Reviews of National Policies for Education

Netherlands 2016

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Foreword

The highest performing education systems across OECD countries combine excellence with equity. The excellence of the Netherlands is evidenced by its strong average performance and few low performers in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). The commitment to further improve education quality is visible at all levels of the education system and beyond. Decentralisation encourages innovative educational practice and facilitates a central government approach that is backed by a widespread commitment to evidence-based policy making. Decentralisation is effectively balanced by strong accountability mechanisms.

However, some challenges remain, and the strengths of the Dutch education system need to be sustained and further developed in the context of changing social and labour market requirements. The Netherlands has long succeeded in managing a system with extensive early tracking and multiple tracks, but growing inequity and an increasing rigidity in track placement has led to increased pressure. Student motivation is inadequate and there are too few top performers, given the overall high standards.

The review aims to further advance the quality and equity of the Dutch system, as well as maintain and build on its current strengths. The report draws on key lessons from high performing and rapidly improving education systems, as well as on research and analysis undertaken by the OECD as part of this project.

The Netherlands is known globally for its commitment to excellence, equity and innovation. I hope this report will support the Netherlands in its ambitions to further enhance the quality and outcomes of its education system, and strengthen the contribution of education and skills to the economic and social growth of the country. The OECD is here to help the Netherlands rise to this challenge.

Andreas Schleicher

Director for Education and Skills and Special Advisor
on Education Policy to the Secretary-General
OECD

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Executive summary

The strengths of the Dutch education system

The Dutch school system is one of the best in the OECD, as measured by the OECD Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). It is also equitable, with a very low proportion of poor performers. Basic skills are very good on average, while the system minimises weak basic skills among teenagers as effectively as the East Asian champions of Japan and Korea. This is supplemented by a strong vocational education and training system with good labour market outcomes. The system is underpinned by: a high level of decentralisation, balanced by a national examination system and a strong Inspectorate of Education; school financing which supports disadvantaged students; experimentation and innovation; and good data and research. Strong stakeholder intermediate institutions inform a lively research and policy debate. However, some challenges remain, and the Netherlands aspires to greater excellence.

Challenges and recommendations

Strengthen quality in early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can have extensive benefits, particularly for disadvantaged children. This review recommends that the quality of general ECEC services should be strengthened through the development of a curriculum framework, and by improving and standardising the qualifications and training of ECEC staff. At the same time, the review argues that the Netherlands should move towards a more integrated approach to ECEC provision.

Reform initial selection and subsequent permeability

Despite early tracking, student outcomes in the Netherlands are good on average and in respect of equity. But large performance differences within tracks are a problem. The review argues that as one component of a reform package, the Netherlands should consider options for reducing the extent of early tracking. At the same time, a student's right to enter a track could be established based on a national objective test. Schools may then be required to respect national test standards when placing students in tracks and subsequently sustaining them in those tracks. This would facilitate upward transition between tracks throughout the school career.

Promote and reward student motivation and excellence

The Netherlands has more 15-year-old top performers in basic skills than most of Europe, but is still behind some Asian countries; some of the most promising students are not reaching their full potential. To address these challenges, the review argues that teacher capacity to respond to individual learning needs should be improved, while rewards for excellence at every level of education are also reinforced through the opportunity for track promotion. High expectations should be set through a relevant curriculum, and parental engagement in education that supports excellence and motivation should be fostered.

Strengthen teacher professionalism and further develop the career structure

This review argues that teacher professionalism should be sustained and developed through a life cycle approach that starts with effective initial selection arrangements and mandatory induction, while promoting collaborative working and learning within and across schools. The career structure for teachers requires further development, with greater salary and career diversity supported by clear competence standards, and effective appraisal linked to professional and school development goals. Sustained attention to differentiated teaching skills is also necessary.

Develop a leadership strategy that promotes professional collaboration and a culture of continuous improvement

The quality of school leadership is especially critical in the decentralised Dutch school system. In response, the Netherlands needs to develop a leadership strategy that promotes collaboration among school leaders, teachers and school boards and a culture of continuous improvement. There should be a mandatory national induction programme for school leaders that

guarantees the quality of induction and mentoring support, annual appraisals for all school leaders and personal development plans that are aligned to school goals. School leaders and leadership teams should also continue to develop their capacity to conduct school self-evaluations, fostering the goal of schools as learning organisations.

Enhance the accountability and capacity of school boards and rebalance their authority

School boards have a key governance role in the Netherlands, but accountability mechanisms are weak and there are sometimes capacity issues within the boards. This review argues that the work of school boards should be made more transparent and that they should open up their operations to meaningful challenge. The strategic leadership capacity of school boards and their professionalism should be enhanced systematically, while the authority of school boards should be rebalanced to give more authority to school leaders.

Assessment and recommendations

The strengths of the Dutch education system

In many respects, the Dutch education system stands out from the crowd

Within broad parameters set by government, schools have extensive freedom, with no national curriculum. In contrast to more "comprehensive" systems, students are "tracked" from around the age of 12. A strong vocational education and training system plays a big role, with good employer links and a dual apprenticeship system, and one of the lowest levels of young people neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) in the OECD. Outcomes, in terms of literacy and numeracy, are very good on average, and the system minimises weak basic skills among teenagers as effectively as the East Asian champions of Japan and Korea, far ahead of most European countries. Education systems thrive on relentless evaluation and self-criticism, and a constant aspiration for improvement and those qualities are found in the Netherlands. The system is underpinned by: a high level of decentralisation, which is balanced by a solid accountability system that includes a national examination and a strong Inspectorate of Education; school financing that supports disadvantaged students; experimentation and innovation; and good data and research. Strong stakeholder intermediate institutions inform a lively research and policy debate.

But some challenges remain, and the Netherlands rightly aspires to greater excellence

Radical changes in a system that seems to be working well are always risky. Reform in the Netherlands should, therefore, be pursued with due consideration, and attended by careful policy evaluation to ensure that results are positive and unintended effects monitored. Against this background, this review has sought to identify the strengths and challenges of the education system, from early childhood up to the end of secondary education, and makes policy recommendations for further improvement.

Challenges and recommendations

Strengthen educational quality in early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can have extensive benefits, particularly for disadvantaged children. In the Netherlands, disadvantaged children are offered support through special programmes, while the needs of working parents are usually met in somewhat different ways. Public expenditure on ECEC has increased from a low base, and the cost of childcare services for parents is above the OECD average. Enrolment rates are high, but most parents use childcare facilities just a few hours a week. High quality is crucial for ECEC to have beneficial impacts for children, and in the Netherlands there is evidence of some quality problems. The qualification levels of ECEC staff could be improved and there is no ECEC curriculum outside the VVE programmes for disadvantaged children.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen educational quality in early childhood education and care through the development of a curriculum framework, improving and standardising the qualifications and training of ECEC staff. Move towards a more integrated approach to ECEC provision.

Reform initial selection and subsequent permeability

The merits of "early" tracking (after primary school) have been extensively debated, but evidence from cross-country studies on the overall effects is uncertain, and studies based on variation within countries produce similarly mixed results. Despite early tracking, student outcomes in the Netherlands are good on average and in respect of equity. Large performance differences *within* tracks are a problem.

One major problem is that the criteria determining track allocation are highly variable. This is partly because the tests used to guide allocation are used in different ways, partly because teacher recommendations are inconsistent, and partly because individual schools are free to adjust their selection criteria to circumstances. A recent reform that places more emphasis on teacher assessment will not improve the consistency of selection.

Alongside effective initial selection, tracking requires subsequent permeability between educational tracks, and this is currently facing increasing obstacles. Strong differentiated teaching skills are needed to support permeability, as these will allow teachers to identify strong performers within their classrooms and support their potential promotion to a higher track. (One quarter of students in secondary education repeat a grade or are down-tracked).

Recommendation 2: As one component of a reform package, consider options for reducing the extent of early tracking.

Recommendation 3: Establish a student's right to enter a track based on a national objective test, and require schools to respect national test standards when selecting students into tracks and subsequently sustaining them in those tracks.

Recommendation 4: Promote permeability between all tracks by (a) facilitating upward transition between tracks throughout the school career and (b) merging some tracks.

Promote and reward student motivation and excellence

High-level skills are important for the advanced Dutch economy. There have been growing concerns about weaknesses among top performers. The Netherlands has more 15-year-old top performers in basic skills than most of Europe, but is still behind some Asian countries; mathematics performance has declined across the performance distribution. National studies suggest that some of the most promising students are not reaching their full potential. Conversely, the share of highly skilled adults in the Netherlands is similar to other top-performing countries.

Low motivation among top performers could be an issue. Many students in the Netherlands, including top performers, are not well-motivated. Top performers also lack perseverance and openness to problem solving. Raising student motivation is hard. The Dutch school system does not incentivise excellence and Dutch parents are also less engaged in their children's education than in the highest performing education systems. One answer is the kind of differentiated teaching that can challenge and motivate students. For example, students could be offered additional lessons for enrichment purposes.

Recommendation 5: To enhance student motivation and promote excellence, build teacher capacity to better respond to individual learning needs, reinforce rewards for excellence at every level of education through the opportunity for track promotion, set high expectations through a relevant curriculum, and foster parental engagement in education.

Strengthen teacher professionalism and further develop the career structure

Building teacher professionalism is a lifelong endeavour. Many teachers are currently approaching retirement age, so there is a real challenge in replacing those skills, and a real opportunity to update and refresh the profession. Good quality teaching requires high level recruits. Entrance to

initial teacher training has become more selective, but perhaps too selective given the difficulty in finding recruits; selection needs to rely on more than cognitive skills. Co-operation between teacher training institutions and schools is insufficient, induction programmes for starting teachers are not routine and systematic, and many lessons in secondary schools are still taught by unqualified teachers.

Over the course of a teaching career, participation in professional development is generally high, despite some barriers, but annual teacher appraisals are not yet routine. More importantly, most teachers do not work and learn in a collaborative culture, which is a real obstacle in the ambition for schools to become learning organisations. The teacher career structure is underdeveloped, and although the "functions mix" promotes greater salary diversity, conditions may not always be sufficiently attractive to draw highly qualified individuals into the profession. Both new and established teachers lack assessment and differentiated teaching skills.

Recommendation 6: Building teacher professionalism calls for a life cycle approach, starting with effective initial selection arrangements and mandatory induction, and for promoting collaborative working and learning within and across schools.

Recommendation 7: Develop a teacher career structure that promotes greater salary and career diversity, is founded on clear competence standards and links appraisal to professional and school development goals.

Recommendation 8: Throughout initial training and subsequent professional development, give increased and sustained emphasis to differentiated teaching skills.

Develop a leadership strategy that promotes professional collaboration and a culture of continuous improvement

The quality of school leadership is especially critical in the decentralised school system of the Netherlands, but has received relatively little policy attention. Leadership competences have been established for primary and secondary education, but they are fairly abstract. School leader salaries may not be sufficiently attractive, and although most school leaders have some type of leadership training, the induction of new school leaders is underdeveloped. School leaders play a key role in transforming schools into learning organisations, but this makes greater demands on school leaders in terms of their capacity to use data, undertake effective appraisals of teachers and promote a collaborative learning culture geared towards continuous improvement. Schools, and in particular poor performing schools, will need support if they are to develop into learning organisations. Strong school leaders are a precondition for achieving this objective.

Recommendation 9: Develop a leadership strategy that promotes professional collaboration and a culture of continuous improvement that includes:

- *Promotion of collaboration among school leaders, teachers and school boards and the linked development of a culture of continuous improvement.*
- *A mandatory national induction programme for school leaders that guarantees the quality of induction and mentoring support.*
- *Annual appraisals for all school leaders and personal development plans that are aligned to school goals.*
- *Continue building the capacity of school leaders and leadership teams to conduct school self-evaluations and provide support for schools to develop into learning organisations.*

Enhance the accountability and capacity of school boards and rebalance their authority

School boards have a key governance role and are highly diverse: some manage large school systems while others manage one small primary school. School boards suffer from some gaps in their capacity to appraise teachers and school leaders, manage finances, tackle the problems of the weakest schools or develop a strategic improvement culture. School boards also lack democratic accountability, and other forms of accountability are relatively weak. Competency standards for board members are often vague, performance appraisals of board members and annual reporting by boards are not routine.

Recommendation 10: The accountability of school boards should be substantially improved by making their workings more transparent and opening up their operations to meaningful challenge.

Recommendation 11: Building on existing initiatives, systematically enhance the strategic leadership capacity of school boards and develop their professionalism. Rebalance the authority of school boards by giving more authority to school leaders.

Chapter 1

The Dutch education system

The Dutch education system is a strong performer, with outcomes for cognitive skills that are both strong on average and in terms of equity. These outcomes emerge from a system that balances a high level of decentralisation and school autonomy with a strong set of accountability measures. But challenges remain, and the Netherlands rightly aims high. Early childhood education and care, while extensive, faces quality issues: the integrity of early tracking faces growing difficulties because of variations in the initial track selection, student motivation is low, and there are few really strong performers. As in all countries, the quality of teachers and school leaders is critical to educational performance, but collective learning and working is underdeveloped. School boards are not always as accountable as they should be.

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Introduction and background

In many respects, the Dutch education system stands out from the crowd

Within broad parameters set by government, schools have extensive freedom, with no national curriculum. In contrast to more "comprehensive" systems students are "tracked" from around the age of 12. The number of separate tracks is large, even when compared with other countries that track early. A strong vocational education and training system plays a big role, with good employer links and a dual apprenticeship system; the Netherlands has one of the lowest levels of young people neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) in the OECD. Literacy and numeracy outcomes are very good, on average, and the system minimises weak basic skills among teenagers as effectively as the East Asian champions of Japan and Korea, far ahead of most European countries. Education systems thrive on relentless evaluation and self-criticism, and a constant aspiration for improvement is found in the Netherlands. The system is underpinned by a high level of decentralisation, balanced by a national examination system and a strong Inspectorate of Education; school financing which supports disadvantaged students; experimentation and innovation, and good data and research, alongside strong stakeholder intermediate institutions to inform a lively research and policy debate. However, some challenges inevitably remain, and the Netherlands aspires to greater excellence.

This review examines the Dutch education system up to the end of secondary school

This review documents the strengths and challenges of the education system from early childhood up to the end of secondary education, and makes policy recommendations for further improvement. The terms of reference for the review can be found in Annex A. An OECD team visited the Netherlands in July and September 2015. This chapter describes the main characteristics of the Dutch education system and its outcomes, and compares them with those of other countries. It concludes with an assessment of the strengths of the system, and documents some outstanding challenges. The remaining chapters address these challenges and offer policy recommendations.

Box 1.1. **The OECD education policy review process**

OECD Education Policy Reviews are tailored to the needs of the country and cover a wide range of topics and sub-sectors focused on education improvement. The reviews are based on an in-depth analysis of strengths and weaknesses that use various available sources of data, such as PISA and other internationally comparable statistics, research and a review visit to the country. They draw on policy lessons from benchmarking countries and economies, with expert analysis of the key aspects of education policy and practice examined. The methodology aims to provide analysis and recommendations for effective policy design and implementation.

A typical Education Policy Review consists of 5 phases, usually over 8 to 12 months depending on the scope of the review. The phases are: 1) definition of scope; 2) desk review and first visit to the country; 3) second review visit; 4) drafting of the report; and 5) launch of the report.

Education Policy Reviews are conducted in OECD member countries and non-member countries, usually upon request by the countries.

A snapshot of the Dutch education system

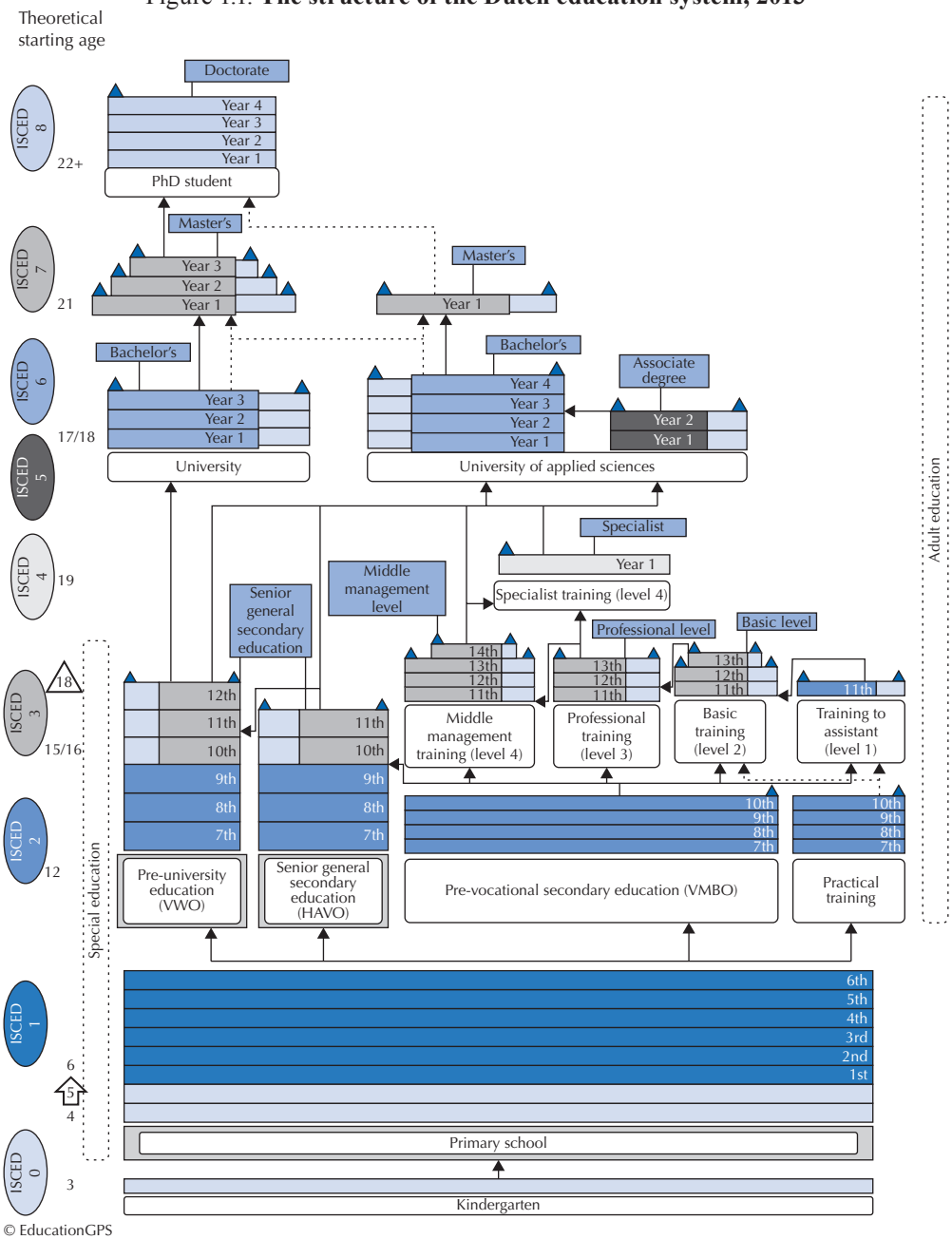
Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is widely accessible

General ECEC is provided in day care centres (*kinderdagverblijven*) and offers care for children under four years of age. In 2013, 52% of Dutch children aged two to three attended these centres one or more days a week. Pre-kindergarten facilities (*peuterspeelzalen*), or playgroups, provide a more formal type of early childhood education than childcare centres for children between 2.5 and 4 years. A total of 37% of Dutch children attend pre-kindergarten facilities (CBS, 2016). A small proportion of Dutch children (about 9%) under four receive in-home care by childminders (*gastouderopvang*). There are subsidised programmes targeted at disadvantaged groups and those from non-Dutch speaking backgrounds. Chapter 2 discusses this in more detail.

