship route.

### Specialist training programmes

There is something remarkable going on in the development of specialist training programmes. Only one programme – that of practical trainer – has been labelled as specialist training in the qualification structure and the training programme register for 2013. Other programmes that were previously designated as ‘specialist training programmes’ have been renamed and are now known as ‘middle management training programmes’. The difference between types of training programmes at level 4 has become more diffuse. In the revision of the qualification structure the specialist programmes are discussed.

**Table 2.4 Participants in specialist training; in numbers**

	<b>1997</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Bol pathway</b>	125	568	2586	413	156
<b>Bbl pathway</b>	2611	5737	4757	3319	2403

Source: CBS-statline. Date of extraction: 25.2.2013

In 2011, 46 of the 2,559 participants followed a training programme in the agriculture sector, 1,731 in the technology sector and 175 in the economy sector. In addition, 607 participants in the care & welfare sector did a practical trainer course; this number has grown steadily in recent years. In 2011, 551 women and 2,008 men did specialist training.

## 2.8 Other aspects

### Financing

There are various sources of funding in the upper secondary vocational education sector. Government funding: block grant funding of schools is within the macro budget at the national level; at the moment the amount of money is based partly on the number of students per course/learning path and partly on the number of certificates awarded per institution. A new manner of financing will be introduced with the intention that schools offer more efficient programmes of shorter duration (see also 1.2). Proposals have been made to base the financing of educational institutes partly on the length of time students stay there (‘cascade financing’). The cascade funding will be introduced from 2014 onwards.

Other sources of income for schools are contract activities for companies and individuals, and for municipalities in civic integration training, although the market shares vary per school.

Students pay course fees per school year: €1,065 in the bol pathway (fulltime education) when they are 18 or older; in the apprenticeship or part-time pathway €221 (levels 1 and 2) or €536 (levels 3 and 4). Students in vocational education and training programmes (school-based fulltime pathways) qualify for student grants from the age of 18 (Student Finance Act). Students are facing the loss of free textbooks and public transport passes, and a social loan system is to be introduced (although the fine for delayed studies is to be scrapped). Companies offering learning places for apprentices originally received a tax benefit of €2,753 for each place occupied per calendar year (2012). The government proposed to replace these tax benefits in 2014 by subsidies for the companies for those educational activities in which market failure occurs. The idea is to subsidise companies for students in the bbl pathway, students in dual educational tracks in higher education (in technical or agriculture courses) and employees of universities (or institutes) qualifying for scientific research/PhD or designer.

CBS figures show that in 2006, companies spent an average of €8,400 for 'guided learning activities' for each participant in the apprenticeship system (upper secondary VET level) and €1,750 for students in practical learning periods in fulltime school-based VET.<sup>15</sup> Until 2014, these costs were partly compensated by tax benefit. In future, the tax benefit for the school-based VET will be withdrawn.

#### *Teachers and trainers*

The professionalisation of teachers is a pivotal political issue. Over the last few years, substantial resources have been invested in raising standards. Efforts are directed in particular towards promoting direct teaching time and the professionalisation of teachers; enlarging teaching capacity is broadly supported.

The initial/continuing training of teachers in upper secondary VET is governed by two important laws: the Professions in Education Act (*Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs*, BIO) and the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (*Wet Hoger Onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*, WHW), which is applicable because the teacher training courses are provided by institutions for higher professional education and universities. The Professions in Education Act, which came into force on 1 August 2006, regulates the standards of competence for both teachers and others working in education-related jobs in primary, general secondary, vocational secondary and general adult education. Training courses must be based on these standards. The law enables schools to devise policies for maintaining the skills of their staff.

The inflow from the teacher education programmes into VET is fairly limited, and remarkably in the teacher education programmes, developments in VET are hardly discussed. Many teachers in VET originate from professional working environments and lack stronger pedagogical and didactical skills. In December 2012, the minister announced three improvements in this area: the introduction of a particular track for VET in the teacher education in this area; better guidance and training for the inflow of new teachers from industry into VET; and the introduction of a minor programme for bachelor's students outside teacher education.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/onderwijs/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2008/2008-2525-wm.htm>

The organisation of work within VET schools is team-based, as laid down in the Professional Statute in the sector, negotiated between the cabinet and the Association of VET Schools. Teachers in upper secondary VET fulfil all possible roles – generic roles such as instruction, guidance and assessment, and more specific roles, some of which are part of the job and some of which are not, and that may include curriculum development and innovation, assessment development, coordination tasks for internships, career guidance, quality assurance, applied research activities, monitoring, remedial teaching and so on. In consultation with school management, the possible and desirable roles are distributed among the team of teachers.

