



Upper Secondary and Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training in the Netherlands

Strengths and Challenges

STRENGTHS

- The Netherlands has a strong and well-funded vocational and education training (VET) system with a large proportion of each student cohort following vocational studies and substantial public and private resources dedicated to VET.
- Work-based learning forms a large part of Dutch VET both in school-based tracks and apprenticeship programmes. VET in the Netherlands has good labour market outcomes with relatively low youth unemployment rates.
- There is a well-developed system to engage social partners both in policy formulation and implementation, and in the delivery of vocational programmes.
- The Netherlands has a vibrant private sector engaged in delivery of postsecondary VET providing flexible format short courses as well as full professional bachelor and master degrees.
- The newly established associate degree is a positive development in the Dutch postsecondary VET system, filling a gap in the range of qualifications available.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Dutch economy has greatly benefited from a strong work-based learning system, given its effective integration into apprenticeships and school-based upper secondary VET. Challenges remain in sustaining work-based learning and reaping its full benefits, as demographic change and the popularity of academic education put pressure on the VET system. Economic pressures may weaken employers' willingness to offer work placements, in a context of changing regulation.
 - Actively champion and promote apprenticeship and work-based learning throughout the Dutch VET system, including at the postsecondary level. Negotiate reform with the social partners to sustain tripartite support for the system.
- Teaching staff are the most valuable resource in any learning institution and their skills have to be updated regularly. As entry from industry into teaching in VET schools is not common, mainly because of regulatory restrictions, the supply of teachers may not be able to respond adequately given a wave of expected retirements, and the need to keep up with changing industry practice.
 - Facilitate the entry of industry practitioners into the teaching workforce and promote skills updating among existing teaching staff through regular industry placements.
- In spite of the relatively small number of students participating in the lowest level of upper secondary VET (MBO 1), it faces considerable challenges. Though, according to the law, this level is not intended to lead to a labour market qualification, inevitably many of those pursuing this programme try to enter the labour market directly or drop out. MBO 1 concentrates young people with disadvantaged backgrounds and yields comparatively poor labour market outcomes. Such a concentration of educational challenges may make it harder to tackle those challenges. At the same time, the diversity of the student body implies a diversity of learning needs.
 - Merge pre-vocational education levels 1 and 2 at lower secondary level and refocus upper secondary VET level 1 programmes as a more effective entry route into upper secondary VET level 2.

- Current postsecondary funding arrangements do not set adequate incentives for providers, in particular to meet the needs of adults seeking part-time provision.
 - Reform regulation and finance so as to support part-time public provision of postsecondary vocational programmes more adequately, and to explore a financing framework that would allow public support for private provision when it is in the national interest.
- The range of qualifications available in the Dutch postsecondary VET system may not fully meet labour market demand in the face of an increasing need for higher vocational skills. There are relatively few options for the graduates of upper secondary VET to upskill other than the academic route or a full bachelor programme. While many short private courses aim at addressing this gap in provision, they lack visibility. In addition, in the absence of an adequate regulatory framework, short courses provided by private institutions may lead to the acquisition of too narrow skills.
 - Increase the number of students pursuing associate degree programmes and consider the development of other short cycle postsecondary vocational options. Encourage programmes to meet the needs of upper secondary VET graduates seeking higher professional qualifications.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Increasingly countries look beyond secondary school to more advanced qualifications to provide the skills needed in many of the fastest growing technical and professional jobs in OECD economies. The OECD study, *Skills beyond School*, is addressing the range of policy questions arising, including funding and governance, matching supply and demand, quality assurance and equity and access. The study will build on the success of the previous OECD study of vocational education and training *Learning for Jobs* which examined policy through 17 country reviews and a comparative report. The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD Skills Strategy.

Full country policy reviews are being conducted in Austria, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (with case studies of Florida, Maryland and Washington State). Shorter exercises leading to an OECD country commentary will be undertaken in Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Iceland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and in Northern Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Background reports will be prepared in all these countries, and in France and Hungary.

[A Skills beyond School Review of The Netherlands, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training](#) (Fazekas, M. and I. Litjens (2014) was published on 13 November 2014.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website: www.oecd.org/education/vet