Education is compulsory from age five, but most children start primary school at age four

Compulsory education (*leerplicht*) in the Netherlands starts at the age of five but most children (98%) enter primary education at age four. From the age of 16, students must attend some form of education for at least two days a week. All young people up to 18 must attend school until they attain a basic qualification. A basic qualification is a HAVO (general secondary education), VWO (pre-university education) or MBO (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, upper secondary vocational education) level 2 diploma (MoECS, 2016). Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of the education system.

Figure 1.1. **The structure of the Dutch education system, 2013**

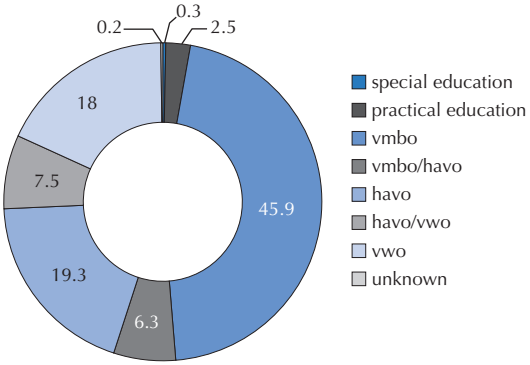


Source: OECD (n.d.), "Diagram of the education system: The Netherlands", *OECD Education GPS*, http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=NLD.

Primary education lasts eight years

Primary schools typically cater for children aged 4 to 12. Schools are free to determine the content and methods of teaching, subject to national attainment targets and reference levels for literacy and numeracy. At the end of primary education, students receive a school report describing their cognitive achievement levels and potential. Students transfer into different types of secondary education based on the advice of their primary school teacher and objective end-of-primary test results (Figure 1.2). Recent policy changes have given more weight to teacher advice.

Figure 1.2. **Recommendations after primary education in 2014 (in %)**



Source: MoECS (2016), *Key Figures Education*, MoECS (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), The Hague.

There are three types of secondary education

Upon leaving primary school, children may enter: pre-vocational secondary education or "VMBO" which lasts four years; general secondary education, or "HAVO", which lasts five years; and pre-university education, "VWO", which lasts six years (MoECS, 2016). As in a number of European countries (e.g. the Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, Hungary), children are selected for a track at the end of primary school. However, the Netherlands differs from other early tracking countries as it has six or seven (depending on how they are counted) "early" tracks, rather than the more usual two or three (see Figure 1.1). Secondary schools have the freedom to delay selection where needed through "bridge classes" in the first years of secondary school. Most secondary schools already stream their students at this stage.

Pre-vocational secondary education is typically for those aged 12-16

This programme prepares students for MBO or HAVO. VMBO and includes four alternative study programmes:

- Theoretical programme (*theoretische leerweg*), "VMBO-t": best suited to students who want to continue on to MBO or to the 4th year of HAVO.
- Combined programme (*gemengde leerweg*), "VMBO-g": offers a mix of theoretical and practical subjects.
- Middle-management vocational programme (*kaderberoepsgerichte leerweg*), "VMBO-k": tailored to students aiming for further vocational training (e.g. as manager of a food franchise operation).
- Basic vocational programme (*basisberoepsgerichte leerweg*), "VMBO-b": a mix between general education and practical experience.

Two secondary education programmes prepare Dutch students for university entry

HAVO, for students normally aged 12 to 17, prepares students for professional higher education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO), typically at universities of applied sciences. In 2015/16, 28% of Dutch 16-year-olds were enrolled in HAVO (CBS, 2016). In the same year, 19% of Dutch 16-year-old students were enrolled in pre-university education (CBS, 2016). A VWO diploma grants access to all universities, including research universities.[1] In the second phase of their curriculum, HAVO and VWO students choose between four profiles: nature and technology; nature and health; economy and social studies; and culture and social studies (MoECS, 2016).

Those from poor and migrant backgrounds are less often found in academic tracks

Among the cohort that entered secondary education in 2005, students of the top quartile of parental income were four times more likely to be in pre-university education (VWO) four years later (2008/09) than children from the bottom quartile. By contrast, students from the bottom quartile of parental income were more than five times more numerous in the basic vocational programme (VMBO-b) than their top-quartile counterparts. In 2010/11, only 30% of non-Western ethnic-minority students were enrolled in HAVO or VWO, compared to almost 50% of the native Dutch population (MoECS, 2012).

There has been a gradual shift in the number of students from vocational to academic tracks

Over time, there has been a shift from vocational to academic tracks. Between 1990 and 2011, the proportion of students in pre-vocational education (VMBO) decreased from 58% to 39%, while the share in general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO) rose from 32% to 44% (MoECS, 2012).

Upper secondary vocational education prepares students for work or study

The length of MBO programmes depends on the qualification chosen. The programmes can be followed at regional training centres (ROCs), agrarian training centres (AOCs) and vocational schools (*vakscholen*) (see Table 1.1). There are four levels of qualification:

- Level 1: assistant training lasts six months to one year and leads to an *assistentopleiding* diploma.
- Level 2: basic vocational training lasts two to three years and leads to a *basisberoepsopleiding* diploma.
- Level 3: vocational training lasts two to four years and leads to a *vakopleiding* diploma.
- Level 4: management training lasts about four years and leads to a *middenkaderopleiding* diploma. It also provides admission to higher professional education. Specialist training (*specialistenopleiding*) is also at qualification level 4 and lasts one to two years. It is preceded by *vakopleiding* or *middenkaderopleiding* (EP-Nuffic, 2015).

Table 1.1. **Fields and levels of study in upper secondary vocational education programmes (MBO)**

Numbers of students enrolled in 2013

Field of study	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Total
Economy	2 642	44 519	47 870	82 473	177 504
Technology	3 233	41 587	28 566	69 444	142 830
Care and welfare	1 294	25 756	58 461	88 845	174 356
Agriculture/green	3 100	6 014	8 172	12 238	29 524
Combination	10 706	230	16	2 522	13 474
Total	**20 975**	**118 106**	**143 085**	**255 522**	**537 688**

Source: DUO (2013), "Aantal onderwijsdeelnemers in het MBO" [Number of students in MBO], www.duo.nl/organisatie/open_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo_/Onderwijsdeelnemers/default.asp (accessed 23 January 2014).

The strong upper secondary vocational education system consists of two parallel structures

The apprenticeship track (*Beroepsbegeleidende Leerweg* or BBL) and the school-based track (*Beroepsopleidende Leerweg* or BOL) both combine learning and working. In the apprenticeship track, at least 60% of the learning takes place in the workplace. In practice, most apprenticeship programmes have one day of formal schooling and four days of workplace training. The school-based track includes at least 20%, and typically around 30%, of workplace training (Vrieze, van Kuijk and de Loo, 2009). Over half of the Dutch labour force had a vocational qualification in 2012. But unlike Germany, Austria and Switzerland, which also have strong vocational systems linked to dual apprenticeship, vocational education is not actively championed (Fazekas and Litjens, 2014).

Box 1.2. **Policy recommendations from the OECDs review of vocational education and training**

This review looked at both upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) and the postsecondary sector in the Netherlands. It made policy recommendations for the upper secondary level as follows:

- 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.
- Facilitate the entry of industry practitioners into the teaching workforce and promote skills updating among existing teaching staff through regular industry placements.
- 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.

Source: Fazekas, M. and I. Litjens (2014), *A Skills beyond School Review of the Netherlands*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264221840-en.

Tertiary education takes two forms

The two forms of tertiary education are: 1) Research oriented education programmes (WO) at universities that include bachelors, Masters and Ph.D programmes; 2) practical-oriented programmes (HBO) that are provided mainly at universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*) and include both professional bachelor (four years) and masters programmes (a further two years). HBO programmes emphasise skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to the labour market.

Governance and financing

School systems balance decentralisation of decision-making with accountability for results

School systems across OECD countries vary a great deal regarding the extent to which they centralise the control of education. For example, teachers in Germany are civil servants, recruited centrally, and allocated to schools, whereas teachers in the United States are typically locally recruited within an often small school district. Many other decisions on the use of resources can also be taken centrally or in a decentralised manner. Decentralisation, balanced by accountability, has been widely encouraged by education policy experts, not least because it resonates with wider trends in public management that grant freedom to local providers of public services to use their resources flexibly, and in return hold them accountable for delivering good results.

The Netherlands has a highly decentralised school system

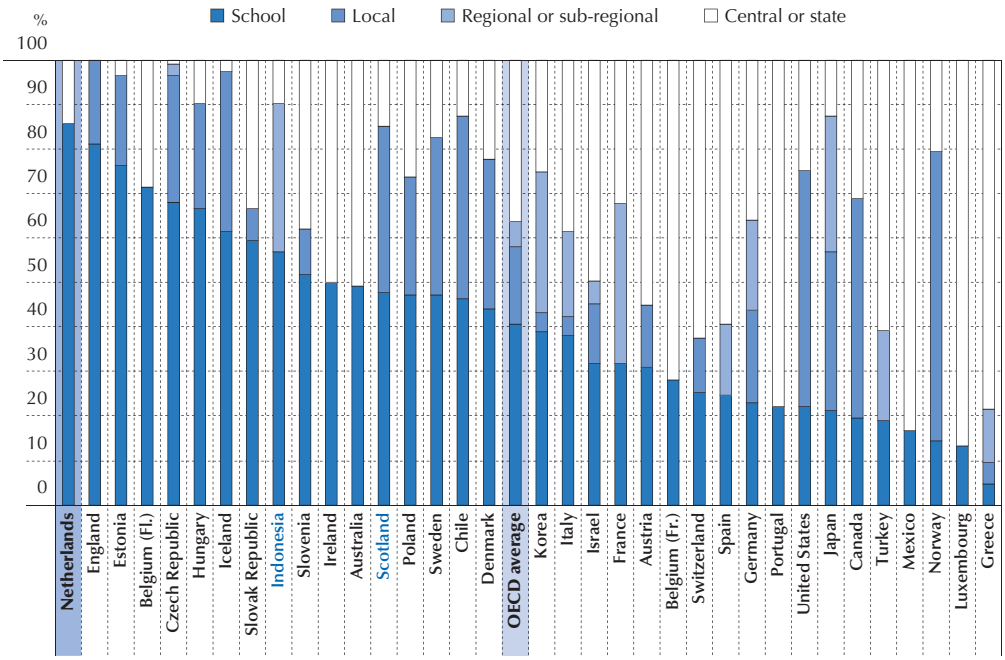
In 2011, at the lower secondary level, schools made 86% of key decisions (compared to an OECD average of 41%), with the remaining 14% made by central government. Schools made 100% of the decisions regarding the organisation of instruction, personnel management and resource management, but only 43% of the decisions regarding planning and structures[2] (OECD, 2012) (Figure 1.3). There is no national curriculum (although there are national examinations), which allows extensive freedom over what is taught and how it is taught, subject to a final assessment in an examination. Since the 1980s, Dutch schools have acquired increasing levels of responsibility (see Chapter 7). School autonomy is grounded in the principle of "freedom of education", guaranteed by the Dutch Constitution since 1917. This allows any person to set up a school, organise teaching, and determine the educational, religious or ideological principles on which teaching is based. Parents may choose the schools attended by their children in principle (although this is somewhat restricted by the school guidance given to students at age 12), with control applied at the local level to mitigate imbalances in school composition or weighted student funding to support greater social diversity in schools (OECD, 2014a).

Public and private schools receive equivalent public funding

In 2011, about one third of students in primary education were in public schools, another third in Catholic schools, one quarter in Protestant schools, with the remainder in other types of government-dependent private schools

(MoECS, 2012). While public schools are open to all students, government-dependent private schools may refuse students whose parents do not subscribe to the school's profile or principles.

Figure 1.3. **Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011**



Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of decisions taken at the school level.

Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en.

Schools are managed by school boards that have acquired an increasingly important role

A distinctive feature of the Dutch system is the institution of school boards (see Table 1.2). Many powers are vested in these boards, rather than directly in the schools that are governed by these boards. The boards oversee the implementation of legislation and regulations in the school and employ teachers and other staff. While in the past public schools were governed mostly by local government, governance has increasingly been passed to

independent school boards. The school governors who make up the boards may be volunteers (laypersons receiving an honorarium) or professionals (receiving a salary). The role of the school boards is under active discussion in the Netherlands. This issue is further examined in Chapter 7.

Table 1.2. **Overview of the school governance system in the Netherlands**

Stakeholders	Role/interest	Intervention/support repertoire
Minister of Education, Culture and Science (MoECS)	Responsible for the overall quality of education in schools.	• Development of national policy. • Development of quality norms. • Development of financing of supportive measures. • Power to stop funding or close schools.
Inspectorate of Education	Supervision of education: quality, finance, social security, and citizenship.	• Assess schools using a supervision framework. Since 2007 also school boards. • Discuss absolute and relative performance with boards and professionals in the schools. Report (very) weak schools to MoECS. • Identification of "excellent schools" (see www.excellentescholen.nl). • Provide public reports of judgements.
Sector councils i.e. PO-Raad, VO-Raad and MBO-Raad	Representation of education school boards' interests.	• Development and implementation of national policies. • Assist schools to improve performance.
Local Government (Alderman for Education)	Owner of school buildings and responsible for their maintenance.	• Improve the quality of education in schools by making funding and assistance available at the local level.
School board	Formal constituent of the school(s), responsible and accountable for corporate and educational quality of school.	• Set the organisational vision and structure. • Hire, professionalise and lay off school leaders/management and other personnel. • Hire support. • Internal quality monitoring. • Determine the organisational/learning climate in the schools. • Steer educational quality. • Change schools' budget.

Table 1.2. **Overview of the school governance system in the Netherlands** *(continued)*

Stakeholders	Role/interest	Intervention/support repertoire
Internal supervisory council	Integral supervision and focusing on the importance of education. Acts as adviser and sounding board to the school board. Employer of the board members.	• Ensures compliance with the code of good governance in education. • Approval of strategic policy, annual reports and accounts. • Appointment, dismissal and legal status and remuneration of board members. • Annual appraisal of the board and its members. • Amendment of the statutes. • Appointment of an external auditor.
(Joint) participation council	Co-decision/advisory role in the management of the school. The joint participation council fulfils these functions at the board level in case a school board consists of more than one school.	• Right to information, right to consent and prior consultation on a number of defined pieces of the school board.
School principal	Managing the day-to-day business in the school.	• Hire and lay off personnel. • Shape team climate. • Invest in teachers or methods. • Contact with parents.
Teacher	Responsible for the quality of education in the classroom.	• Make changes in classroom. • Contact with parents.
Parents/students	Client of the education system, some formally part of school board or member of the parents' council representative.	• Participate actively in school. • Assist with day-to-day activities.

Source: Adapted from van Twist, M. et al. (2013), "Coping with very weak primary schools: Towards smart interventions in Dutch education policy", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 98, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpnhld7-en.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MoECS) has overall responsibility

An optimal model of public service provision will balance local flexibility with central accountability; this is apparent in the Netherlands. MoECS initiates legislation and determines the structure and funding of the system, but it only engages with individual schools in cases of serious underperformance. In the context of teacher policy, the Dutch government

(2011, p. 3) described the distribution of responsibilities for educational reform as follows: "the government will establish the objectives of the policy measures ('*what*') while the field itself will decide how best to pursue those objectives ('*how*')." MoECS holds the school system accountable by setting standards, attainment targets and organising central examinations. The Minister of Education is responsible for the scope of school inspection, which is carried out by an independent inspectorate that submits an annual plan to Parliament after approval by the Minister.[3] The Inspectorate of Education monitors both education quality and compliance with statutory regulations.[4]

There is a large intermediary structure of school support organisations

Some of these are organised according to religious denominations. The Council for Primary Education (PO-raad), the Council for Secondary Education (VO-raad) and the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (MBO-raad) represent the employers (school boards) of their respective sectors and offer support services to schools, such as a team of "flying brigades" that work with schools identified by the Inspectorate of Education as weak or unsatisfactory (Nusche et al., 2014).

The Netherlands achieves good results with an average level of expenditure

Looking across countries, the link between expenditure on education and outcomes is tenuous at best. With an expenditure of 3.8% of GDP on primary and secondary education in 2012, similar to the OECD average, the Netherlands achieves good student outcomes (see below) (OECD, 2015). Over four fifths of expenditure on educational institutions is from public sources (also similar to the OECD average). Annual expenditure per student in the Netherlands is lower than the OECD average in primary education at USD 8 185, and higher than the average in secondary education at USD 12 296 (OECD, 2015).

Education expenditure has increased

Between 2000 and 2012, expenditure on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, as a percentage of GDP, increased by 0.6 percentage points (compared to an OECD average increase of 0.2 percentage points). Between 2005 and 2012, expenditure per student in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education increased by 13%, while enrolment increased by 1% (OECD, 2015).

Funding mainly reflects the number of students

School funding arrangements may be categorised into three types. In the first type, school funding depends on the local tax base, as in the United States and, to some extent, China. This means that disadvantaged students in poor areas tend to have poorly resourced schools. The second type makes school funding depend very simply on the number of students, with few adjustments (often for students with special needs). This arrangement applies, for example, in Hungary. A third type allows for per capita funding but makes more substantial adjustments, partly to reflect local cost-drivers, such as rural location, but more commonly to reflect the additional demands of teaching disadvantaged students. The Netherlands falls into this third category.

School boards receive block grants for staffing and operating costs

Block grants based on the student population are given to school boards. Schools with students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, those with special education needs, or other specific student populations can receive additional funding. Schools can also receive additional funding from municipalities for specific educational purposes (such as for students at risk of dropping out of education). Other sources of funding for schools include voluntary contributions from parents or businesses. Parents receive an allowance until a child is 18, based on the age of the child and the number of children in the family. For early childhood education, municipalities receive grants from the government's Municipality Fund, based on parents' educational background and school location.

Outcomes: Quality and equity

Attainment and participation in education

Attainment rates are similar to the OECD average

In 2014, 76% of 25 to 64 year-olds had completed at least upper secondary education. Among 25 to 34 year-olds, 85% had attained at least upper secondary education and 44% had completed tertiary education (OECD, 2015). For many years, and even today, attainment rates have been seen as a key indicator of the success of education systems. However, attainment is measured largely in terms of the time students spend sitting in classrooms, and there are few means of testing across countries whether they have learnt useful things during this time. The exception is survey measures, such as the Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), that focus on basic skills. However, these tend to show a somewhat tenuous relationship between attainment and literacy and numeracy skills. Today, in developed

countries and emerging economies, the emphasis is therefore shifting from quantity to quality.

The cognitive skills of Dutch students are among the highest in the world

The PISA 2012 results show that among the 65 countries that participated, the Netherlands ranked 10th in mathematics, with an average score of 523, 15th in reading (511) and 14th in science (522) (OECD, 2014b). At the primary school level, among the 49 countries participating in the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Netherlands ranked 13th in reading and outscored the international average (500 points) by 46 points. Only nine countries had significantly higher scores. Only seven countries performed significantly better than the Netherlands in mathematics in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) (Meelissen et al., 2012).

But there has been a decline in performance since PISA 2003

The PISA mathematics test score of the Netherlands fell by 1.6 points a year between 2003 and 2012, a decline shared across educational tracks and one of the largest declines among all participant countries. At the primary level, PIRLS and TIMSS data show stable results in all domains since 2003. But the average scores are significantly lower than the high levels initially obtained in 1995 for mathematics and in 2001 for reading (Meelissen et al., 2012).