The 17 Knowledge Centres for VET train the practical trainers. These trainers are responsible for guiding and training of students/apprentices in the company, should have didactic skills such as being able to instruct, guide, motivate and assess the students/apprentices. These sectoral centres regularly provide commercial courses to train these practical trainers in the various branches of industry. From 2015/16, S-BB will be in charge of these legal tasks.

#### *Professionalisation of teachers*

General, theoretical and practice-based subjects are taught in vocational education. It goes without saying that VET teachers have to keep abreast of developments in their professional field and in work on the shop floor. Moreover, special demands are placed on teachers in apprenticeship- and classroom-based routes at level 2 in comparison with level 4. While teachers want to design their professional 'job territory' themselves when linking theoretical and practical insights, they must also satisfy national requirements.<sup>16</sup>

A key question for the future is how the tension between the central direction (and control) by government can be attuned to the autonomy of the schools themselves. With the emphasis on regulatory control and central exams, many teachers do not identify with the efficiency mind-set that resonates in many of today's government policies. It has also been noted that major improvements in the professionalisation of teachers are needed. In 2013, the Education Council asked for policy and a wider public debate on the professionalisation of teachers.<sup>17</sup> Particularly relevant is the lack of explicit specialisation programmes for VET teachers in the hbo and university programmes for becoming a teacher.<sup>18</sup>

That said, several improvement plans have been developed for mbo (as well as for other educational sectors) over the last couple of years. In response to all these issues, the umbrella organisations for, respectively, primary and secondary education, upper secondary vocational education and higher education, together with the FNV and CNV trade unions have established their own consultative body, the Education Foundation (*Stichting van het onderwijs*), which is trying to further configure the labour relationships in the sector and to further the professionalisation of teachers. In September 2013, they negotiated a National Education Agreement under the heading 'The route towards magnificent education' (De route naar geweldig onderwijs). However, given the lack of budgets in light of the on-going curtailment of public finances and the halt on the relatively expensive seniority or part-time

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<sup>16</sup> This area is slightly under-researched, since most attention has been directed to teachers in general education, and not to those in VET, whereas in the latter sector various political reforms have taken place over the last two decades, without considering the performance of its professionals (see Van der Meer, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Onderwijsraad (2013) *Leraar zijn. Meer oog voor persoonlijke professionaliteit*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.

<sup>18</sup> Onderwijsraad (2013) *Advies Herijking bekwaamheidseisen*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.

early ageing regulation (bapo), the main trade union organisation in education (AOB-FNV) did not sign the agreement. The National Education Agreement lifted the zero per cent wage increase (wage stop), and in 2014 in all educational sector collective agreements have shown a 1.2% wage increase for one year. Recurrent negotiation issues include other working conditions (the debate on class size; working hours, holiday schedules).

The further implementation of the Teachers Agenda fits within this approach. Under the broad lemma 'Teacher 2020' (Actieplan Leraar 2020, 2011), in combination with the various administrative accords, the sector collective bargaining agreements in primary, secondary, VET and higher education, and the Professional Statute in these sectors, schools are to produce a more modern HRM policy in answer to such divergent problems as the high level of un- or under-qualified teachers and an ageing workforce. For VET the prime ambition is to further develop and integrate both theoretical and practical teachers' skills. This is mainly done with help of continuous study programmes for teachers and the innovation of these education programmes in the form of particular minor programmes and study profiles for VET professionals. We will see in the years to come the extent to which the inflow profiles, career ladders and outflow patterns of teachers have changed, and with what results.



### 3 Postsecondary VET and other VET programmes

In this chapter we present some related dimensions of postsecondary VET. We start by giving the numbers of students in the various study routes, followed by a number of small-scale initiatives to strengthen the system. We conclude with a section on continuous training and on youth unemployment.