Equity and inclusion

The Dutch school system leaves few teenagers with weak basic skills and few who become NEET

Very few teenagers in the Netherlands have weak basic skills (Figure 1.4). In 2011, the Netherlands had the lowest rate of 15 to 29 year-olds who were NEET across all OECD countries (7% compared to an OECD average of 16%) (OECD, 2015).

Social background has less impact on outcomes than in many other countries

In the Netherlands, there is a weaker link between mathematics performance and socio-economic status than on average in the OECD, and the weakest among the countries with highly stratified education systems.[5] Some 9% of students are "resilient" – meaning they succeed at school despite a disadvantaged background – which is significantly higher than the OECD average of 6% (OECD, 2013).

Figure 1.4. **Very few teenagers in the Netherlands have low basic skills**

Percentage of 16-19 year-olds with low literacy or numeracy (below level 2)

Note: Adults who obtained their highest qualification outside the host country: those with foreign qualifications and first-generation migrants who obtained their highest qualification prior to entering the host country are excluded.

Countries are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of 16-19 year-olds with low literacy or numeracy (below level 2).

Source: OECD (2016), *Building Skills for All: A Review of England*, OECD Publishing, Paris, www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf.

There are concerns about increasing diagnoses of special educational needs

In 2011, 17% of students were identified as having special needs. This was nearly double the figure for 1990, with increases concentrated in the secondary sector. In response, the Appropriate Education Act (*Wet Passend Onderwijs*) of 2014 made school boards responsible for providing "inclusive" education to every student. As a result it is expected that more students will be placed in mainstream education and that separate facilities will increasingly be of a temporary nature (Inspectorate of Education, 2015).

The performance of migrant students remains an important challenge

Fifteen-year-old students with an immigrant background scored 57 points less on average than their native peers in PISA 2012 (OECD, 2013). PIRLS, TIMSS and national test results (CITO[6] test), all show that these gaps are visible from the earliest years. TIMSS, for example, shows that at the age of 10, immigrant students are already behind their Dutch peers by 22 points in reading and 34 points in mathematics. After controlling for socio-economic differences, both first- and second-generation immigrant students still score far behind non-immigrant students, with 41 and 31 point differences respectively (Meelissen et al., 2012).

As in many other countries, girls are better at reading and boys are better at mathematics

In PISA 2012, Dutch girls performed substantially better than boys at reading (by 26 points), while boys were slightly better than girls at mathematics (by 10 points) (OECD, 2014b). At the primary level, PIRLS 2011 found that Dutch girls outperformed boys by 7 points in reading, which is far below the international average of 16 points. TIMMS 2011 found that boys outperformed girls in mathematics by 8 points, one of the largest gaps among countries (Meelissen et al., 2012).

Demographic change

The Netherlands is facing a demographic decline in its student population

Initially, primary education has been most affected by the demographic decline of its student population. Between 2011 and 2020 the number of students in primary education is expected to decline by 100 000 (a decrease of 7%), with declines of up to 20% in the Achterhoek and the Rivierenland regions. Within these regions, some municipalities face declines of up to 30% of the student population by 2020. This has inevitably led to an increasing number of schools with very small student rolls. For example, in the primary

sector, 5% of schools are very small (fewer than 50 students) and 15% are small (50 to 99 students). Less than half (45%) of all primary schools can be considered large schools that have more than 200 students (Haartsen and Wissen, 2012).

Small schools face particular challenges

The quality of education in smaller schools is harder to ensure due to financial and staffing problems (Moseley and Owen, 2008; Huitsing and Bosman, 2011). There are a limited range of teaching methods and styles, difficulties in teaching a wide range of ages and abilities in a single class, and fewer social opportunities with children of a similar age. Schools that have experienced a strong demographic decline are more often classified as weak or very weak by the Inspectorate of Education (Haartsen and Wissen, 2012).

School closures are unpopular

In rural areas, schools may symbolise sustainable local societies (Witten et al., 2001; Egelund and Laustsen, 2006). Closures and mergers reduce local school choice and increase travel distances, although in the densely populated Netherlands, nearly 90% of primary school children live within one kilometre of their school. Compensatory financial and other measures have been developed to support school mergers, maintain quality, and stimulate innovative solutions. Strengthened co-operation between small rural schools can help to solve staff and financial problems (Huitsing and Bosman, 2011). Sometimes the measures have eliminated traditional differences between public and religious schools. In Drenthe, the *brede scholen* (literal translation "broad schools") integrates early childhood and primary schooling (Van Leer et al., 2012). At the secondary level, experiments have begun with reducing the number of tracks, a development that parallels developments in the eastern parts of Germany, and may be desirable on other grounds. Sometimes the pressure of adversity stimulates innovation.

Appraising the Dutch school system

Why does the Netherlands perform so well?

School freedom is balanced by strong accountability mechanisms

As set out in this chapter, the education system in the Netherlands appears to balance a remarkable degree of freedom at the level of schools and school boards alongside the strong accountability mechanisms of: national examinations; the influential Inspectorate of Education, particularly through

its role in challenging individual school weaknesses; and the pressures of free school choice. This balance seems to work relatively well.

Early tracking is balanced by moderating influences

In some respects, basic skills outcomes of the Dutch school system appear to break the rules, conflicting with the argument that early tracking damages equity. Tracking by ability takes place early and is intensive, with more tracks than almost any other OECD country. Since the Dutch school system performs well both on equity and on average, it is harder to advance the argument for radical change to establish a comprehensive school system.

A strong vocational system plays a key role

In some countries, vocational education and training involves poor quality, inadequately resourced schools, and weak connections to the labour market. These quality problems mean that those tracked into vocational education and training are more likely to have poor education and career outcomes. Under such circumstances, the overall impact of initial tracking is very bad for equity. However, in the Netherlands the upper secondary vocational education (MBO) schools are well-resourced and perform well, with strong links to the labour market that are mediated through extensive work-based learning. At the top of the vocational system there is good access to tertiary education in the universities of applied science. School to work transition is also smoother in the Netherlands than in most other countries with a low NEET rate (Fezekas and Litjens, 2014). This all means that the potential equity risks of a highly tracked system are significantly reduced, if not eliminated.

Traditional flexibilities in tracking are important

Historically, schools have maintained two important mechanisms to moderate early tracking. First, secondary schools have traditionally been given the freedom to delay selection where needed through "bridge classes" in the first years of secondary schools. Second, the legal framework enables "scaffolding" diplomas. Once the student has graduated within his or her track level, he or she is automatically allowed to gain access to the next level. Many students have thus been allowed to obtain, with some delay, diplomas at higher educational levels than those at which they were initially placed. Some emerging threats to these flexibilities will be discussed in Chapter 3.

A competent education workforce

The quality of education depends on the quality of staff. The vast majority of Dutch teachers provide a good pedagogical climate for their students, explain things clearly and are focused on helping students improve their learning. The Inspectorate of Education also finds that in many schools, teachers, school leaders and school board members are working hard to improve the quality of education (Inspectorate of Education, 2015). Although there are clear areas for further improvement (see Chapters 5 to 7), the quality and dedication of teachers is one of the key reasons for the success of the Dutch school system.

This overall positive appraisal of the Dutch system determines the approach of this review

Radical changes in a system that seems to be working well are always risky. Intellectual humility may be unfashionable, but our understanding of the factors that drive the success and failure of education systems has some limitations. Reform in the Netherlands should therefore be pursued in an incremental fashion and accompanied by evaluation to ensure that results are positive and that unintended effects are monitored. In this context, this review – guided by the terms of reference (see Annex A) – has sought to identify a number of areas for further improvement.

Six areas for further improvement, addressed in the six following chapters, are as follows:

- High participation rates and a strong focus on early intervention programmes for vulnerable groups reflect the effort that has been made in the Netherlands to improve access and provide quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). However, several challenges remain: the quality of ECEC is sometimes too weak, there is no ECEC curriculum, staff qualifications are low, and the organisation of provision is fragmented.
- Early tracking is controversial, but in the Netherlands the outcomes seem to be relatively good. Initial selection into tracks is based on variable criteria, and an increased emphasis on teacher assessment, rather than objective tests, is creating new risks. The measured cognitive skills of those in different tracks overlap extensively. There is a tension between the central principle of tracking, that students of given cognitive skills are best suited to a particular type of educational programme, and school discretion, in which tracking decisions depend on teachers' advice and cognitive test scores that are interpreted on a variable basis.

- Although the Netherlands has a high proportion of top performers compared to other European countries, there remains room for improvement. There are challenges of motivation among all groups of Dutch students, despite efforts by the Dutch government, including several policy initiatives, to improve the motivation and performance of the country's most talented students.
- The Netherlands has pursued numerous initiatives to improve the quality and attractiveness of the teaching profession, including the establishment of a teacher's register, greater salary flexibility and more selective entry into initial teacher training. But some challenges remain with initial teacher training, the lack of systematic induction arrangements, and weaknesses in differentiated teaching skills. More broadly, teachers needs to develop an approach in which they are part of schools as learning organisations, learning collectively and working collaboratively with other teachers.
- In the highly decentralised Dutch school system, school leadership is vital but inadequately recognised. Recent initiatives to strengthen school leaders' capacity are insufficient and the quality of school leaders is too variable.
- School boards in the Netherlands enjoy extensive autonomy in various areas and have become increasingly responsible for guaranteeing the quality of education. But unlike many other countries, school boards in the Netherlands are not subject to the kind of democratic accountability faced by their counterparts. This means that other accountability measures are particularly critical. School boards, which vary enormously in scale, sometimes also face significant capacity challenges.

Notes

1. Gymnasium is a pre-university education (VWO) programme that includes the classical languages Greek and/or Latin. The term gymnasium can also refer to a type of school that only offers a gymnasium programme.

2. The four domains of decision-making comprise the following areas: **Organisation of instruction**: student admissions; student careers; instruction time; choice of textbooks; choice of software/learningware; grouping of students; additional support for students; teaching methods; day-to-day student assessment. **Personnel management**: hiring and dismissal of principals, teaching and non-teaching staff; duties and conditions of service of staff; salary scales of staff; influence over the careers of staff. **Planning and structures**: opening or closure of schools; creation or abolition of a grade level; design of programmes of study; selection of programmes of study taught in a particular school; choice of subjects taught in a particular school; definition of course content; setting of qualifying examinations for a certificate or diploma; accreditation (examination content, marking and administration). **Resource management**: allocation and use of resources for teaching staff, non-teaching staff, capital and operating expenditure, professional development of principals and teachers.

3. The relationship between the Inspectorate of Education and MoECS is described in the 2006 Regulation on Educational Inspection, available at: wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0019615/geldigheidsdatum_07-12-2009.

4. The tasks of the Inspectorate of Education are stipulated by the 2012 Education Supervision Act (*Wet op het onderwijstoezicht, WOT*), available at: wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0013800/geldigheidsdatum_04-03-2014.

5. Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Flemish Community of Belgium.

6. At the end of primary education, vast majority of schools administer an aptitude test called the CITO Eindtoets Basisonderwijs ("CITO final test primary education" abbreviated to CITO toets (CITO test)), developed by the Central Institute for Test Development, which is designed to recommend the type of secondary education best suited for a student given his or hers cognitive abilities.

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Chapter 2

Improving quality in early childhood education and care in the Netherlands

High participation rates and a strong focus on early intervention programmes for vulnerable groups reflect efforts to improve access and provide quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC). However, the quality of ECEC is sometimes too weak and the organisation of provision is fragmented. This chapter examines challenges and solutions for strengthening the quality of ECEC in the Netherlands. It analyses the governance, financing and structural and process quality of different ECEC services and identifies a need to strengthen the quality of ECEC through the development of a national curriculum framework, better skills for ECEC staff, and a move towards a more integrated approach to ECEC provision.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Why early childhood education and care matters

Numerous studies demonstrate the benefits of ECEC for cognitive development, school achievement and completion, and socio-emotional development (Barnett, 1995; Burger, 2010; Heckman, 2006; Love et al., 2003; Magnuson, Ruhm and Waldfogel, 2007; Winsler et al., 2008). The benefits are greater for disadvantaged children (Magnuson et al., 2004; Wen et al., 2012). Good quality ECEC also supports the working lives of parents and the emancipation of women through labour market participation. As a result, increasing the provision, quality and accessibility of ECEC is high on the policy agenda in many countries (OECD, 2006, 2011).

Diverse forms of provision

There are different types of provision for children under four years

The ECEC system in the Netherlands refers to all settings that provide care and early education to children under the age of four. Although compulsory schooling starts at the age of five, children can enrol in primary school at age four. Consequently, there is almost universal enrolment in primary school at age four. The first two grades of primary school are equivalent to kindergarten (*kleutergroepen*). The provision of ECEC to children below the age of four includes:

- Private day care centres (*kinderdagverblijven*), offering care for children between birth and four-years-old up to five days a week throughout the year. These are primarily for working parents. Over 52% of children aged two to three attend centre-based day care, but on average only for two full days a week (CBS, 2016).
- In-home care by child-minders (*gastouderopvang*) for children between birth and 12. A small proportion of Dutch children (about 9%) in the age group two to three receive such care. As in day care centres, the main aim is to support working parents.
- Public pre-kindergarten facilities (*peuterspeelzalen*), or playgroups, provide a more formal type of ECEC. Children enrol on a per-session basis. Some 37% of Dutch children attend pre-kindergarten facilities, in most cases for two to four half days a week for the age group two to three years (CBS, 2016

Disadvantaged children are offered support through special programmes

Day care centres and pre-kindergartens can offer VVE (*voor en vroeg schoolse educatie*) programmes for up to four half days a week, in addition to a general programme. The programme is free of parental costs and covers ages two-and-a-half to six years old, spanning the preschool and kindergarten

ages. There is a structured curriculum that focuses on holistic development, but with an emphasis on Dutch language development.

Responsibilities are divided across different ministries and bodies

- Since 2002, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) has been responsible for childcare policy, including implementation of the Childcare Act (2005) and the Welfare Act, which includes pre-kindergarten for two- to three-year-olds.
- MoECS is responsible for the education system and the special intervention programme (VVE) for disadvantaged groups (two and a half to four years old). The Inspectorate of Education monitors the educational aspects of ECEC provision, focusing mainly on the quality of provision in these programmes.
- The Municipal Health Service (*Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst*, GGD) is in charge of monitoring the structural quality of ECEC and conducts annual inspections of providers. Since 2010, National Quality Standards have set out uniform quality standards for all day care settings.

Funding for ECEC comes from various sources and differs by municipality

Funding for the general provision of ECEC comes from three sources: 1) government and municipal funding of public pre-kindergarten facilities and childcare subsidies; 2) contributions from employers; and 3) parents. Each contribute around a third of overall costs (Bettendorf, Jongen and Muller, 2015). The 2005 Childcare Act increased the role of the private sector: day care centres now operate in a private market and parents are free to choose the day care centre they prefer. Means-tested day care subsidies are paid to working parents and unemployed parents, subject to active labour market programmes. The government fully finances the VVE programmes used by disadvantaged children (Education Council, 2015).

Public expenditure on ECEC has increased from a low base

Public and private expenditure on childcare and early education services, including expenditure on four- and five-year-olds (in primary education), was 0.9% of GDP in 2011, close to the OECD average of 0.8% (OECD, 2015a). Subsidies for parents increased substantially between 2005 and 2008, which cut the effective parental fee for day care by half (Bettendorf, Jongen and Muller, 2015) and trebled public expenditure to 2.7 billion euros in 2009. This ensured sufficient provision for working parents (Akgunduz and Plantenga, 2014). Following the financial crisis, childcare subsidies were reduced by 2%

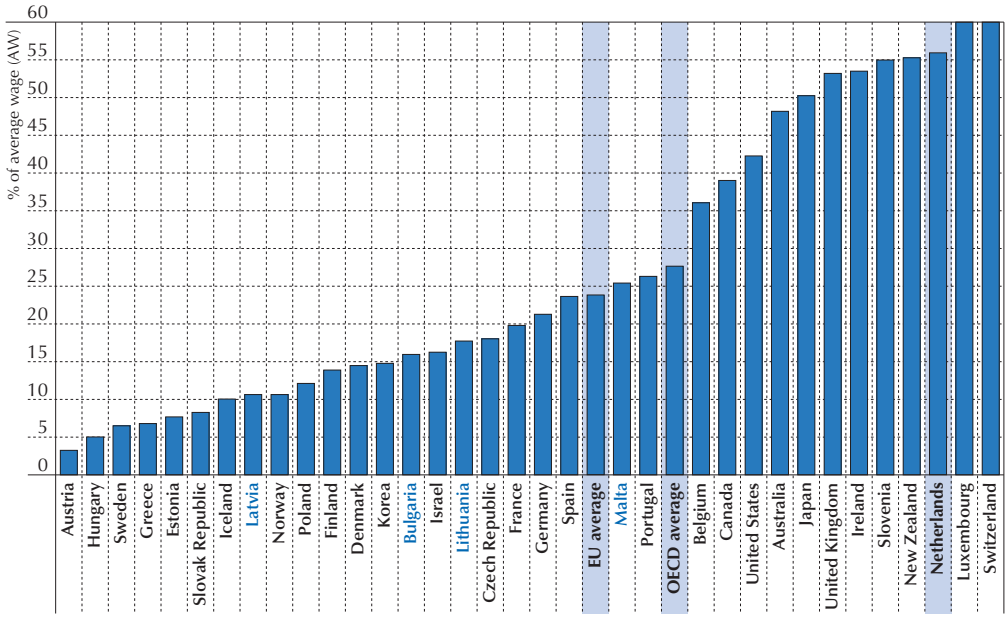
to 5% for the first child and 10% for the second child in 2012. This had the largest impact on medium- to high-income families.

The cost of childcare services for parents is above the OECD average

In 2012, the gross costs of full-time childcare represented 56% of the average wage in the Netherlands for a two-year-old in full-time care, double the OECD average (Figure 2.1). By 2017, parental costs should fall due to the increase in government funding. In practice, full-time childcare is unusual; Dutch children participate, on average, only two days a week.

Figure 2.1. **Childcare costs for Dutch parents relative to wages**

Childcare fees per two-year-old attending accredited full-time care and education services as a percentage of average wage (2012)



Countries are ranked in ascending order of childcare fees per two-year-old as a percentage of the average wage.

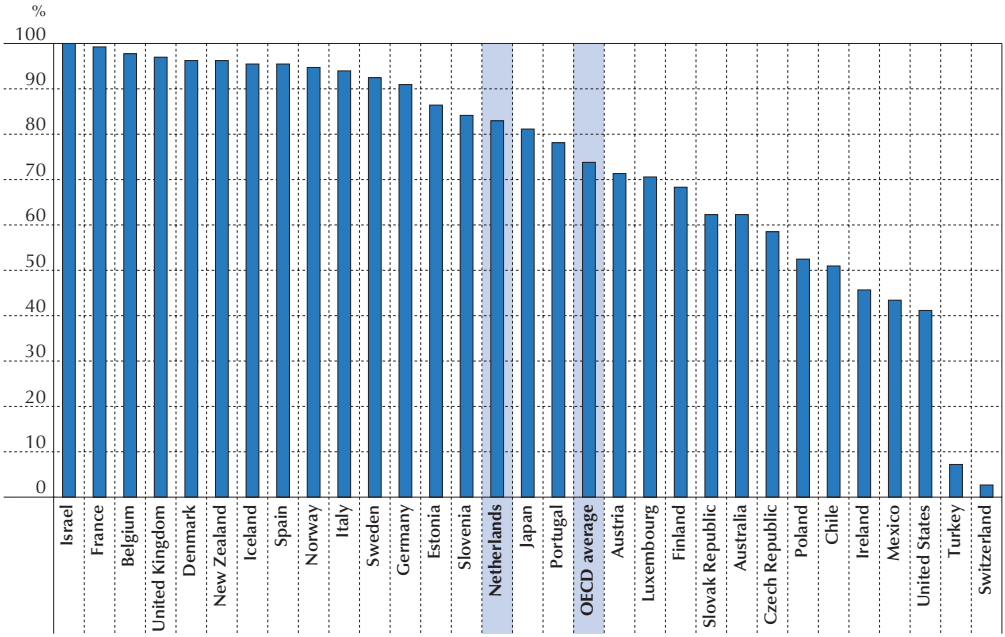
Source: OECD (2014), "PF3.4: Childcare support", *OECD Family Database*, OECD, www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm (accessed 11 January 2016).