#### 3.1 Study routes to higher education policy

The number of students in higher education increased from 373,800 in 2007 to 423,100 in 2011 (Ministry of OCW, 2012, Key figures 2007–2011). This trend is set to continue in the coming years. More and more havo graduates are going on to higher professional education (hbo) instead of mbo, and more mbo students are going on to hbo. The main reason for this rests with secondary education: an increasingly greater percentage of secondary education students are doing havo/vwo (pre-university education) instead of choosing vmbo.

About half of the upper secondary VET graduates with a qualification at mbo4 level – especially those in ‘middle management VET’ – immediately advance to higher professional education (hbo). In addition, of the other half of the mbo4 graduates, a quarter enter higher professional education (mostly on a part-time basis) after one or more gap years. The almost 30,000 entrants with an mbo qualification comprise about 30% of the total annual inflow of some 100,000 students entering higher professional education. Fifteen years ago, the annual inflow from upper secondary VET was less than 20,000. About 17% of all students in higher professional education are enrolled in part-time (14%) or dual pathway degree programmes (3%). Six per cent of the students entering higher professional education are aged 30 or over. The government plans to change the funding for part-time higher professional education in the near future in order to create optimal conditions for flexible educational programmes that meet the needs of the labour market (see also 1.4).

Admission to higher professional education requires an upper secondary general education (havo or vwo) or VET qualification (mbo4). Some bachelor’s programmes have additional admission criteria related to the set of subjects prospective entrants studied to attain their qualification. These criteria do not apply to students with an mbo4 qualification, as they currently have a universal right to go on from mbo to hbo. However, this is about to change: in 2013 efforts are being made to harmonise the rules regarding admission to higher professional education. These changes fly in the face of the advice of the Education Council, which found no evidence for a lower success rate among entrants who had studied unrelated subjects compared to those who had studied related subjects, and therefore recommended upholding the current right to admission for all students with an mbo4 qualification.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the introduction or expansion of obligatory key subjects (Dutch, English, arithmetic) has already strengthened the value of mbo4 diplomas.

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<sup>19</sup> Onderwijsraad (2009). *De weg naar de hogeschool (The road to higher professional education)*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad. Onderwijsraad (2011). *Om de kwaliteit van het beroepsonderwijs (About the quality of VET)*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.

Just under 70% of entrants with an mbo4 qualification attain a bachelor's degree (within nine years of entering higher professional education); for those with a havo qualification, the figure is just over 70%. Entrants with an mbo4 qualification have a dropout rate of over 20% in their first year, which is higher than among those with general (havo or vwo) qualifications. However, entrants with an mbo qualification can fall back on their vocational degree, which is generally popular in the labour market.

### **3.2 Associate degree programmes**

In 2006, a number of trial associate degree (AD) programmes were launched. These 2-year programmes must be part of accredited 4-year bachelor's degree programmes in higher professional education, so that the same admission criteria apply to both AD and bachelor's degree programmes, and students can automatically advance to the bachelor's degree programme upon completing the AD.<sup>20</sup> The AD programmes and the resulting degrees can be seen as a Dutch form of short cycle higher education. There are currently more than 100 AD programmes that have been accredited by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO), some of which are available at multiple teaching locations. To receive this accreditation, a thorough explanation must be provided of the programme's relevance to the labour market. In 2012, the employers' associations specified their criteria for the content of AD programmes in view of the planned additional rollout of such programmes. Programmes that pay a lot of attention to 'business management' are very popular with employers.

AD programmes are also provided by publicly funded institutes for higher professional education (sometimes in collaboration with schools for upper secondary VET). Since 2011, privately funded parties have also increasingly entered this market. It has been decided to move from the trial phase to the phase of offering these types of programmes as a standard option.

The programmes aim to give upper secondary VET graduates and those already working more options to attain a higher professional (hbo) qualification and advance their education even further. In 2011, more than 4,000 students were enrolled in these short-cycle programmes. Five years after their introduction, these programmes received over 1,500 new entrants, or 1.5% of the total inflow in higher professional education. Based on the policy target, the aim is to achieve a further increase to 15%. Currently, 63% of the entrants have a qualification in upper secondary VET; more than a third of the entrants are aged 30 or older and about 60% take the AD programme on a part-time basis or as a dual pathway.