Levels of participation

Enrolment rates are high

On average across OECD countries, 74% of three-year-olds attended ECEC in 2013. In the Netherlands, participation rates in ECEC are above the OECD average, with 83% of three-year-olds attending ECEC (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. **Enrolment rates at age three in ECEC, 2013**



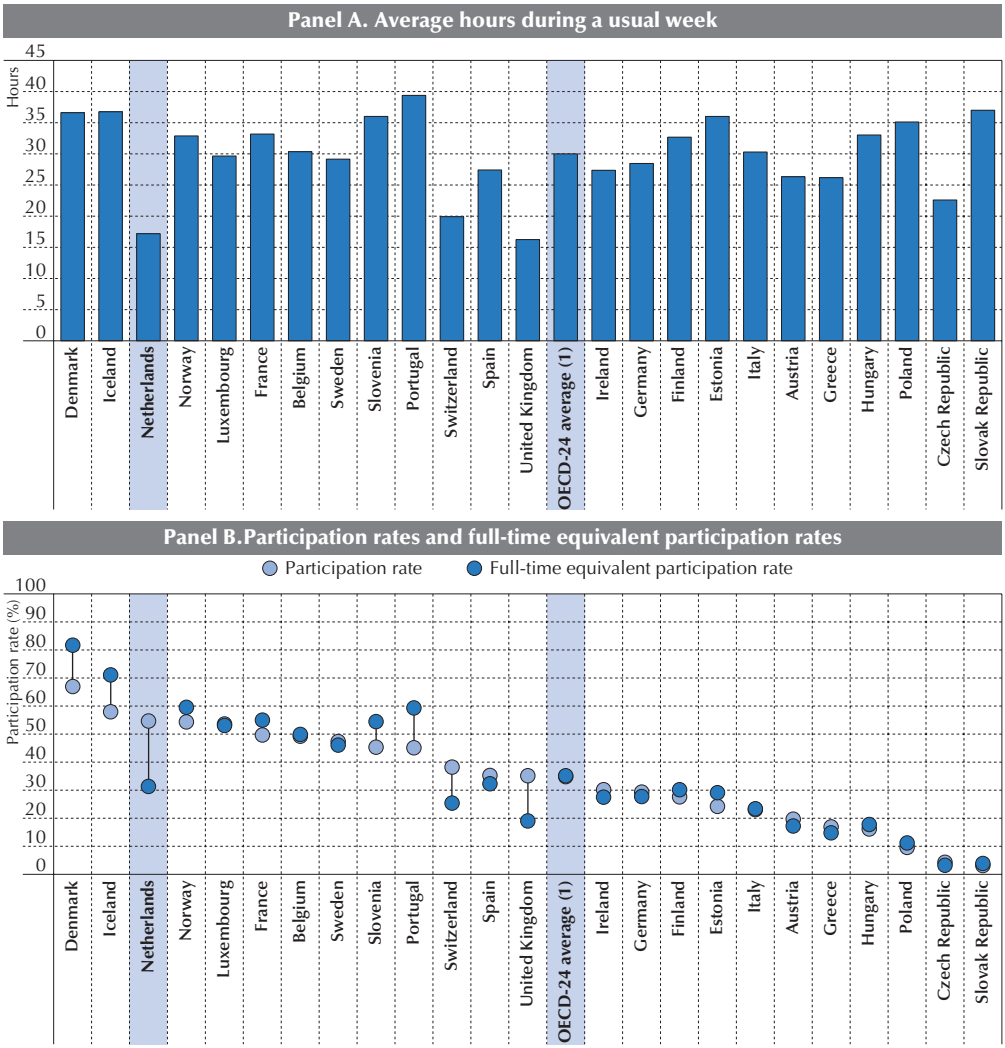
Countries are ranked in descending order of the enrolment rates of three-year-olds in 2013.

Source: OECD (2015a), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en.

But Dutch children usually make only part-time use of facilities

In the Netherlands, a child attended ECEC for an average of 17 hours per week in 2013, which is below the 30 hours for full-time care (Figure 2.3). The full-time equivalent (FTE) participation rate for 0-2 year-olds is 31%, which reflects high participation but low average hours. Around one third of OECD countries have higher FTE participation rates, including Denmark, Iceland and Norway that have 60% or higher (OECD, 2013).

Figure 2.3. **Participation in formal care of 0-2 year-olds, 2013**



Notes: Data include children in centre-based services, organised day care and pre-school (both public and private), and those who are cared for by a professional childminder. Data exclude informal services provided by relatives, friends or neighbours. Weekly hours data for Germany refer to 2012.

1. Unweighted average for the 24 OECD countries for which data on average weekly hours are available.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the participation rate for 0-2 year-olds in formal childcare and pre-school services.

Source: OECD (2013), "PF3.2: Enrolment in childcare and pre-school", *OECD Family Database*, OECD, www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm (accessed 11 January 2016).

Social background is strongly linked to participation and the form of ECEC provision

Although participation rates in the age group 0-3 years are above the OECD average, participation in ECEC is strongly determined by socio-economic status (CBS, 2016). About 40% of children under three from the lowest income group (20th percentile) attend no form of ECEC provision, compared with 8% for the highest income group.

There is a strong socio-economic dimension in the choice of ECEC facility

Private day care centres typically cater for dual-earner, mainly wealthier, households. Pre-kindergartens typically serve children from low-income families and with minority backgrounds (Slot, 2014; Akgunduz and Plantenga, 2014). VVE programmes for the disadvantaged are therefore mainly organised within the context of pre-kindergarten. Some, including the Education Council (2015) and Social and Economic Council (2016), have warned of the ensuing risks of social segregation.

ECEC as a labour market instrument

At home childcare is mainly provided by women

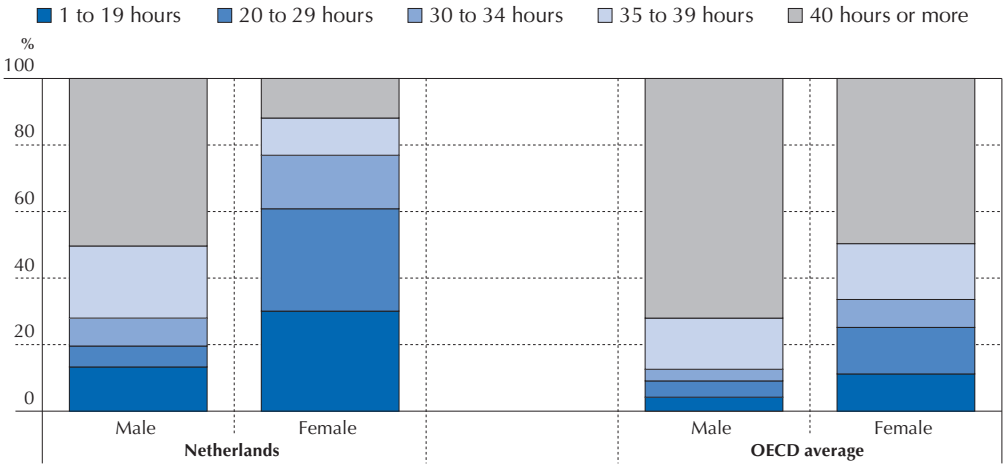
In the Netherlands, as in many countries, childcare for very young children is often provided by the family, and mothers in particular (Education Council, 2015). While female labour force participation is high (at around 80%), more than three quarters of women workers are part-time, which, together with Switzerland, is the highest among OECD countries. However, the part-time choice of work is heavily gender biased (Figure 2.4) in the Netherlands, which leads to an unequal division of paid and unpaid work. Part-time working women are paid less and have fewer opportunities for promotion. In the Netherlands, the pay of women lags further behind that of men (by 20%) than in other OECD countries (15% is the OECD average), and few women occupy managerial and top positions in the private sector (17%).

Increased ECEC subsidies had relatively limited impact

Increased childcare subsidies between 2005 and 2009 had little impact on female labour market participation (this increased by only 3%), but a bigger impact on female working hours per week (up by 6.2%) (Bettendorf, Jongen and Muller, 2015). This may reflect a strong cultural preference for family childcare, and potentially concerns about the quality or affordability

of available day care. Other government policies may also be a factor. For example, Dutch men are entitled to 5 days of paid paternity leave, while women are entitled to 16 weeks paid maternity leave. This is in contrast to Nordic countries where fathers have more rights.

Figure 2.4. **Distribution of working hours for employed adults in couple households with children, by gender, 2014**



Source: OECD (2015c), "LMF2.1: Usual working hours per week by gender", *OECD Family Database*, OECD, www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm (accessed 7 April 2016).

The quality of general provision ECEC

High quality is crucial for ECEC to have beneficial impacts for children

Research has shown that low quality ECEC can damage rather than promote child development (OECD, 2011). There are two main dimensions of ECEC quality:

- *Structural quality* refers to characteristics of ECEC provision: group sizes, child/staff ratios, staff educational qualifications with specialisation in ECEC, ECEC curriculum, suitable professional development and on-the-job training (OECD, 2011; Leseman and Slot, 2013; Slot, 2014). All of these structural requirements, except for the ECEC curriculum, are strongly regulated for all types of ECEC provision. Structural quality is a precondition of process quality.

- *Process quality* concerns the social-emotional and instructional features of teacher-child and child-child interactions that have been found to be positively related to children's development of self-regulation, pre-academic, and social skills (Curby et al., 2009; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008; Slot, 2014).

Process quality in general ECEC is low to medium, and is particularly insufficient in privately provided day care institutions

The emotional aspects of process quality are handled well in all types of ECEC services (Leseman and Slot, 2013; Social and Economic Council, 2016). Staff are generally sensitive to children's needs and create a good atmosphere. However, educational quality is low to medium in all types of ECEC services (Veen and Leseman, 2015), particularly in private sector institutions (Slot, 2014).

Structural quality

A common quality framework now applies

Legislation in 2010 brought day care centres and pre-kindergartens under the same statutory quality framework with the aim of equalisation. The two forms of ECEC provision have become highly comparable in structural quality (Slot, 2014).

The qualification levels of ECEC staff could be improved

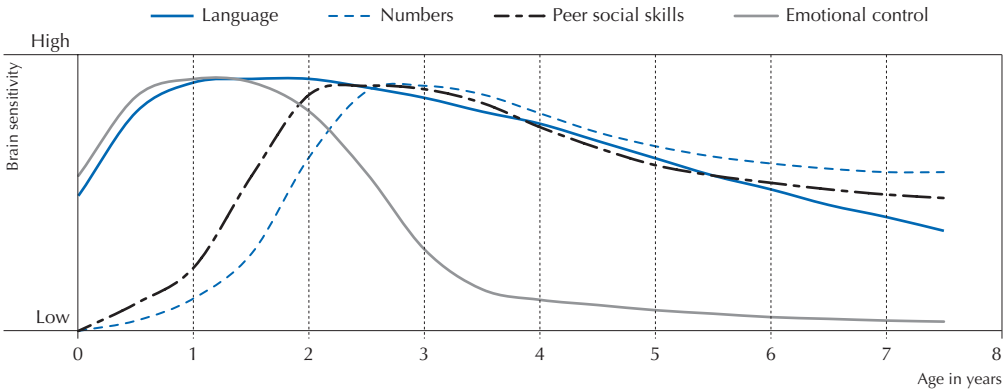
The minimum qualification requirement of an MBO diploma (upper secondary vocational education) for ECEC staff working with children up to age four is low compared to many other OECD countries. For example, all Nordic countries, New Zealand and the United Kingdom require tertiary diplomas for ECEC staff (OECD, 2011).

There are concerns about the quality and lack of standardisation of initial education programmes, which are mainly at the MBO level and often have little specialised ECEC content (Lindeboom and Buiskool, 2013). The Education Council (2015) has argued for many years that staff qualifications at the university level would improve the quality of ECEC. This doesn't necessarily mean that all staff would need such high qualifications, rather that teams could have skills at different levels, ranging from MBO to the university level, thus limiting the cost implications of more qualified staff. The importance of continuous professional development is increasingly recognised, which has led to several professional development initiatives, such as MoECS's programme "Versterk" (2010-2014) and the "Quality Impuls" (*Kwaliteitsimpuls*) programme (2013-2016) that have been implemented in recent years (Social and Economic Council, 2016; Education Council, 2015).

The Netherlands lacks a common ECEC curriculum

By setting standards for ECEC provision, a curriculum promotes quality and consistency, recognising that much cognitive and emotional development takes place prior to ages of three or four (OECD, 2006) (Figure 2.5). Most OECD countries have an ECEC curriculum that describes developmental objectives and explains what subjects (such as early reading) should be pursued (OECD, 2011, 2015b). In the Netherlands, there is no curriculum for children below the age of two and a half, and only a loose description of developmental goals for those between the ages of two and a half and four. The VVE programme curricula were designed for disadvantaged children but are increasingly being used in additional childcare contexts.

Figure 2.5. **Sensitive periods in early brain development, by age**



Source: OECD (2015b), *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264233515-en.

The effectiveness of the VVE programme in reducing early learning disadvantages

While many continental European and Nordic countries follow a universalist approach to early childhood education, the Netherlands explicitly targets disadvantaged children through VVE programmes that are mainly offered in public pre-kindergartens. Following the 2010 Law on Disadvantaged Education (*Wet OKE:Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie*), VVE funding was substantially increased, doubling the number of registered places in 2015 and bringing the total to 110 000 children (Akgunduz and Heijnen, 2016).

First findings of the VVE programme's positive effects

Based on a national large scale longitudinal cohort study (Pre-COOL), Slot (2014) showed that VVE programmes have positive effects on emotional and educational process quality for all children. A recent study found that the increased funding of VVE programmes has caused a large reduction in the grade repetition of children in the early years of primary education (Akgunduz and Heijnen, 2016) – in Dutch primary schools the rates of year repetition are three times higher than the OECD average (7.7%). Repetition is most common during the first two years of primary education (at age four or five) and is heavily biased towards children from socio-economically disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds. In some schools, nearly half of the student population repeats a grade. This is both costly and wasteful, given the evidence that the effectiveness of the grade repetition in increasing students' outcomes is very limited (Akgunduz and Heijnen, 2016).

Recommendation 1: Strengthen educational quality in early childhood education and care

Recommendation 1: Strengthen educational quality in early childhood education and care through the development of a curriculum framework and through improving and standardising the qualifications and training of ECEC staff. Move towards a more integrated approach to ECEC provision

Develop a national curriculum framework for all ECEC settings

By setting standards, a curriculum promotes quality and consistency in provision, objectives that are particularly important in the Dutch context where ECEC provision is fragmented and general ECEC is of average to low process quality. An integrated approach to national curriculum development is needed, but should be adapted to local needs in partnership with staff and families.

Raise qualifications of staff and strengthen initial and continuous education that strongly focuses on ECEC

The Netherlands should invest in raising the qualification levels of staff. To achieve this, the level of initial and continuous education and training programmes need to be raised and their content strongly focussed on ECEC. Harmonisation of the numerous programmes that give access to ECEC will be needed.

Moving towards a more integrated approach

For some years, the Dutch Education Council has been encouraging the government to move towards an integrated approach that involves both the integration of "childcare" and "early education" objectives alongside the integration of different providers and their resources. The Council argues that cost considerations and conflicts of interest have been obstacles (Education Council, 2015). Three concrete steps would facilitate the establishment of an integrated approach: 1) introduce a national ECEC curriculum to help raise and equalise the process quality of ECEC; 2) consolidate the governance, financing and monitoring of ECEC under one single ministry to improve coherency and follow the examples of many other OECD countries; 3) incentivise local innovations, including public-private partnerships, to work towards more integrated ECEC provision.

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Chapter 3

Making sense of early tracking in the Netherlands

The Dutch school system is highly stratified with extensive early tracking. Early tracking is controversial, but student outcomes in the Netherlands are good on average and in terms of equity. However, the integrity of the tracking system is increasingly challenged, with evidence pointing to large student performance differences within educational tracks (programmes), and seeming growing inequity in educational opportunities between disadvantaged and more advantaged students. This chapter analyses the challenges of the system for initial selection and allocation of students into different tracks and proposes options for improvement. It highlights the importance of a national and objective test to determine the initial tracking decision. It also examines ways of improving the permeability of the system through a drastic reduction of down-tracking and grade repetition, and strong differentiated teaching skills to identify strong performers within classrooms and support their potential promotion to a higher track.

The pros and cons of early tracking

Secondary education can be comprehensive, or, as in the Netherlands, involve multiple separate tracks

In comprehensive education systems, children of different ability levels attend the same school and follow the same educational programmes for a long time. Schools and teachers cater to a wide range of student abilities, and ability grouping is typically within the same school or even the same class, which allows ready transition between difficulty levels. Students can often follow different subjects at different difficulty levels. In stratified systems, however, children are separated (sometimes as early as lower secondary level) into different educational programmes or "tracks" according to their abilities. These education systems are typically found in German-speaking countries, Eastern Europe, the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands and can be more or less stratified, depending on the age at selection and/or the number of programmes they offer to students (Bol et al., 2014; Education Council, 2010; Prokic-Breuer and Dronkers, 2012).

The merits of "early" tracking (after primary school) have been extensively debated

Proponents of early tracking argue that grouping students by ability leads to more efficient learning, which makes it easier for teachers to target the right level. They argue that if the ability distribution in the classroom is too large and teachers target the average, both the strongest and the weakest performers will suffer (Hallinan, 1994; Lazear, 2001; Sund, 2013). Critics of early tracking point to the risks for low-achievers. A rich literature documents peer effects: performance is improved by more able students, and reduced by less able students in the same classroom. Tracked systems tend to deprive low-performing students of the positive peer effects[1] from stronger students. In addition, students in vocational tracks are often subject to a very different curriculum that sets them on a learning trajectory from which it is subsequently hard to escape (Korthals, 2015; Sund, 2013). Finally, since students develop at a different pace, early selection can easily result in the misallocation of students, a particular problem if initial misallocation is hard to rectify.

Evidence from cross-country studies on the overall effects is uncertain

The discussion around tracking leads to the question of who gains and who loses and by how much. Among cross-country studies, Hanushek and Woessmann (2006) find that early tracking increases inequality and has no clear effect on average achievement. Other studies have obtained

different results. Waldinger (2006) finds that tracking has no effect on the relationship between family background and achievement and concludes that there is no evidence of it having a negative impact on equity. Jakubowski and Pokropek (2015) compare achievement progress between primary and secondary education to find that progress is lower in early tracking countries, with more negative outcomes for boys and low-achieving students. Brunello and Checchi (2007) analyse International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) data (another popular source for international comparisons) to yield ambiguous findings that suggest different effects on literacy and future earnings.

Studies based on variation within countries produce similarly mixed results

Figlio and Page (2002) use data from the United States to investigate the effects of tracking on students' mathematics test scores and find that tracking does not harm low-ability students or benefit high-ability students. Looking at the comprehensive school reform[2] in Finland, Pekkarinen, Uusitalo and Kerr (2009) find a small positive effect of the reform on the verbal test scores of students from poorly educated families, but no effect on performance in arithmetic or logical reasoning. In the Dutch context, Van der Steeg, Vermeer and Lanser (2011) find that tracking has positive effects on the performance of students at the top of the performance distribution, but no negative effect for average students. Van Elk, Van der Steeg and Webbink (2011) suggest that increasing participation in comprehensive classes (combined general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO) classes) would increase graduation from higher education.

Ability grouping is not the only difference between selective and comprehensive school systems

The institutional context of tracking in terms of school choice, teacher selection, curricular arrangements, and funding arrangements etc. varies among countries. This may explain some of the ambiguity of the research evidence and suggests that the effects of tracking may be different in different countries (Pekkarinen, Uusitalo and Kerr, 2009).

Despite early tracking, student outcomes in the Netherlands are good on average and in respect of equity

It may be expected that the peer effects of early tracking damage the performance of students at the lower end of the performance scale and improve the performance of the best students, thus extending the performance distribution at both the top and bottom. However, the Dutch

results starkly contradict this hypothesis, with strong results at the bottom end of the distribution and slightly disappointing results at the top end (see Chapter 4). For example, the Netherlands had one of the smallest percentages of low-performing students in mathematics (15%[3]) in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 (OECD average of 23%). Moreover, when compared to other top-performing countries, the average score of students at the bottom of the performance distribution is relatively high. Similarly, PISA 2012 showed that the performance gap between students with an immigrant background and native students is smaller than in countries with a similar size and nature of migrant population (such as Germany, Austria or Sweden). So one major argument held by critics, that early tracking damages equity, is difficult to sustain in the case of the Netherlands.

School selection and its link to tracking

Large performance differences within tracks, and performance overlaps across tracks, are a problem

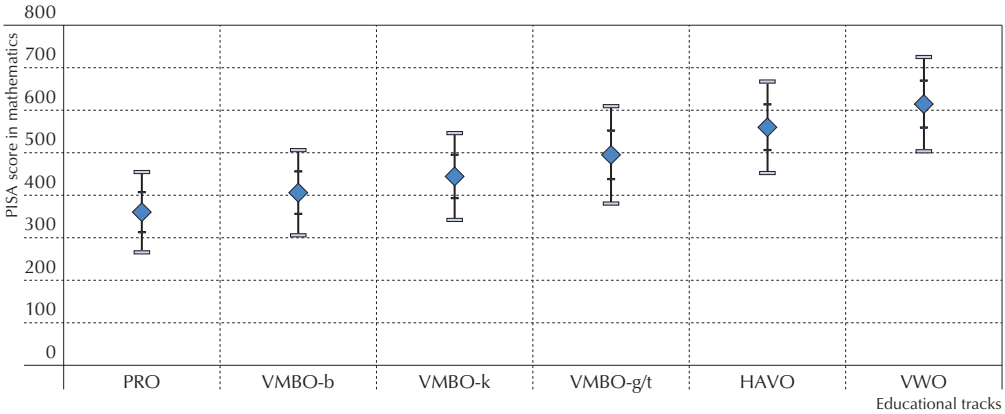
Figure 3.1 presents an analysis of student performance across different educational tracks based on PISA 2012.[4] The Figures show that there is an extremely large variation in performance at any given track. They also show that there is a lot of overlap in literacy and numeracy performance of students in one track compared with those in another. It suggests that in any one track a very large group of students in the Netherlands have the same cognitive skills as in the "next" track, despite having been placed in different tracks. This, for example, means that many of the best HAVO students are performing as well as the weaker performing VWO students.

There is considerable school segregation within educational tracks

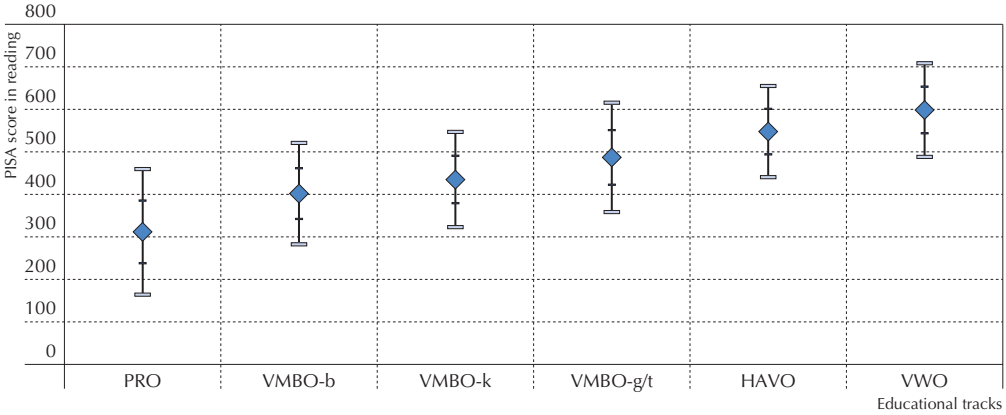
Ensuring consistently high standards across schools is a formidable challenge for any school system. PISA 2012 suggests that a considerable percentage of the total variation in student performance within tracks, about 20% on average, can be attributed to differences in performance[5] between schools. Performance differences are highest in the pre-vocational education (VMBO-g/t) tracks at 26%. Other top-performing countries with comprehensive systems, such as Canada, Finland and Poland, have similar results, with one striking difference: their results are at the system level while the Dutch results are at the track level. In other words, in these countries student performance depends much less on the school a student is going to than in the Netherlands.

Figure 3.1. **The cognitive skills of students in different educational tracks, PISA 2012**

PISA mathematics score distribution, by educational track



PISA reading score distribution, by educational track



Note: The markers around middle point of each graph indicate standard deviations.

Source: OECD calculations based on the OECD PISA 2012 data base.

The problem of inconsistent selection criteria

Inconsistent selection undermines the rationale of tracking

The rationale for tracking assumes that students with a certain level of cognitive skills will be best served in an educational programme that sufficiently motivates and challenges them in their learning. However, as suggested by the OECD's analysis, a considerable proportion of students are

finding themselves in educational programmes that do not necessarily match their cognitive skills. The process of selection into tracks is a relevant factor for two main reasons:

1. The results of the end of primary test[6] have never been consistently linked to primary school recommendations; and primary schools can differ radically in how they use these test scores to advise on track placement in secondary education. With the same test scores, students could easily obtain recommendations for higher tracks at some schools (or in some regions), while other schools could be more restrictive in their advice (Education Council, 2014; Van der Werfhorst, 2014). Overall there has been a tendency, especially in big cities under the pressure of ambitious parents, to "inflate" the end of primary test results, which leads to an increased percentage of students being advised to take the higher track.
2. Secondary schools in the Netherlands are free to select students and impose additional selection requirements that may go beyond the primary school's advice. For example, some elite independent gymnasia only accept students with exceptionally high CITO scores. Secondary schools may be more selective and make extensive use of their autonomy as they are under pressure to speed up educational trajectories and improve their results. This is typically the case with popular secondary schools or in parts of the country where there are population pressures that exceed demand. Schools with declining student rolls may feel inclined to be more lenient when it comes to student test scores. Students who have the same track recommendations but live in different parts of the country may therefore be more or less successful in obtaining entrance to the track of their choice.

The recent reform that places more emphasis on teacher assessment will not improve the consistency of selection

Since 2014/15, the national end of primary test has been de-emphasised as the main instrument for determining the educational track of students in favour of teacher assessments of students' cognitive skills. This reform was based on the observation that end of primary test scores were used too restrictively. For example, students with weak test results, who were given the benefit of the doubt in terms of track placement, often managed to do well and obtain their qualification at the higher educational level (Education Council, 2014).

But reliance on teacher assessments risks both bias and inconsistency

Despite the good intentions behind this reform, it is fraught with risk. Although primary school teachers know their students, and are, in principle, capable of assessing them multi-dimensionally and through time, there are several reasons why this shift in emphasis from a national test to a teacher assessment could increase inconsistency:

1. Even if teachers know their students, they are not in a position to compare their own students with a national sample, so they will not normally know if they are making higher or lower recommendations than teachers across the Netherlands.
2. Teacher judgement is often biased in favour of children from advantaged backgrounds (Waldinger, 2006; for Netherlands-specific findings, see Timmermans, Kuyper and van der Werf, 2015). Higher track recommendations than would be expected, given the end of primary test score, are mainly obtained by children with higher socio-economic backgrounds in the Netherlands (Education Council, 2014).
3. Teacher assessments can be biased by pressure from articulate parents willing and able to argue the case of their child (Hillmert and Jacob, 2010; van der Werfhorst and Hofstede, 2007). This adds to the risk of bias against those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The end of primary test now takes place later in the year, i.e. after the decision of a student's placement in secondary school has been made. Although primary schools may adjust their advice when test results are higher than the initial advice, this rarely happens. Low-educated parents are also found to rarely object to low school advice (Korpershoek et al., 2016).

Growing inequity in track placement

The most recent report of the Inspectorate of Education (2016) looks at track selection and student placements. The results clearly point to growing inequity in track placement. With the same results on national tests at the end of primary education, children of lower socio-economic background are increasingly more likely to be placed in lower tracks compared to their more advantaged peers.

Permeability between tracks after selection

Alongside effective initial selection, tracking requires subsequent permeability between educational tracks

Students develop their skills at different paces, so any assessment administered at one point in time will not accurately predict later

performance. If initial tracking decisions are subject to error, for the reasons discussed above, this adds to the importance of subsequent permeability. This means that any stratified education system needs effective mechanisms to allow initial tracking decisions to be adjusted in response to performance (Checchi and Flabbi, 2007; Jakubowski and Pokropek, 2015). In the Netherlands, students with the potential to switch to higher tracks face two challenges: 1) reduced expectations and opportunities to learn in lower tracks may mean that their potential cannot be developed and realised; and 2) there may be direct obstacles to transition (discussed in the next section).

National learning goals and central examinations determine programmes in each track

In the absence of a national curriculum, the national learning goals prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MoECS), together with central examinations at the end of secondary education, guide Dutch teachers in setting learning goals for their students. Because of stratification, learning goals are set differently for every secondary school track, translating into what is taught and examined in each track. With many different educational tracks, permeability between tracks depends on how well learning goals, allied to sensitive teaching practice, align between the tracks and thereby support promotion to higher tracks. The degree of alignment is vital, given the evidence of overlap in the cognitive skills of students between tracks. Keeping students in schools where expectations and the curriculum taught are below their potential level means that students' talents are not fully exploited.

Promotion to higher tracks faces increasing practical obstacles

Students seeking promotion to a higher track often need additional support to catch up on material that was not studied in the lower track. How to provide this additional support is left to the discretion of schools and is therefore applied variably. Some HAVO schools introduce additional selection criteria; others oblige students to follow "reparatory" classes to catch up with the learning goals of HAVO. In many schools, student motivation will be a key factor in determining success as students are not always offered support. The reduction in the number of larger schools, with VMBO, HAVO and VWO within one school, also plays a role. For years the Netherlands has witnessed a nationwide trend of creating separate schools by school type (e.g. a VMBO school). This development provides an additional obstacle to students seeking promotion to higher tracks (Inspectorate of Education, 2016). As a consequence of these obstacles in the current system, there are

only a small number of students that stream upwards from vocational to general tracks, and of those that do, a considerable proportion fail to achieve a diploma at that level. For example, the data show that among the VMBO students that go on to HAVO, about 25% do not obtain a HAVO diploma (Inspectorate of Education, 2015).

Strong differentiated teaching skills are needed to support permeability

The capacity of teachers to assess individual students, develop potential, and promote able students to higher tracks is a key element in the permeability of the system (Jakubowski and Pokropek, 2015). This means that even in a highly tracked system, teachers need strong differentiated teaching skills: schools can never afford to assume that initial tracking has ensured a homogeneous classroom. As students develop variably, they may excel in some subjects but not others. Many teachers lack the skills to systematically assess students and differentiate their teaching to individual learning needs (see Chapter 5). Weak teaching practice that offers no timely and practical response to struggling students, except grade repetition or down streaming, leads to many low performing students repeating or being down-tracked. Similarly, the (potentially) best-performing students in the class may not be sufficiently challenged in their learning to follow subjects at a higher level or even to seek promotion to a higher track. So underdeveloped differentiated teaching skills add to the downward pressure on the mobility of students, with down-tracking a too easy option and track promotion too difficult.

Grade repetition and down-tracking

One quarter of students in secondary education repeat a grade or are down-tracked

Given the inconsistent selection criteria applied before secondary school, all actors in the system may reasonably anticipate the possibility of a further "filtering out" of students in each track. Unfortunately, this diminishes the incentives for teachers to target support at struggling students to keep them on track. Grade repetition is often viewed as a necessary cost of obtaining good end results[7] and/or as a good alternative to down-tracking. Students are "offered" an additional year in the same grade and the time to mature in the same track. It is widely perceived that being promoted to the next grade before being sufficiently proficient may increase the risk of failure and lead to frustration as lower achieving students are not able to cope with more demanding learning tasks (Ikeda and García, 2014). However, any classroom will have students who struggle with the material, and asking students to

repeat a year, or down-tracking them, may not be the best approach; with additional support during or after lessons, or at summer schools, those same students may well succeed.

Recommendations 2-4: Reform initial selection process and subsequent permeability of tracks

Recommendation 2: Consider options for reducing the extent of early tracking, as one component of a reform package

Potentially reduce the extent of early tracking

The Dutch system of early tracking faces growing problems. Initial selection into tracks is far too variable and some recent trends and policy developments have exacerbated the challenge of managing early tracking. For example, it has become increasingly difficult to achieve track promotion, meaning that the scope to correct misallocations is falling. There are large overlaps in the cognitive skills of students in different tracks. It could be argued that these issues illustrate the intrinsic flaws of early tracking and that the system requires reforms to reduce tracking in favour of a more comprehensive education. While recognising the logic of this argument, radical wholesale change may be difficult as the Dutch education system achieves good results overall. One reason for this may be that early tracking reflects to some extent the preferences of some students for applied topics, as well as academic selection. In the Netherlands,[8] previous attempts to radically change the education system have often proven costly and counterproductive (Van der Werfhorst, Elffers and Karsten, 2015). However, more modest options for reducing the number of tracks, or postponing the age of first tracking, should remain as potential components of reform.

Recommendation 3: Establish a student's right to enter a track based on a national objective test, and require schools to respect national test standards when selecting students into tracks and subsequently sustaining them in those tracks

There is a tension between consistent tracking criteria and local decision-making

The integrity of the early tracking system is under pressure. There is a tension (some may call it a contradiction) between the central principle of tracking, that students of given performance levels are best suited to a particular educational track, and local decision-making, which leaves the track allocation decision to the highly variable discretion of local actors.

This review argues that if the integrity of tracking is to be sustained, the discretion of local actors has to be substantially restrained.

Base the track decision primarily on a national standardised test

An objective track decision requires a single national end of primary test, which could be extended to examine a broader range of competences than at present. Nationally set objective standards on the required scores for each track level should be established and should determine entry to different tracks. Local discretion by primary teachers and the receiving secondary schools create both inconsistency and bias and should be removed from the decision. The transparency of such a system would be fair to all students.

Implementation of the system would require local co-ordination

Applying common standards in track selection requires the compliance of schools in accepting all students who meet the nationally agreed standards. Schools should have limited freedom in introducing their own selection criteria after the initial selection. Local co-ordination would be required to manage demand and supply so that holders of a test "ticket" are granted the right to enter a particular track in a local school or schools.

Schools would also need strict limits on their capacity to make students repeat grades or be down-tracked

Limits would be necessary as otherwise schools could accept students but then swiftly push them into a lower track or a lower year, thus subverting, through local discretion, the objectives of the national system. Limits on down-tracking and grade repetition are desirable in their own right. Grade repetition is both costly and relatively ineffective when compared with alternative measures of targeted supports for students who struggle at school, and, in the Dutch context, the best defence of repetition is that it is often preferable to down-tracking.

A virtuous circle would link changes in schooling policy to strengthened differentiated teaching

These structural reforms would strongly encourage, and be supported by, changes in teaching practice designed to give more weight to differentiated teaching skills. A reduction of grade repetition and down-tracking calls for more attention to alternative interventions designed to support struggling students within a particular track to succeed. The importance of such differentiated teaching skills is underlined in Chapters 4 and 5. The aim would be to create a virtuous circle in which

schools faced with the requirement to sustain students in the same grade and track actively seek and develop innovative solutions to achieve this objective. Some central support measures from MoECS would be necessary to support this development.

Recommendation 4: Promote permeability between all tracks by (a) facilitating upward transition between tracks throughout the school career and (b) merging some tracks

Curricula and learning goals of different tracks should be aligned to facilitate track promotion

Even if initial track selection is conducted as well as possible, some "late bloomers" will need to be promoted to a higher track. Currently, different educational tracks are associated with different learning opportunities, with the gaps being particularly large between vocational and general education. This means that by the time a "late bloomer" is identified they will have to overcome a curricular gulf. Instead, curricula and learning goals need to design in, rather than design out, the possibility of track promotion.

Promoting larger secondary schools through financial incentives

To facilitate track promotion, there is a need to reverse the downward trend in the number of larger schools, ensuring that VMBO, HAVO and VWO remain within one school. The projected demographic decline of the secondary education student population provides further reason – and an opportunity – for promoting larger schools through financial incentives built into secondary education school financing.

Some tracks could usefully be merged

Permeability will be easier if there are fewer tracks and therefore fewer boundaries to manage. The overlaps between the cognitive skills of students in different tracks would be substantially reduced if there were fewer tracks. There is already an active policy debate in the Netherlands about different options for merging tracks, and the OECD in its review of vocational education and training in the Netherlands recommended that VMBO-b and VMBO-k should be merged (Fazekas and Litjens, 2014). Some mergers of different tracks, alongside the other measures discussed above, would help ensure that all students are in the right track.

Notes

1. This only applies if peer effects are non-linear (Hoxby, 2000).
2. The Finnish comprehensive school reform abolished the old two-track school system and created a uniform 9-year comprehensive school, effectively delaying age of selection and reducing stratification (Pekkarinen, Uusitalo and Kerr, 2009).
3. Defined here as level 1 or below.
4. VMBO-g and VMBO-t are fused for practical purposes (very small N in VMBO-g in the PISA sample).
5. This applies for all three PISA domains: literacy, numeracy and problem solving. The additional calculations are available upon request.
6. Schools are required to report on the extent to which their students have reached expected core learning objectives. While schools are free to use different instruments for this purpose, the vast majority of schools use CITO's end-of-primary test, which provides information on the school type most suitable for each student in the next phase of education. Since the 2014/15 school year it is mandatory for primary schools to administrate regular student monitoring systems, as well as a final test at the end of Year 8. Schools can choose to administer the CITO tests or alternative tests, provided they meet central quality requirements (Nusche et al., 2014).
7. This is evident from strong societal beliefs in the benefits of grade repetition in the Netherlands (Goos et al., 2013).
8. Such as, for example, the radical change in the system in 1999 through the so-called "Basisvorming" reform.

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Chapter 4

Building student motivation and pursuing excellence in the Netherlands

There are growing concerns that some of the most promising students in the Netherlands are not reaching their full potential. Although the Netherlands has a high proportion of top performers compared to other European countries, there are real challenges of motivation among all groups of Dutch students. Top performers also lack perseverance and openness to problem solving, despite efforts by the Dutch government to improve the motivation and performance of the country's most talented students. This chapter examines this challenge by exploring ways to reinforce rewards for excellence at every level of education, and the role of parents in motivating students to strive for excellence in their learning.