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<sup>20</sup> Information about Ad programmes can be found at [www.leido.nl](http://www.leido.nl)

#### **A forerunner?**

In the 1990s, the Netherlands introduced stand-alone programmes for short higher professional education, the *kort-hbo* (short hbo) programmes. These were usually 2-year programmes. It was later decided to phase out these programmes, as it was felt that they did not fit in with the new bachelor–master system then being introduced; they were shut down in the early 2000s.

However, the results of the kort-hbo programmes (as at 2001) still make interesting reading today:

- 9,000 students enrolled and
- 180 licences were granted for these programmes, of which only 45 were used. The programmes included 39 organised by privately funded parties that enrolled 4,500 students.
- 70% of entrants had a qualification in upper secondary VET.
- The programmes were mostly offered on a part-time basis as they attracted participants who were already employed.
- One programme in particular drew many students: the business management course offered by two publicly funded institutes. It comprised a sixth of the total kort-hbo programme.

### **3.3 Craftsmanship and excellence: *meester* titles**

One further development worth noticing in this report, is the attempt made by the Board for Craft Trades (*Hoger Bedrijfschap voor de Ambachten*, HBA) to encourage the registration of a '*meester*' (master) title for extraordinary performance as a craftsmen in practice.<sup>21</sup> This is an initiative for the further development of excellent craftsmanship while reaching a higher rung on the career ladder. Inspired by the French concept of the *maître*, excellent professional work is recognised in practice. There are currently seven industries where one or more master titles are used (e.g. master chef, master goldsmith, master floor layer, master tailor). These *meester* titles – the ultimate recognition of excellent craftsmanship – can be attained through an apprenticeship supplemented by schooling or through schooling alone. In both cases students must pass a thorough practical skills test to be awarded their title. The hospitality industry in the Netherlands, for instance, currently has a total of 230 masters awarded in five trades (chef, ice cream chef, wine waiter, wine master and head waiter). Current discussions concern whether to introduce the *meester* title for more industries, which is part of a more general debate on upgrading the Dutch manufacturing economy. The minister of OCW even included a reference to the principles of master–apprentice model (*meester-gezel* in Dutch) in her last policy letter of 2 June 2014, as a general principle for the improvement of VET. The introduction of additional *meester* titles is an initiative of the various branches of industry, and refers to a labour market qualification in sectors where craftsmanship goes far beyond the levels accredited in VET-qualification programmes; it does not refer to a pedagogic or didactical principle in VET itself. The master titles are intended to provide more attractive career prospects for young people who have just entered an artisanal profession and to mature professionals seeking further development.

<sup>21</sup> <http://hba.nl/pages/2086/Invoering-meestertitel.html>. See also the recent report of Social and Economic Council on the handicraft sector: 'Handmade in Holland', issued in May 2013.

### 3.4 Adult training and education

'Skills beyond School' is at the heart of the agenda for lifelong learning. Since the extraordinary Lisbon European Council in March 2000, all should be aware that the future of European communities depends on the extent to which citizens are able to rise to economic and social challenges. Lifelong learning provides support for this. This subject has always held a significant position on the agenda of various committees as well as in the forums of the tripartite Social and Economic Council (composed of independent crown members, trade unions and employers' representatives) and the bipartite Labour Foundation (owned by trade unions and employers associations). The general notion of the importance of mobility between learning environments and workplaces to derive maximum benefit from the knowledge and skills available there is commonly acknowledged.

Three authoritative reports published in recent years illustrate this. The Education Council (2009) distinguished between four functions of lifelong learning: retraining and further training, keeping knowledge up to date, upgrading work processes and personal development. In its recommendation to the minister for Social Affairs and Employment, the Participation in Work committee (led by Peter Bakker, 2008) argued that the Netherlands is on the brink of fundamental change: 1) in the coming decades we will be faced with a decrease in the supply of labour as a result of an ageing demographic, and 2) due to globalisation, the demands on the knowledge level of work processes and hence the adaptability of the labour force are on the increase. In 2009, the national 'Think tank for learning and working' advised enhancing the learning culture in businesses. Thanks in part to their chosen methodology, this think tank also spread the understanding that labour market policy is very sector-based. One of their conclusions was that the term 'employability' should be laid down in the Netherlands Civil Code, a recommendation that is also included in the recent Social Agreement: 'Within the framework of employability policy, employers and employees are jointly responsible for sustainable employability. The social partners are therefore in favour of including this addition in the Civil Code and embedding it in the concepts of good employership and good employeeship.'