Why high-level skills matter

High-level skills are important for the Dutch economy

Advanced economies, such as the Netherlands, depend on high-skilled workers and top talent in order to grow (Daron, 2002). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) estimates that more than one-third of all job opportunities in the Netherlands in 2025 (34%) will be for professionals (high-level occupations in sciences, engineering, healthcare and teaching), compared to 24% of jobs across the EU-28 countries. Most of these jobs will be for people with tertiary qualifications (CEDEFOP, 2015). Research suggests that the creation of one high-tech job results in the creation of four additional jobs for less-skilled workers (Goos, Konings and Vandeweyer, 2015). Highly skilled workers may also spur innovation and boost technological progress.

But the most highly skilled workers are not always the top performers

Although performance on standardised tests in mathematics, language and science is highly correlated with future earnings and other positive outcomes, non-cognitive skills also contribute (OECD, 2015; Borghans, Diris and ter Weel, 2014). Emotional intelligence, social skills, motivation, drive and perseverance are frequently cited as related to job performance, health and personal well-being (O'Boyle et al., 2011; Goleman, 2005; Mischel, 2014). Although the skills involved are diverse and fluid, it is generally agreed that education systems do not regard them seriously enough (OECD, 2015).

Excellence in cognitive skills

There have been growing concerns about weaknesses among top performers

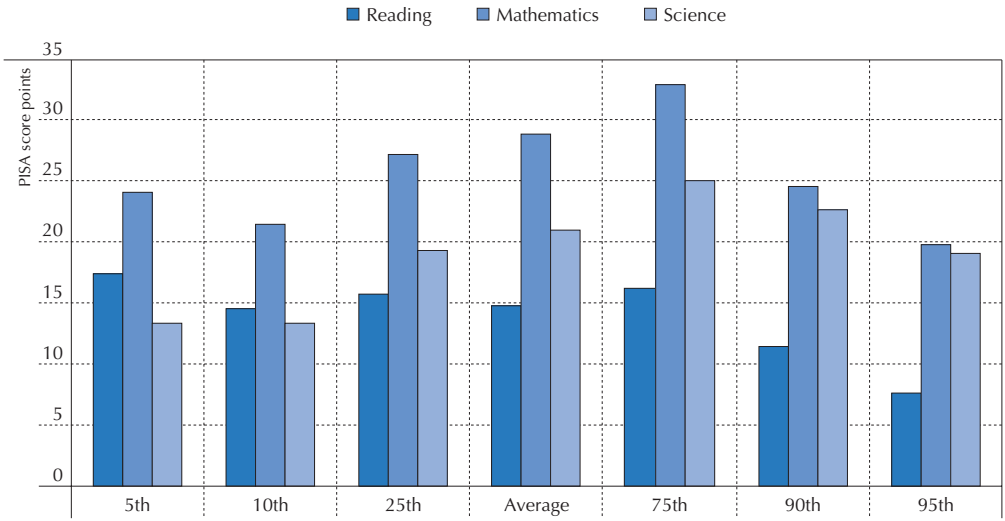
Before 2008, excellence was rarely presented as a concern in the Dutch school system and a common belief prevailed that gifted students "will learn anyway" (De Boer, Minnaert and Kamphof, 2013: 134). However, in view of recent concerns regarding the actual performance levels of the Dutch high achieving students, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MoECS) has sought to address the issue. A 2014 plan developed to strengthen education for talented primary and secondary students includes over 20 measures, including the removal of legal barriers for students to follow certain subjects at higher levels (Wolfensberger, 2015).

The Netherlands has more top performers than most of Europe, but is still behind some Asian countries

While Dutch students generally perform better than the OECD average, the strongest Dutch students (those in the 95th percentile of performance) have a relatively smaller advantage (see Figure 4.1). However, these differences are small and statistically insignificant in most cases. An alternative way of looking at excellence is to examine the percentage of "top performers" according to an absolute standard. When this comparison is made, the Netherlands comes out well compared to European countries, but is still behind some top-performing Asian countries on cognitive skills.

- In mathematics: 19% of 15-year-old Dutch students score at proficiency Level 5 or 6 on PISA 2012, more than the OECD average of less than 13%, but less than Singapore (40%), Korea (31%) and Japan (24%).
- In reading: almost 10% of students reach Level 5 or 6, more than the OECD average of 8%, but less than in Singapore (21%), Japan (18%), Korea (14%), New Zealand (14%), Canada (13%), Finland (13%), France (13%), Australia (12%) and Belgium (12%).
- In science: almost 12% of students reach Level 5 or 6, less than Singapore (23%), Japan (18%) and Finland (17%).

Figure 4.1. **Relative performance advantage of Dutch students compared with the OECD average**



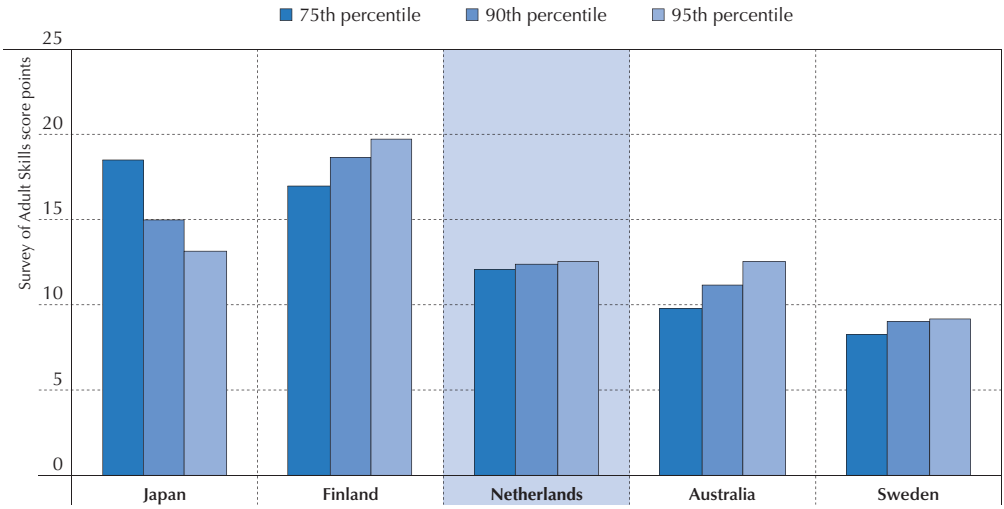
Source: Own calculation based on OECD (2014), *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en.

Mathematics performance has declined across the performance distribution

The Netherlands' performance in the PISA mathematics assessment fell by around 15 score points between 2003 and 2012 (OECD, 2014: Table I.2.3b); a decline observed across the performance spectrum (OECD, 2014: Table I.2.3d). In PISA 2003, around 25% of students scored at or above proficiency Level 5, while in PISA 2012 less than 20% of students performed at this level. Similar changes were observed among the weakest students.

Figure 4.2. **Relative advantage over the average in literacy scores, Survey of Adult Skills 2012**

Top-performing adults in the five top-performing countries in literacy proficiency



Source: Own calculation based on OECD (2013a), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en.

But the share of highly skilled adults in the Netherlands is similar to other top-performing countries

The 2012 Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), shows that the share of highly skilled adults in the Netherlands is large and similar to other top-performing countries. Moreover, top-performing adults (those at the 95th percentile) attained scores similar to those of adults in three of the other four countries shown; top performers in Finland scored significantly higher. Similar results can be found for numeracy proficiency (OECD, 2013a).

Young adults in the Netherlands do very well: 16-24 year-olds rank third in literacy and second in numeracy among participating countries. The contrast with school level results suggests that some catch up may take place in early adulthood, perhaps linked to the smooth school-to-work transition in the Netherlands.

National studies suggest that some of the most promising students are not reaching their full potential

A cohort study of the trajectories of excellent students by Kuyper and van der Werf (2012) revealed that between one quarter and one third of the excellent students[1] at the end of primary education do not manage to obtain a degree at the higher track level within the foreseen time (Table 4.1). Within this group, the students with a low socio-economic background are especially likely to be down-graded or down-tracked during the course of their educational career. The results show a serious mismatch between the potential of these students and the opportunities they have to excel during secondary education. A meta-study conducted by Mooij and Fettelaar (2010) suggests that many excellent students are insufficiently challenged from as early as first grade.

Table 4.1. **Percentage of students on schedule for timely completion of VWO Diploma**

	On schedule for timely completion in year…						
Cito score*	1	2	3	4	5	6	VWO Diploma
545	90.3	79.7	63.8	52.8	44.5	39.5	36.3
546	92.6	78.7	65.5	57.3	49.4	45.5	43.1
547	94.5	84.9	74.6	66.9	55.8	54	50.7
548	95.6	89.1	80.2	72.3	68.1	63.3	60.4
549	98.1	96.2	91.4	85.4	79.7	73.9	71.5
550	98.6	97.2	94.4	91.1	87.7	82.3	80.9

Note: * The CITO test is an end of primary attainment test that provides information on the school type most suitable for each student in the next phase of education. Schools are required to report on the extent to which their students have reached expected core learning objectives. Schools are free to use different instruments, but the vast majority of schools use CITO's end-of-primary test.

Source: Kuyper, H. and G. van der Werf (2012), *Excellente leerlingen in het voortgezet onderwijs: Schoolloopbanen, risicofactoren en keuzen* [Excellent Students in the Secondary Education: School Trajectories, Risk Factors and Choices], GION onderzoek/onderwijs, Groningen.

Weak motivation among Dutch students

Low motivation and drive to learn among top performers is a potential issue

Research suggests that student motivation is a key driver of performance (Broussard and Garrison, 2004; Gottfried, Fleming and Gottfried, 2001; Lange and Adler, 1997). To be successful, not only in education but also in real life, students need to be willing to engage with problems and be open to new challenges. To do this they need to be motivated and driven by the joy of learning (intrinsic motivation) and/or believe that high achievement is important in life (extrinsic motivation). Motivation in children is critical because it predicts motivation later in life (Broussard and Garrison, 2004; Gottfried, 1990). Gottfried (1990) found that academic intrinsic motivation at ages seven and eight predicts subsequent motivation, even after controlling for IQ, achievement, and socio-economic status. With age, motivation becomes increasingly differentiated. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) note that students attach more value to activities at which they excel at over time, suggesting that they will be increasingly more motivated to learn in subjects in which they experience success. Guay et al. (2010) found that differentiation of motivation for different school subjects did increase with age, with intrinsic motivation especially likely to vary between subjects for older students.

Many students in the Netherlands are not well-motivated

PISA 2012 showed that the Netherlands has one of the smallest shares of 15-year-old students who find learning mathematics interesting or enjoyable among the participating economies. PISA 2009 showed that almost 50% of Dutch 15-year-olds do not read for enjoyment at all, and only about 20% read for more than 30 minutes per day. Compared to other OECD countries, Dutch students are also less willing to work through problems that are difficult, they do not remain interested in the tasks that they start, and, more than in other countries, they are likely to shy away from complex problems (OECD, 2013b).

Top-performing students are less motivated to learn than in other OECD countries

Across OECD countries, motivation to learn is usually higher among top-performing students. In the Netherlands, while the best-performing students reported higher motivation than poor performing students, their level of motivation was still much lower than the OECD average. For example, the index of intrinsic motivation to learn mathematics is negative among students who score below proficiency Level 2, but is close to the OECD average for

those who attain Level 5 or 6. Across OECD countries, the index is negative for low performers but positive for top performers, particularly in Finland, Korea and Switzerland (OECD 2013b: Table III.3.8).

Top-performing students also lack perseverance and openness to problem solving

PISA 2012 showed that the readiness among top performers in mathematics to work hard and solve difficult problems is much lower in the Netherlands than in many OECD countries (OECD 2013b: Table III.3.8). At the other end of the performance spectrum, Dutch low performers are close to the OECD average in perseverance and openness to problem solving. This suggests that perseverance and openness to problem solving are particularly low among the best students.

Raising student motivation is a challenge

Schools and teachers can help students learn how to learn, nurture their willingness to solve problems, and build their capacity for hard work and persistence. PISA 2012 shows that teacher practices and classroom composition play an important role, as does parental engagement in the learning of their children. Beyond these factors, the education system and society need to encourage and challenge children to do their best and reward them for their efforts, whether they succeed or not.

School and teaching practices, and their impact

Differentiated teaching can challenge and motivate students

To foster student motivation, teachers must challenge students and demand the use of higher-order skills (Brown, 1994; Klieme, Pauli and Reusser, 2009). A relevant and flexible curriculum is an essential pre-condition. In PISA 2012, less than half of students reported that their teachers give them challenging problems (OECD, 2013b). One reason for this may be the broadly shared belief in "equal education opportunities", which in practice often results in education being designed for the average student and a similar programme being offered to every student. It is crucial that differentiated teaching skills are linked to the assessment of the learning needs of each and every child. This requires teachers to have a solid understanding of the relevant differences between students in the classroom (Bosker, 2005; Tomlinson et al., 2003). The evidence suggests that the assessment skills of many teachers are underdeveloped (Inspectorate of Education, 2015, 2016). This is further discussed in Chapter 5.

In disordered classrooms, even the most motivated students will lose out

Evidence shows that respectful and supportive relationships between teachers and students and orderly classrooms are a prerequisite of effective instruction (Hopkins, 2005; OECD, 2010; Scheerens and Bosker 1997). Among all top-performing countries in PISA, the Netherlands has the lowest index of disciplinary climate; the difference is particularly striking when compared to Japan, Korea and Estonia. Even in the most socio-economically advantaged schools in the Netherlands there is noise and disorder, teachers need to wait for a long time for students to calm down, and/or students do not work for a long time after the lesson begins (OECD, 2013b). Kuyper and van der Werf (2012) show that among top Dutch students, those who are orderly are most likely to realise their true potential.

Mixed classes are negatively associated with the performance of the top students

Van der Steeg, Vermeer and Lanser (2011) and Kuyper and van der Werf (2012) show that the performance of the best students at the end of primary education decreases during secondary education if they are not immediately placed in homogenous pre-university education (VWO) classrooms or gymnasium schools. When the best students are placed in mixed classrooms they obtain lower results and are much more likely to repeat the grade and be down-tracked than their peers with equivalent cognitive skills test results. It is unclear the exact role that motivation, teaching practices or peer effects play in this process, but it is likely that all of these factors are interrelated. Given the inefficiencies caused, these should be carefully studied further within the Dutch context.

In other countries, students are more likely to be offered additional lessons for enrichment purposes

PISA 2012 shows that in most OECD countries, the offer of additional mathematics lessons for remedial and enrichment purposes is common practice (OECD, 2013b). The Netherlands is one of the few countries where remedial lessons are more often on offer than enrichment classes. In 59% of Dutch secondary schools, students are only able to attend remedial classes after school, and no additional classes are offered for students who may want to excel. In Japan and Korea, only 12% of schools offer remedial classes only, and the majority offer both remedial and enrichment classes (about 72% in Japan and 80% in Korea).

Dutch parents are less engaged in their children's education than in other countries

As PISA and many other studies show, students learn better when their parents are involved (OECD, 2012). However, secondary school principals report that Dutch parents are less involved in school activities and that their expectation of academic performance is lower than the OECD average (OECD, 2013b). A minority of parents discussed their child's progress or behaviour with their child's teacher on their own initiative during the academic year prior to PISA 2012. Only 12% of school principals in the Netherlands (compared to the OECD average of 21%) reported that pressure for high achievement comes from many parents (OECD, 2013b). The issue of parental involvement in the Netherlands indicates that schools could make more effort to promote partnerships between parents and the schools (Panteia, 2014).

Strong performers from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to realise their potential

Kuyper and van der Werf (2012) show that among top performers, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are much less likely to realise their potential. Differences in parental involvement may explain this result. Disadvantaged parents are less careful about the school choice of their children, may find learning less important, or may simply lack the time and financial resources to support the education of their children.

The Dutch school system could do more to incentivise excellence of all students

Dutch educational policy has given more attention to excellence in recent years through a number of initiatives. For example, currently students can formally follow subjects at higher track level or obtain their secondary education diploma with a cum laude distinction. Also, some schools focus on improving excellence by offering special educational programmes, such as bilingual education or programmes for gifted and talented students. While these are all positive developments, there is room to further encourage the performance of each student. The main goal for the majority of Dutch students in each track is still to finish secondary school at that level. As entrance into higher tracks or higher (secondary) education in the Netherlands is mostly guaranteed simply by graduating, there is no real incentive for all students to exceed the minimum requirement. Chapter 3 argued for reform that would increase the possibility of up-streaming to a higher track in order to follow subjects at a higher level. This would help increase the incentive to excel. The reform proposed would remove the *threat*

of repetition or down-tracking, and increase the *potential rewards* in terms of track promotion. It is well understood that rewards are more effective motivators than threats.

School evaluation has given limited attention to excellence

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education has, in the past, been mainly concerned with school failures. However, more recently a traditional evaluation has been extended to include measures to assess the extent to which average and high-performing schools are fostering excellence.

Recommendation 5: Promote and reward student motivation and excellence

Recommendation 5: To enhance student motivation and promote excellence, build teacher capacity to better respond to individual learning needs, reinforce rewards for excellence at every level of education through the opportunity for track promotion, set high expectations through a relevant curriculum, and foster parental engagement in education

Build teacher capacity to better respond to individual learning needs, focusing on the promotion of excellence

To foster student motivation, teachers need to be able to respond to the different learning needs of all students, including higher performers or those with the potential to be a high performer. Providing students with a challenging and stimulating learning environment that fosters excellence calls for a flexible and relevant curriculum, which requires a solid understanding of the differences between students in the classroom. Further investment in differentiated teaching skills are much needed (see Chapter 5).

Reinforce rewards for excellence throughout the system

In the current system, suboptimal performance can be penalised by grade repetition and down-streaming, while excellence is not sufficiently rewarded. More opportunities could be given to (potentially) strong performing students in each track to pursue promotion to higher tracks and/or follow subjects at a higher level. Entry into higher education could also be more competitive. Many higher education institutions are introducing additional selection criteria for their most popular programmes in the Netherlands, which increases competition between the applicants.

Strengthen parental involvement in the learning of their children

PISA shows that parents' expectations are strongly and positively associated with positive dispositions towards learning and student performance. The evidence suggests that Dutch parents, especially those from a low and average socio-economic background, should do more to support their children in their learning. In addition, schools should take a more pro-active role in strengthening the partnership between parents and the larger school community.

Note

1. Kuyper and van der Werf (2012) define excellent students as those who score in the top 5% of the performance distribution. They use the results of three different tests for this: 1) CITO test implemented at the end of primary education; 2) entry examination in secondary education; and 3) the intelligence test "NIO". The study is based on "Voortgezet Onderwijs Cohort Leerlingen" (VOCL) data.

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Chapter 5

Enhancing teacher professional development in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has pursued numerous initiatives to improve the quality and attractiveness of the teaching profession, including the establishment of a teacher's register, greater salary flexibility and more selective entry into initial teacher training. While many teachers are approaching retirement age some challenges remain. This chapter examines policies and practices to enhance teacher professionalism and further improve the career structure. It examines the teaching skills of Dutch teachers, their initial education and professional development opportunities, as well as the potential obstacles to participation. It highlights the importance of a life cycle approach to teachers' professional development that is underpinned by a diversified career structure, and the promotion of collaborative working and learning among other teachers and school leaders.

A life cycle approach

Building teacher professionalism is a lifelong and collective endeavour

Teacher quality is an exceptionally strong predictor of student learning (Hattie, 2008; Hanuschek and Rivkin, 2012). Quality teaching and learning needs to be nurtured throughout the professional life cycle. This starts with effective arrangements to select talented individuals; strong initial teacher training; further continuous professional development linked to school goals; and collective learning and working, starting with quality induction programmes for starting teachers (Schleicher, 2016; OECD, 2014a). This needs to be supported by a well-designed career structure that helps attract, retain and motivate teachers to give their best throughout their careers. These issues will be considered in turn.

Attracting and selecting trainee teachers

Many teachers are approaching retirement age

In upper secondary vocational education (MBO), more than half the teachers are over 50 years of age (Figure 5.1). This is a challenge because highly experienced teachers will be lost and replacing them with good recruits will be difficult. However, it is also an opportunity to reshape and enhance the skills of the teaching workforce to ensure that it is ready to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world (MoECS, 2013).

Teaching is not considered a high status profession

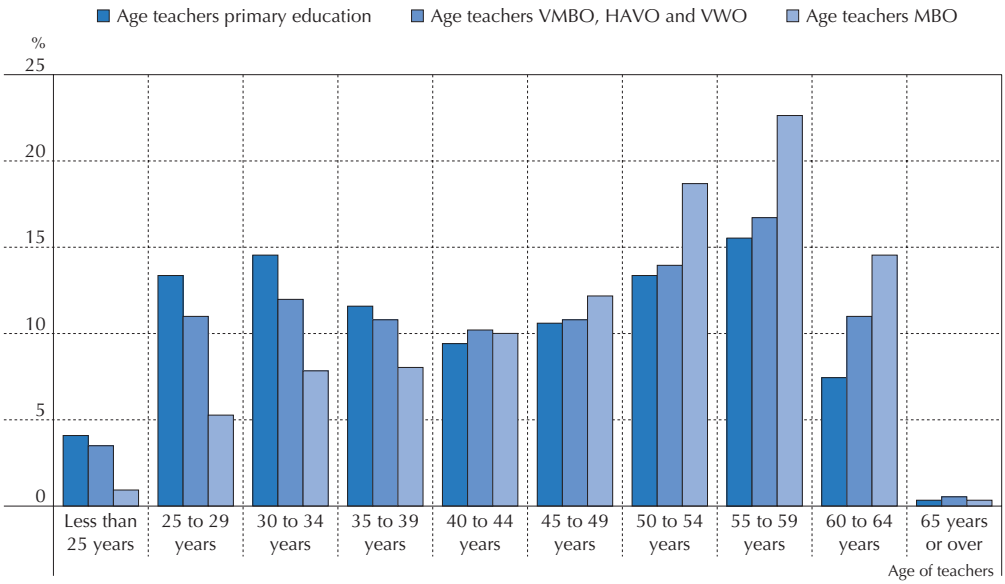
A great deal of effort has been expended to make the teaching profession more attractive (MoECS, 2015a), but although 9 out of 10 Dutch teachers are satisfied with their jobs, only 4 out of 10 report that society values their profession (OECD, 2014b). Projections suggest a rise in the number of vacancies in primary education, but with regional variations. At the secondary level it remains difficult to find sufficient teachers for certain subjects, for example mathematics and science. Despite the large number of retirements in MBO, large shortages are not expected as teachers can also be recruited from working life (Fontein et al., 2015).

Good quality teaching requires high level recruits

The strongest education systems typically make teaching a highly selective profession (Barber and Mourshed, 2007), and the cognitive skills of teachers are a significant determinant of international differences in student performance. Until recently in the Netherlands, all those who had obtained

an MBO level 4, general secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university education (VWO) diploma could enter initial teacher training. An analysis of the cognitive skills of teachers, based on data from the Survey of Adult Skills 2012, a product of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), confirms that recruitment has not been from the top of the cohort of secondary education graduates (Schleicher, 2013; Hanushek, Piopiunik and Wiederhold, 2014).

Figure 5.1. **Percentage of teachers by age group and school type, 2013**



Source: Eurostat (2015), "Distribution of teachers at education level and programme orientation by age groups [educ_uoe_perd01]", *Eurostat database*, Eurostat, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/data/database (accessed 11 January 2016).

Entrance to initial teacher training has become more selective

In 2010, mathematics and language test requirements were introduced for first year trainee teachers for primary education. A test at the end of training has been in place in teacher training programmes for both primary and secondary education since 2013/14 (Van der Rijst, Tigelaar and van Driel, 2014). The quality of new teachers is seen to have improved partly due to this measure (Inspectorate of Education, 2015). Further subject knowledge requirements have been imposed on those wanting to enter teacher training for primary education from 2015/16 onwards. Students coming from VWO can enter directly, unlike students from HAVO and MBO. As a result of

these stricter entry requirements, some 30% fewer students started teacher training in 2015 compared to the previous year (The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, 2015), and projections suggest the sector will face a shortage of 4 000 full-time primary teachers in 2020 (Fontein et al., 2015).

Entry requirements may have become too selective and are focused only on cognitive skills

The projected teacher shortages suggest that entrance tests to the profession may be too demanding and do not take into account other criteria, such as non-cognitive skills, that may better reflect the complex nature of teaching. Teacher training institutions have recently started various initiatives around intake procedures and selection options. The evidence shows a wider range of selection criteria can be used effectively (Van der Rijst, Tigelaar and van Driel, 2014; European Commission, 2013). Finland, for example, selects secondary graduates based on exam results, a written test on assigned books on pedagogy, observations in school situations and interviews (Sahlberg, 2010).

Initial teacher training

There are three different teaching qualifications (see Table 3.1)

A secondary teacher's diploma (i.e. a bachelor's degree) is required to teach in primary schools and in the lower grades of secondary schools. To teach in the upper classes of HAVO and VWO, teachers are required to complete a first level teacher's degree, (i.e. a master's degree). In 2013, 91% of primary teachers had a higher education professional (HBO) diploma, of which a small proportion had an HBO-master diploma. In general secondary education, 68% have an HBO diploma. In MBO, almost 80% had an HBO diploma and 14% were university graduates (Berndsen et al., 2014). While teacher training institutions have great flexibility, minimum competency requirements are set out in seven domains in the Education Professions Act (2006), which covers competencies such as: interpersonal, pedagogical, subject-specific and didactical, organisational competencies, competencies to co-operate with colleagues and with the environment, and self-reflective and developmental competencies (OECD, 2015a).

The quality of teacher training needs to continue to improve

Evidence suggests that the quality of teacher training has improved, although some uncertainty surrounds this claim, for example the relative value of bachelor's and master's degrees.[1] While the results of the 2015

accreditation round of teacher training programmes for primary education were markedly better than six years before, quality remains variable. Graduates of second-degree teacher training programmes are less positive about their education than those who have studied for primary education (NVAO, 2015a; Inspectorate of Education, 2015). The research component of teacher training may need strengthening, and first-degree secondary teacher training programmes at universities are too distanced from practice. Improved specialised programmes for (V)MBO teachers will become operational in 2016/17 (MoECS, 2015b).

Table 5.1. **Teacher training qualifications: Standard programme and institutional providers**

Types of qualifications	Standard programme		Institutional providers
	Structure	Allows for teaching in	
Primary education teaching qualification	• Four years integrated bachelor programme (education and practice).	• Primary education – all grades • Special education – all grades	University of Applied Sciences (HBO) – "Pedagogic Academic Basic Education" (PABO)
Secondary education 2nd degree teaching qualification	• Four years integrated bachelor programme on subject (e.g. English).	• VMBO – all grades (1 to 4) • HAVO – grades 1 to 3 • VWO – grades 1 to 3 • MBO – all grades	University of Applied Sciences (HBO)
Secondary education 1st degree teaching qualification	• Four years bachelor or master programme focused on subject, followed by 1 or 2 years pedagogical and didactical integrated master programme.	• VMBO – all grades (1 to 4) • HAVO – all grades (1 to 5) • VWO – all grades (1 to 6) • MBO – all grades	University – teacher education college University of Applied Sciences (HBO)

Co-operation between teacher training institutions and schools is insufficient

Many countries are putting more emphasis on getting trainee teachers into classrooms earlier and for longer (Schleicher, 2011); and effective co-operation between teacher training programmes and the schools in which teaching practice takes place is vital. The Inspectorate of Education (2016) concludes that contact between teacher training institutions and schools is not guaranteed. The American "professional development schools" and Sweden's recently established "training schools" are examples of such

partnerships between teacher training programmes and schools (Harris and van Tassel, 2005; OECD, 2015a). In the Netherlands, such partnerships have been promoted but are not yet well established (Oberon and University Utrecht, 2015).

Differentiated teaching skills

New teachers feel they lack assessment and differentiated teaching skills

Chapters 3 and 4 of this review argue that teachers need better preparation for more diverse levels of attainment in the classroom. Recently trained teachers often report that they are unprepared to systematically assess students and differentiate their teaching (NVAO, 2015a, 2015b; Inspectorate of Education, 2016). Nearly half of all school principals still allocate new teachers to combination classes (e.g. HAVO/VWO), where the capacity to teach classes with a wide range of attainment levels is particularly important (Inspectorate of Education, 2015).

These weaknesses are common among all teachers

PISA 2012 shows that 65% of school principals in the Netherlands (compared with an OECD average of 21%) report that teachers fail to encourage students to achieve their full potential; 59% say that teachers in their schools are not performing well in teaching students of different ability levels within the same class; and 71% say that teachers are not meeting individual student needs. These reports may partly reflect the high expectations of school leaders, but the Inspectorate also reports that in the classroom there is little evidence of teaching being tailored to differences between students: there is insufficient feedback to students and students are not encouraged to take an active role in their own learning (Inspectorate of Education, 2015, 2016). At the secondary level, the Inspectorate found that less than half of teachers differentiate their instruction between students. In primary education, VMBO, and the highest classes of VWO, more teachers display differentiated teaching skills. Teachers may not themselves recognise these weaknesses: in TALIS 2013 few teachers acknowledged that they need additional training in individualised teaching, and assessment and evaluation (OECD, 2014b).

Other countries promote models for differentiated teaching

The Netherlands should look towards Australia, Finland, Germany, New Zealand and Scotland that have prioritised formative assessment and differentiated teaching, including for initial teacher training (OECD, 2005;

Schleicher, 2011; see also Box 5.1). In Finland, for example, teachers are trained to use a broad spectrum of methods to differentiate instruction and respond to the needs of each student. The Netherlands may move in a similar direction with the development of a national curriculum that has clearer learning goals and more personalised teaching and learning (MoECS, 2016a).

Box 5.1. **Examples of differentiated teaching and the role of assessment**

The comprehensive school *Gesamtschule Schüpberg*, **Switzerland**, is a small school with a multi-grade classroom. The school lays particular emphasis on the heterogeneity of the student group, and regards the heterogeneous student body as a stimulating and motivating influence on the children's social and cognitive development. Activities are adjusted to the development of the individual child. The children, as well as the teachers, write feedback into their learning booklet ("Lernheft"), which contains self-evaluations, feedback, learning aims, etc. The entries are subsequently discussed in individual conversations between child and teacher.

In the *Lisbjerg School,* **Denmark**, there are two large mixed-age groups of three years each (6 to 9 or 10 to 13). The students are also organised into smaller groups of 12 pupils, which are also mixed in terms of age. Teaching is differentiated and alternates between work within the bigger and the smaller groups. Individual teacher-pupil feedback/assessment sessions are held every second month. During these pupil-teacher sessions, the Plan for Interpersonal, Educational Development ("the child's storyline") is discussed on the basis of the work with portfolios. The aims previously set are evaluated and new aims are formulated. The pupils' primary teacher is responsible for putting these aims into writing. The portfolios are also used for self-assessment and as an assessment tool for the regular pupil-teacher feedback sessions. Finally, the portfolios are used as an important instrument for parent-teacher meetings.

The *Europaschule Linz,* **Austria**, uses a combination of student-initiated and traditional forms of learning. Open structures are used to foster self-determination and independence. Autonomous, self-determined learning and alternating social modes are seen as a basis for differentiation and individualisation. The adoption of flexible roles for teachers and pupils and the use of team-based teaching support a more individual approach that embraces differences in, for instance, ability and learner types. Teachers provide students with feedback in order to foster social skills and competencies. The feedback is based on seven criteria: "respects the other's personality and work", "is able to co-operate", "is able to communicate", "shows reliability and sense of responsibility", "is able to deal with criticism", "abides by rules agreed on", "handles his/her own and the other's property carefully".

Source: OECD (2013a), *Innovative Learning Environments,* Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264203488-en.

Starting teachers

Starting teachers are not receiving enough support

In the Netherlands, 12% of newly qualified primary school teachers, and 22% of their secondary counterparts, leave teaching within a year (Inspectorate of Education, 2015). Research evidence shows that well-designed induction programmes increase teacher retention and satisfaction and improve teaching quality (Kessels, 2010; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). However, TALIS 2013 showed that less than half of Dutch secondary teachers had participated in formal or informal induction programmes, while in Japan and Singapore, this figure is eight out of ten (OECD, 2014b). Van der Boom, Vrielink and Vloet (2014) found that 28% of new teachers in Dutch primary schools received no supervision of any kind; this figure was 14% for new secondary school teachers. The support provided is often organisational rather than pedagogical, and temporary staff receive little support (Van der Boom, Vrielink and Fontein, 2015). Sector agreements now encourage and fund school boards to give guidance, including coaching, to new teachers, or an additional time budget of 40 hours a year to reduce the workload (MoECS, 2015b). However, national data show no rise in the percentage of starting primary teachers receiving induction and mentoring support.

A recent pilot "coaching starting teachers in secondary education" addresses the issue

This project, started by MoECS in 2014, covers just over one third of secondary schools and 1 000 starting teachers. It stimulates the collaboration between initial teacher training institutions and schools and provides starting teachers with a strong induction programme that lasts three years. The pilot is under evaluation to determine its potential for national implementation (MoECS, 2015b).

Continuous professional development

Participation in professional development is high among full-time teachers

In 2013, 93% of lower secondary teachers in the Netherlands had participated in some form of professional development, similar to other strong performers such as Estonia, Korea and Poland (OECD, 2014b). In addition, 20% of teachers were following a qualification programme. This high level of participation reflects scholarships for teachers to pursue the masters and Ph.D. programmes that MoECS has promoted in recent years. Part-time teachers participate much less, which is a big issue in primary education where many of them work (Inspectorate of Education, 2014).

Despite funding, teachers face barriers to professional development

Collective labour agreements grant teachers up to EUR 600 and 83 clock hours for professional development, per year; "sector agreements"[2] for primary and secondary education grant additional funds to school boards for this purpose. A Teacher Development Fund offers schools up to EUR 75 000 and coaching for promising teacher-initiated innovations in teaching and learning. However, there are many barriers to participation that have to be overcome. In 2013, 38% of secondary teachers reported that professional development conflicts with their work schedule, 39% said that there is no relevant professional development offered, and 31% believed that there are no incentives for participation (OECD, 2014b).

Annual teacher appraisals are not yet routine

Teacher appraisal in the Netherlands is primarily used to improve teaching through professional development (Nusche et al., 2014). National regulations require performance interviews at least once every four years in primary education and every three years in secondary education. MoECS' strategic plan, the *Teachers Agenda 2013-2020*, underlines the importance of keeping teacher's knowledge and skills up to date and calls for all teachers to be appraised at least once a year by 2020. The percentage of teachers in primary, secondary and upper secondary vocational education that had an appraisal at least once a year in 2015 (81%, 71% and 75% respectively) has risen, but not as quickly as intended (MoECS, 2015b).

Sometimes, appraisals have no concrete impact

Four out of ten Dutch teachers believe that appraisal and feedback have little impact on their classroom practice (OECD, 2014b). This may be because the school leaders involved have not been trained to appraise teachers and little formal guidance is available on the required appraisal processes. School boards are free to develop their own approach to teacher appraisal within the framework of the teacher competency requirements, but some have criticised this framework for being too vague (Education Council, 2010; OECD, 2014a). An earlier OECD report (Nusche et al., 2014) suggested that the Netherlands should look towards Norway where a national programme aims to equip school leaders to appraise teachers, and for their role as pedagogical leaders.

Many teachers do not work and learn collectively

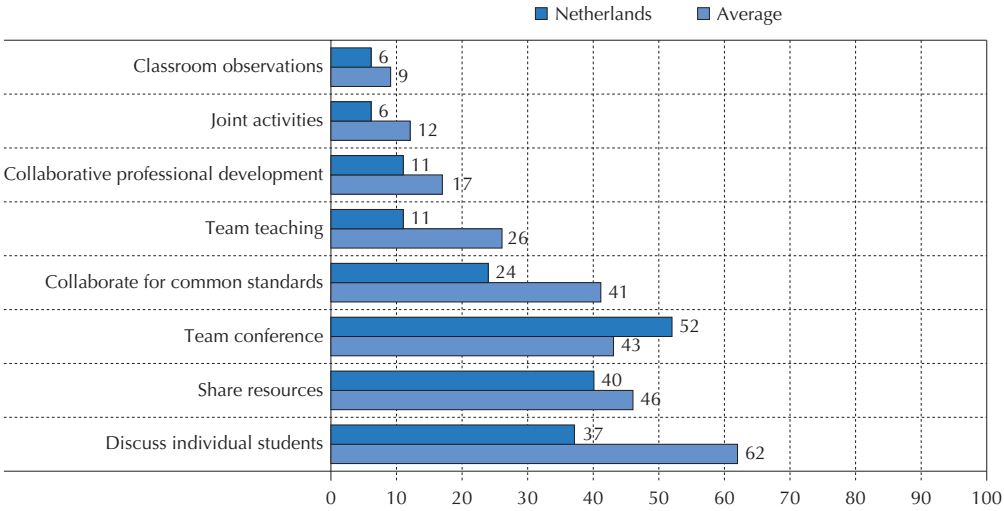
Research evidence shows the potential of collaborative working and learning among teachers to improve instruction (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Though better developed in upper secondary vocational education schools, many Dutch primary and secondary teachers tend to work alone

(MoECS, 2015b; Oberon, Kohnstamm Institute and ICLON, 2014; see Figure 5.2). In TALIS 2013, for example, only 11% of secondary teachers in the Netherlands reported participating in collective professional development at least once per month (TALIS average of 17%) (OECD, 2014b). Some 60% of teachers in primary and secondary education participated in peer reviews in 2015, which was less than previous years following a decline at the primary level (MoECS, 2015b).

These findings are an obstacle to the Netherlands' ambitions for schools as learning organisations

These ambitions are linked to a model of collective learning (MoECS, 2013) (Kools and Stoll, forthcoming). Initiatives such as the Education Co-operate's Peer Review project or the Foundation LeerKRACHT programme (Box 5.2) that promote professional collaboration are therefore important. School leaders and boards could also play a more active role in encouraging teachers to pursue collaborative learning and working within and across schools. This will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Figure 5.2. **Activities undertaken by lower secondary teachers at least once per month, TALIS 2013**



Note: Figures are percentages.

Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en.

Unqualified teachers

Many lessons in secondary schools are still taught by unqualified teachers

Unqualified teachers are primarily found in general secondary education in certain subject areas. In PISA 2012, school principals reported that only 80% of secondary teachers were fully certified (OECD, 2013b). Dronkers (2010), using PISA 2009 data, showed that if an appropriately trained teacher taught all classes, performance would increase considerably. According to the schools that still employ unqualified teachers, they are often teachers nearing retirement age who have performed adequately for many years (Inspectorate of Education, 2015). But this view has been challenged, and MoECS has therefore recently presented a plan to reduce the number of unqualified teachers in secondary education (MoECS, 2016b).