All in all, even though lifelong learning has been at the top of the agenda in social negotiations in the Netherlands for at least two decades, it is a subject that still needs to be strongly prioritised. The Netherlands has a long tradition of business- and sector-dependent arrangements on the one hand, and well-intentioned but barely influential proposals for a broad-based support of a national infrastructure (in administrative terms too) on the other. These appear to be two parallel worlds that never quite meet.

Both upper secondary VET and higher professional education can be considered initial VET, although for many adults it is a form of continuing vocational training to which they return after many years outside the educational system. Of the students in the apprenticeship pathway, 53% are 23 or older, while in the school based pathway only 19% are. In the apprenticeship pathway, 30% of the students are older than 30 (Fleur et al., 2012).

### 3.5 Using VET programmes as a response to youth unemployment

All the initiatives described above have yet another dimension: the transition from school to work and the urgent need to find a policy response to youth unemployment. We have noted above that the serious employment crisis reverberates in the use of the double learning pathways in mbo: the classroom-based track (bol), which increases during a depression, and the apprenticeship track (bbl), which is more often chosen at times of labour shortages. Our study also shows that the levels of knowledge and skills of students in vocational and general education vary widely. In general, the levels achieved by students have risen and more and more students are obtaining diplomas at mbo4 level or higher. Overall, the outcome of the upper part of mbo is pretty good; as a rule, graduates find jobs.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in addition to steering a straight course, there are other ways of achieving success; for example, by stacking courses and switching through vmbo and mbo, as well as through havo and mbo, students transfer directly and indirectly from secondary into higher education and the labour market.<sup>23</sup>

Since the relations between vocational education and the labour market operating at the regional level are close and many graduates remain employed with the company of training, the VET and hbo systems are part of the discussion on the triple 'helix of labour market reform' between governments, educational institutes and trade and industry. The Social Pact is still at an early stage and is yet to be implemented in legislation. In practice, social policies will be further decentralised to the municipal level, where the Invalidity Insurance (Young Disabled Persons) Act, the Sheltered Employment Act, and the Work and Social Assistance Act will be converged (from 2015).

In this light, the cabinet declaration of October 2012 and the Social Pact of April 2013 emphasise the potential role for vocational education to increase skills. A not unsubstantial symbolic fact is that the latter agreement was signed on 11 April 2013 at the Mondrian Regional Training Centre (*ROC Mondriaan*) in The Hague. Yet, a direct consequence of the agreement was the establishment of a youth unemployment task force with a budget of 50 million euros, in addition to the provision for sectors to submit proposals for further training, job mobility and employment, which the government will co-finance to the tune of another 600 million euros.

The following measures are to be taken to combat youth unemployment:

1. Transitions from school to work will be encouraged either by offering youngsters jobs within three months after becoming unemployed or having concluded their formal education, or by offering them the opportunity for further education, a training course or an internship (Youth Guarantee). Councils can use what is known as the Starters Grant, a tool aimed at school leavers without jobs that provides extended internships enabling them to gain experience over a maximum period of six months following their training.
2. Providing better information on choice of study field and change-over programmes for school leavers without prospects.

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<sup>22</sup> According to the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA), unemployment among qualified mbo students is low. ROA (2011). *School leavers between education and labour market 2010*. ROA-R-2011/7. Maastricht: ROA

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. the extended 'Doorstroom' report by ecbo and ROA on this issue (Westerhuis et al., 2012).

3. Encouraging more companies to provide apprenticeships and more recognised training companies to offer internships and apprenticeship jobs. To combat shortages in apprenticeship tracks, two youngsters can work together at one job, and if this is not possible, apprenticeship tracks can be converted into classroom-based tracks. Moreover, internships do not all start at the same time. These measures are in line with the internship offensive set up earlier by the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (S-BB).
4. Reintroducing the successful programme 'School ex' in combination with 'Next step' (guiding students to further education and education with good labour market perspectives) in mbo and introducing it in hbo (also to avoid displacing mbo graduates), with the focus on implementing a development programme for the youngsters in question.
5. Promoting a more flexible course intake.
6. More work from the government, with as market condition attention to 'social return on investment' for which youngsters are deployed.

## 4 Some evaluative remarks

In this background report, we have overviewed particular developments in secondary and postsecondary vocational education in the Netherlands. We think that the Dutch vocational educational system is, according to many comparative standards, a rather good one with a fine combination of school-based and work-based vocational training programmes that are well embedded in a social infrastructure of cooperation between schools and local businesses at various levels. Still, some further improvements are possible.

After our sketch of policy developments in our introductory chapter, we have above all presented an analysis of middle management and specialist positions at the fourth level of upper secondary vocational education (mbo4). The relatively small-scale specialist courses are fairly well embedded in the regular mbo programme. While upper secondary VET and higher professional education (postsecondary VET) are forms of initial vocational education, for many adults these programmes also serve as continuing vocational training. This is especially true for upper secondary VET, where the apprenticeship track is more extensive than in higher professional education.

We have also seen that discussions are emerging about the associate degree programmes, the award of *meester* degrees for specialist courses, and short courses and part-time bachelor's degree courses at higher professional education level (hbo). These policy initiatives are relatively small in size and, despite their apparent success, are not generally perceived as an important dimension of the development onto a 'high skill' labour market.

Therefore, apart from this general conclusion on the incomplete connection between upper secondary vocational (mbo) and higher professional education (hbo), we present in this final chapter some broader evaluative remarks to assess the current debate and the partly contradictory attempts to innovate.

First, the educational system in the Netherlands is rather standardised with a broad pillar of general and of vocational education, resulting in a ramified system of learning pathways at various levels. These two pillars have developed relatively independently of one another. Up until now, also within the vocational tracks, the flexibility of education in terms of teaching time, the pace of study and the location of the school have remained fairly contained.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, within this structure, students follow different learning pathways by stacking and switching between courses at various levels. We can observe that in addition to the Regional Training Centres (roc's), a broader range of 'schools' have come into existence in recent years, such as network, vocational, neighbourhood and company schools. Finally, another noteworthy factor is the strong development of the private sector in vocational education, which has made substantial investments (over 2 billion euros). As regards 'lifelong learning', we observe that public schools have only a small part of the market, with wide private initiative (the share of mbo is 8% and of hbo 5%).

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<sup>24</sup> See the ecbo study by Kuijk et al. (2011), in which a distinction is made between organisational and content-related forms of flexibilisation.

Second, a key observation is that in the vocational column, vmbo, mbo and hbo each has its own legislative framework and only a partially aligned administrative system. Each subsystem is relatively closed, with its own laws and regulations. This means that in the educational sector, policies are compartmentalised, that is, specific to each type of education. With respect to the topic of this report, this implies that each type of education (upper and postsecondary VET) has its own national policymaking bodies, forms of coordination and development agenda. We conclude that there is no nationwide knowledge infrastructure and policy debate with clear feedback mechanisms, meaning that everyone gets involved (or stays out of it) a little bit. In fact we do not know very precisely to what extent there are gaps in the trajectories for further education or 'lifelong learning' courses or to what extent the Netherlands is experiencing 'market failure'. To be sure, the Netherlands has a relatively high rate of participation in post-initial, formal and non-formal learning, above the EU target of 15%. However, due to the compartmentalisation of policies, nobody really owns the problems and issues at the crossroads of the various types of education, such as the changes to the link-up between mbo and hbo level and lifelong learning opportunities, remain relatively untouched. As the discussion on the *meester* title makes clear, businesses also have no transparent recognition or standardisation of craftsmanship and professionalism, aspects that are far more valued in high-performance economies such as Germany or Switzerland.

Third, the system of qualifications for upper and postsecondary VET and the corresponding courses are currently being revised. As part of this operation, those drafting the qualifications have to take into account a number of changes that are being made to the system as a whole: the introduction of an entry-level qualification for mbo1 and the scrapping of the universal entry into mbo2 on the entry side of the system, while shortening the duration of the courses at the mbo3 and 4 level on the exit side of the system. This intervention should give students the option to develop a broad basis for labour market entry, or to advance to further specialisation in higher professional education. The proposed stricter criteria applied to 'general subjects' in upper secondary VET will make many programmes more demanding in terms of language and arithmetic. It is not known how such general skills relate to craft-based skills and issues such as communication, entrepreneurship, networking in the roughly 4,000 occupations in the labour market. Several of these policies are thus potentially contradictory in effect and it is not known what their combined impact will be on the school-based pathway and on the apprenticeship pathway, which has many more adult participants. There has not been any ex-ante evaluation. The possibility cannot be excluded that the nature of education at mbo level will become more general and more based on book learning. The action plan 'Focus on Craftsmanship' emphasises in the first place the efficiency of VET at upper secondary level; not craftsmanship. In the most recent government policy letters (2 June 2014), this position is countered somewhat, and now craftsmanship is the focus of attention, although schools are still very busy implementing Focus on Craftsmanship.

Fourth, the education system is more generally facing the challenge of finding a balance between accessibility, efficiency and quality. In recent years, the principle of 'accessibility' has somewhat receded into the background. More priority has been given to efficiency, as demonstrated by various policies: the severe budget reduction for adult education programmes, the plans to change funding for part-time education at the hbo level, cuts to the budget for the knowledge centres for vocational education and the business community

(wva), shortening of the nominal duration of the learning pathways, and more intensive education during the first year. Furthermore, the concept of quality can have widely different meanings, such as establishing a professional profile, 'programmes of excellence' in higher professional education, paying more attention to general subjects that count towards qualifications in upper secondary VET, or ensuring that vocational education at the upper secondary and higher levels is attuned to innovations in the workplace. All these efforts to raise quality standards depend on the success of the current investment in the skills and capabilities of teachers in school and workplace trainers in companies, which need both to integrate theoretical and practical instruction.

Fifth, the Netherlands relies quite heavily on the designated nine top industries for much of its income. Investments in research are therefore made to foster innovation and public-private partnerships in these industries (although some organisations believe that these 'capped' investments are too limited and should be broader in their orientation, see AWT, 2013; WRR, 2013). Yet, particular 'human capital' agendas have been adopted for these industries. In addition to these programmes aimed at familiarising students with the content of technical professions and courses, the government also introduced the Centres of Innovative Craftsmanship (mbo) and Centres of Expertise (hbo). Businesses and mbo and hbo educational institutions work together to reinforce regional knowledge development in one of the key sectors/areas of innovation in the Netherlands. In 2014, a new regional investment fund was established, leading to co-investment by companies and local governments. This may lead to new hybrid learning environments in which students from different educational backgrounds and levels are trained by businesses and schools alike, enhancing knowledge development that is also of potential interest to the businesses themselves. As we know from our own research on co-makership, it takes time for such initiatives to be productive, but when investments are substantial enough, it may also lead to further educational attainment and career development.

Sixth, training beyond school is affected by the current development in socioeconomic policymaking and the revision of labour market arrangements. Today, in the light of structural and rising unemployment, especially among younger lower skilled cohorts in the labour market, important policy proposals include shortening the duration of unemployment allowances and relaxing the right of dismissal, although jobseekers are of course to be brought back to work as soon as possible. However, the nature of such labour market arrangements has its impact on the working of continuing training, the willingness to participate in either generic training or more specific training, and the willingness to contribute to enterprise specific innovation. At the moment, the impact of the proposed labour market measures on training and upgrading is hardly a subject for debate.

Seventh, the concept of postsecondary vocational education is quite fuzzy. While upper secondary VET and higher professional education are forms of initial vocational education, for many adults they also serve as continuing vocational training. For the individuals involved, it usually serves as a form of postsecondary or post-initial vocational education. This is especially true for upper secondary VET, where the dual pathway is more extensive than in higher professional education. The small-scale training programmes at the interface between mbo and hbo that we looked at in this report (specialist training programmes at mbo4 level, *meester* programmes, the connection to the Associate Degree and hbo bachelor) all seem to bode well for the labour market.

However, the small and diminishing numbers of adults in these courses gave reason to install the Rinnooy Kan committee. This committee on higher education concluded in the spring of 2014 that modularisation, flexibility, customisation and demand-driven funding are components of a successful lifelong learning programme for adults. The committee advised to further 'experiment' with financial instruments for the period to come, an opinion adopted while focusing on higher education. How the minister and the VET sector will respond to this advice remains a question for the near future. As we have shown in this report, in recent years new elements have been 'patched' into the study routes from vmbo to mbo and from mbo to hbo. However, a full range 'learning and working' track from VET to university level is still a way ahead.

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