The teacher register will become mandatory in 2017

In 2012, the Netherlands followed the example of strongly performing education systems such as Australia, Ontario (Canada), New Zealand and Scotland with the development of a teacher register, which will be mandatory from 2017. To become and stay registered, teachers need to be qualified and show that they meet professional development requirements (i.e. 160 hours per 4 years). The register is expected to improve the status of teachers, support professional development and limit the use of unqualified staff. The registration system is still under development and its role has not yet been clearly defined (see below; Nusche et al., 2014).

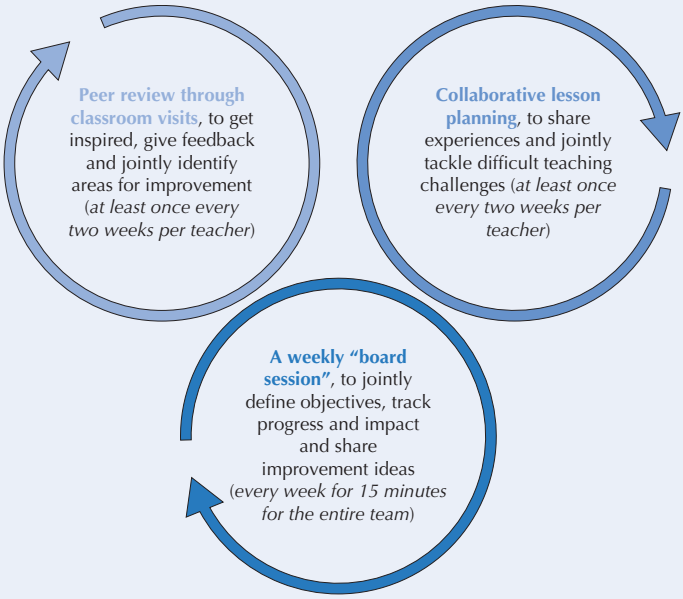
Box 5.2. **"Foundation leerKRACHT" programme promotes peer review and collaborative work planning**

Foundation leerKRACHT (the Dutch word for teacher) started in 2012 and aims to: 1) implement a bottom-up capacity building programme for schools, which aims to reach more than 5 000 Dutch primary and secondary schools by 2020 (out of a total 8 700); and 2) reshape national education policy to create a strong body of teachers and stimulate schools to create a "continuous improvement culture".

The foundation believes in the quality of the teacher and aims to return the ownership of education back to the teachers. It aims to achieve this by helping schools create a continuous improvement culture in which teachers work together to improve their teaching, with school leaders serving as role models by engaging in the improvement process. Teachers and school administrators that participate in the programme work closely together to improve education in schools at their discretion.

Box 5.2. **"Foundation leerKRACHT" programme promotes peer review and collaborative work planning** *(continued)*

Three improvement processes are central to the programme: 1) classroom observation and feedback conversation; 2) joint lesson planning; and 3) board sessions. This "board session" is copied from the LEAN movement in the manufacturing industry, where small teams hold daily stand-up meetings to jointly improve quality. The approach is underpinned by forum meetings with "foundation leerKRACHT schools" in the region, and by visits to companies that have a continuous improvement culture.



This private initiative now involves 1 in 10 secondary schools in the Netherlands, 1 in 3 vocational schools and hundreds of primary schools (van Tartwijk and Lockhorst, 2014).

Source: Foundation LeerKRACHT (2016), www.stichting-leerkracht.nl/ik-ben-geinteresseerd/.

The teacher career structure

The teacher career structure is underdeveloped

The Teachers Agenda 2013-2020 formulated objectives to promote the professional development of teachers (Elffers, 2015). An earlier OECD report (Nusche et al., 2014) argued for a career structure that recognises and rewards excellence and allows teachers to diversify their careers. However, some teacher positions, such as "co-ordinator" or "student

teacher supervisor", yield no salary increase (Elffers, 2015), and aside from the career step of senior teacher, the only promotion opportunity would be a principal position (Gerrichhauzen, 2007; Evers, 2007; Commission Teachers, 2007). The Netherlands could look towards the examples of countries such as Australia, Estonia, New Zealand and Singapore that have diversified the career structure to recognise that teachers develop and grow as professionals throughout their teaching careers, and that teachers may wish to follow different career pathways (see Box 5.3; AITSL, 2012: Schleicher, 2011).

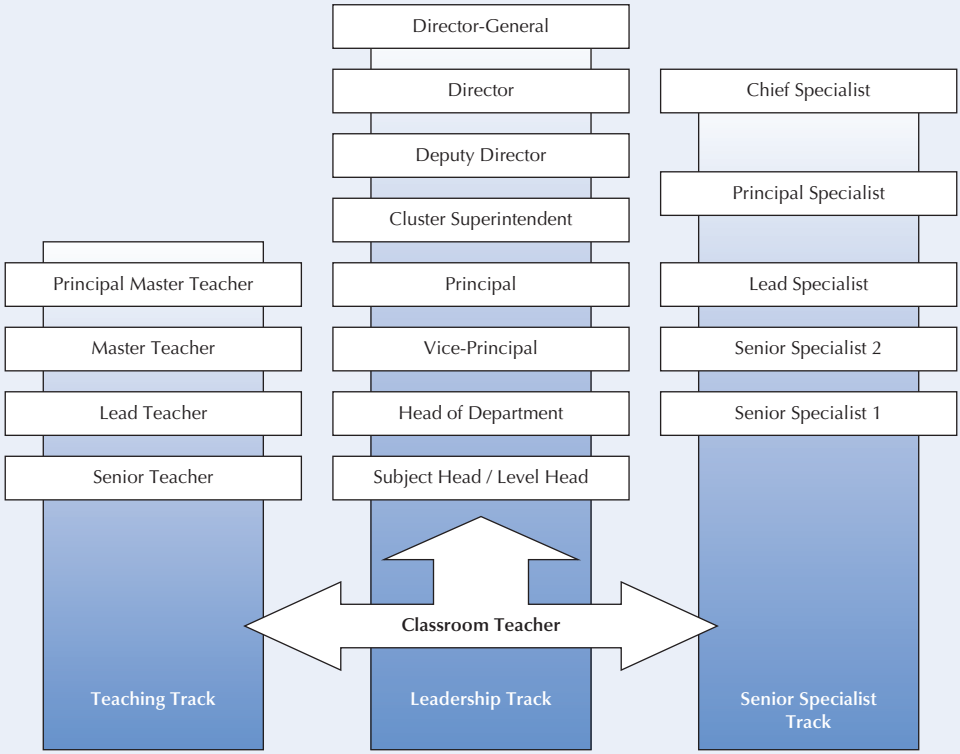
Box 5.3. **Vertically and horizontally differentiated career structures for teachers**

Australia has made a vertical differentiation on the basis of teaching competences, with increasing requirements on their knowledge, practice and professional engagement. These are reflected in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:

- *Graduate* – demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students and how these may affect learning.
- *Proficient* – use teaching strategies based on knowledge of students' physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics to improve student learning.
- *Highly Accomplished* – select from a flexible and effective repertoire of teaching strategies to suit the physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students.
- *Lead* – lead colleagues to select and develop teaching strategies to improve student learning using knowledge of the physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students (AITSL, 2012).

In **Singapore**, high quality teachers are often cited as one of the reasons for excellent outcomes (Goodwin, 2014; OECD, 2011). There are three horizontally differentiated tracks to promotion and higher pay: a teaching track, a leadership track and a specialist track. Each route has multiple, ascending, positions, with corresponding salaries (Elffers, 2015). These different tracks and roles provide teachers with opportunities for advancement within or outside the classroom. Each role runs for a fixed term, apart from the within-school teacher role, which is a mix of permanent and fixed-term positions. It attracts significant additional remuneration to help recognise the most effective teachers and principals. Teachers or leaders changing track or position get corresponding training and mentoring support from the National Institute of Education. This usually involves shorter programmes from several weeks to months, after which teachers can apply their new knowledge and skills in their school. This training is explicitly linked to positions on the career ladder that are underpinned by professional standards.

Box 5.3. **Vertically and horizontally differentiated career structures for teachers** *(continued)*



Sources: AITSL (2012), "Standard 1: Know students and how they learn", AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership), http://www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers/standards/list?s=1; Elffers, L. (2015), "De loopbaanladder van leraren in Singapore" [The career ladder of teachers in Singapore], www.academischewerkplaatsonderwijs.nl/files/2414/2121/7890/De_loopbaanladder_van_leraren_in_Singapore.pdf; OECD (2011), *Lessons from PISA for the United States, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264096660-en; Goodwin, A. L. (2014), "Perspective on high-performing education systems in Finland, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, and Singapore: What lessons for the U.S.?", in S.K. Lee, W.O. Lee and E.L. Low (eds.), *Educational Policy Innovations: Levelling Up and Sustaining Educational Achievement*, Springer, Singapore.

The "functions mix" promotes greater salary diversity

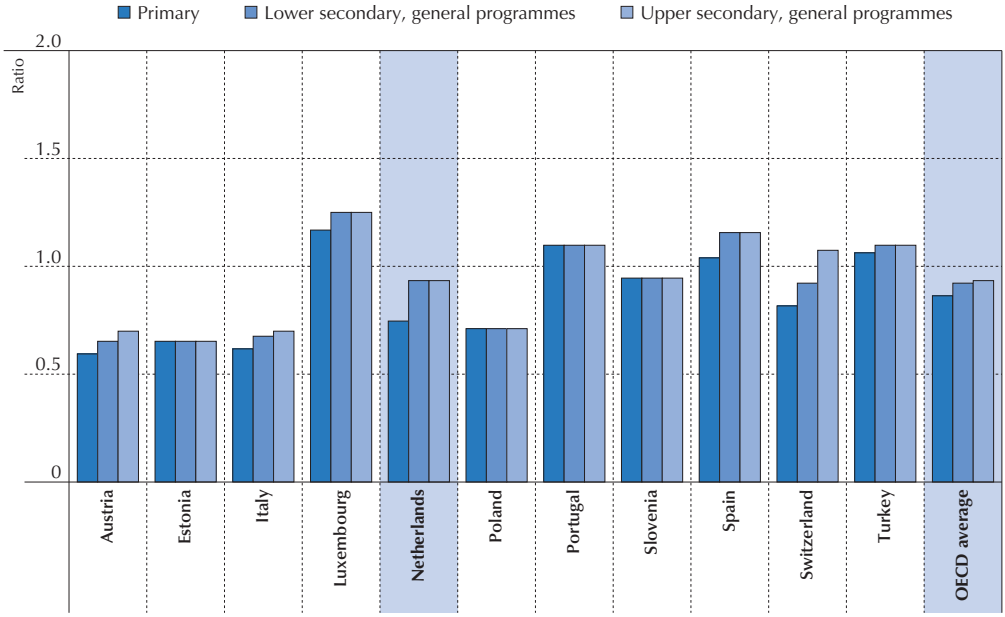
The 2008 "functions mix" policy is designed to enable promotions based on differences in teacher competencies and performance, and allows teachers to receive a higher salary where there are shortages. At the upper secondary vocational education level, the functions mix policy focuses on

the Randstad region, which is most affected by teacher shortages. Contrary to the recommendation of the Commission Teachers (2007), promotion to a higher position and salary scale has not been linked to higher qualifications. Instead, implementation of the policy has been left to school boards. A great deal succeeds or fails as a result of the (variable) capacity of school boards and school leaders to manage human resources (Education Council, 2013; Inspectorate of Education, 2015).

Are conditions sufficiently attractive to draw highly qualified individuals into the profession?

The Functions mix policy has succeeded in keeping a slightly larger share of teachers in the Randstad region, but the proportion of unqualified teachers has not changed (van der Steeg, Gerritsen and Kuijpers, 2015; CPB, 2014). Although the function mix is acknowledged as a first step to making teaching a more attractive career option due to faster career advancement opportunities, several reports have argued that the relatively low salaries continue to deter highly qualified individuals from joining the profession (see Figure 5.3; Education Council, 2013; Cörvers, 2014).

Figure 5.3. **Average teacher salaries, relative to earnings, for tertiary-educated workers aged 25-64, 2013**



Source: OECD (2015b), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933284456.

A recent study showed that secondary education students underestimate the salaries of teachers substantially (Researchned, 2015), suggesting that better career information advice may also be needed.

Recommendations 6-8: Strengthen teacher professionalism and further develop the career structure

Recommendation 6: Building teacher professionalism calls for a life cycle approach, starting with effective initial selection arrangements and mandatory induction, and for promoting collaborative working and learning within and across schools

Balance increased selectiveness with market realism to ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers, and base selection on a wide range of criteria

While making entry into teacher training increasingly selective is desirable, it needs to be blended with market realism to ensure an adequate number of recruits. It also needs to be based on a wider range of selection criteria, including non-cognitive competencies, to better reflect the complex nature of teaching.

Promote collaborative professionalism within and across schools, starting with mandatory induction and strong collaborations between teacher training institutions and schools

The effectiveness of team learning and collaboration for improving teaching and learning is well recognised, however, such practices are not well established in the Dutch school system. MoECS should therefore continue to step up its efforts to promote professional collaboration across the system. School leaders and boards play a pivotal role in establishing a learning culture within and beyond the school grounds (see also Chapters 6 and 7). As in Finland, Germany, Northern Ireland and Singapore, the Netherlands should establish mandatory induction periods that allow starting teachers to receive systematic support. In Singapore, teachers have 20% fewer teaching hours for the first three years of teaching and also receive mentoring support. Teacher training institutions need to connect with schools to guarantee the relevance of their training programmes and to provide continuous support to schools and their teachers throughout the professional life cycle.

Recommendation 7: Develop a teacher career structure that promotes greater salary and career diversity, is founded on clear competence standards, and links appraisal to professional and school development goals

A strengthened career structure and appraisal system would underpin teacher professionalism

The Netherlands should further develop the teacher career structure to ensure it offers teachers a variety of career paths, recognising and challenging them throughout their careers. The diversified career structure should be based on revised teacher competency standards that are clear and recognise that teachers develop and grow as professionals throughout their teaching careers, and that teachers may wish to follow different career pathways. The revised standards should be linked to the offer of professional development. A clear competency framework would also support more effective teacher appraisal. Teacher appraisal should be closely linked to the school's improvement goals and understanding of effective teaching, as is done in countries such as England, Northern Ireland, Korea and New Zealand. The capacity of school leaders, and others responsible for conducting appraisals, needs improvement, and school boards should ensure that schools develop appraisal processes (Nusche et al., 2014).

Ensure salaries are sufficiently attractive to draw highly qualified individuals into the profession

The function mix has made teaching into a more attractive career option with faster career advancement opportunities. However, teacher shortages remain a challenge, in particular in disadvantaged schools and for certain subjects. Given that many staff are approaching retirement, and the relatively low salaries compared to other tertiary educated individuals in the Netherlands, further action may be needed. The proposed further development of the career structure could serve as an opportunity to ensure both greater career and salary diversity.

Recommendation 8: Put increased and sustained emphasis on differentiated teaching skills throughout initial training and subsequent professional development.

This chapter offers evidence that differentiated teaching skills, and the capacity to appraise individual students, are weak in the Netherlands. Chapter 3 argued that these skills are critical to teaching performance, even in a highly tracked system, in order to ensure that those deserving of track promotion can rapidly be identified and encouraged. Chapter 4 argued that the pursuit of excellence and the motivation of students require

an individualised approach to teaching so that individual learning goals are relevant, engaging and demanding. Differentiated teaching skills therefore play a key systemic role in addressing some of the main challenges in Dutch education. This means that there needs to be a step towards improvement in the level of attention that is given to these skills at every stage of the professional development of teachers.

Notes

1. This is discussed, for example, by van Veen, Van Dreil and Veldman, 2011. Though research evidence shows only an indirect effect (Chingos and Peterson, 2011; Hanushek and Rivkin, 2012), it certainly contributes to the image of the profession (OECD, 2011).
2. The sector agreements describe the ambitions for the respective sectors (primary education and secondary education) for the period from 2014 to 2017. They contain agreements on priorities, objectives, measures and investments.

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Chapter 6

Putting the spotlight on school leaders in the Netherlands

The quality of school leadership is especially critical in a highly decentralised school system, as in the Netherlands, but it has received relatively little policy attention. Although school leaders usually perform to standard, the evidence suggests that if the Netherlands is to realise its educational ambitions, school leaders' competences need to be further strengthened. This chapter examines the challenges and solutions for developing high quality school leaders in the Netherlands. It highlights the need for a strategic approach to leadership development that rests on professional collaboration and a culture of continuous improvement. It examines how further developed competence profiles for school leaders could support professional development. In addition, this chapter discusses the need for capacity building of school leaders and leadership teams for conducting school self-evaluations, and for supporting the development of schools into learning organisations.

The limited profile of school leadership issues

School leadership is critical but has received relatively little policy attention

Fuelled by increasing school autonomy, the role of the school leader has grown in importance in many OECD countries (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008; Schleicher, 2012), including the Netherlands (Verbiest, 2007). However, the issue of school leadership has received little policy attention in the Netherlands: more than eight out of ten (83%) General School Leaders Association (AVS) members (primary school leaders) believe the government devotes insufficient attention to school leaders (AVS, 2012). The Global Teacher Status Index 2013 revealed that respect for school leaders in the Netherlands was second lowest among participating countries (Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013).

School leaders are not always involved in policy discussions

School boards, represented by the various sector councils, have been the key point of contact for MoECS in the development and monitoring of policies, for example in the sector agreements between MoECS and the Primary Education Council (PO-Raad) and Secondary Education Council (VO-Raad). Part of the challenge of involving school leaders may lie in the fact that they have been less well organised. The AVS represents the interests of primary school leaders, however, the association that represents secondary school teachers, the Network for School leaders (NVS), was only established in November 2015.

Defining what we expect of school leaders

Leadership competences have been established for primary and secondary education

The MoECS Action Plan Teacher 2020 proposes that all primary and secondary school leaders, and the leadership/middle management team in upper secondary vocational education, should have a required set of professional competences (MoECS, 2011). For primary and secondary school leaders, recently revised competency profiles (Table 6.1) provide guidance on daily practice, appraisals and education programmes. For upper secondary vocational education schools, no such profile has yet been established.

Table 6.1. **School leader competence standards for primary and secondary education**

Primary education school leader competences	Secondary education school leader competences
1. Vision directed working	1. Creating a shared vision and direction
2. In relationship to the environment	2. Establishing a coherent organisation for the primary process
3. Shaping organisational characteristics from an educational orientation	3. Promoting co-operation, learning and research
4. Handling of strategies for co-operation, learning and research at all levels	4. Strategic dealing with the environment
5. Higher order thinking	5. Analysing and problem-solving (higher order thinking)

Sources: Andersen, I. and M. Krüger (n.d.), *Professionele Schoolleiders. Beroepsstandaard voor schoolleiders in het Primair Onderwijs* [Professional School Leaders. Professional Standard for School Leaders], Schoolleidersregister PO, www.schoolleidersregisterpo.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/onderzoek-en-publicaties/Beroepsstandaard-Professionele-Schoolleiders.pdf; Secondary Education Academy (2014), *Beroepsstandaard schoolleiders VO* [Professional Standard School Leaders VO], Secondary Education Academy, www.vo-academie.nl/files/3714/1751/8232/Beroepsstandaard_Schoolleiders_VO_vastgesteld.pdf.

Current leadership competences provide limited guidance

The competence standards illustrated in Table 6.1 are relatively abstract, which leaves school boards with a limited basis on which to select, appraise and develop the skills of their school leaders (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a). The key issues of human resource management receive scant attention. Greater clarity on expectations could be provided, as is done in Australia and Singapore (see Box 5.3 in Chapter 5).

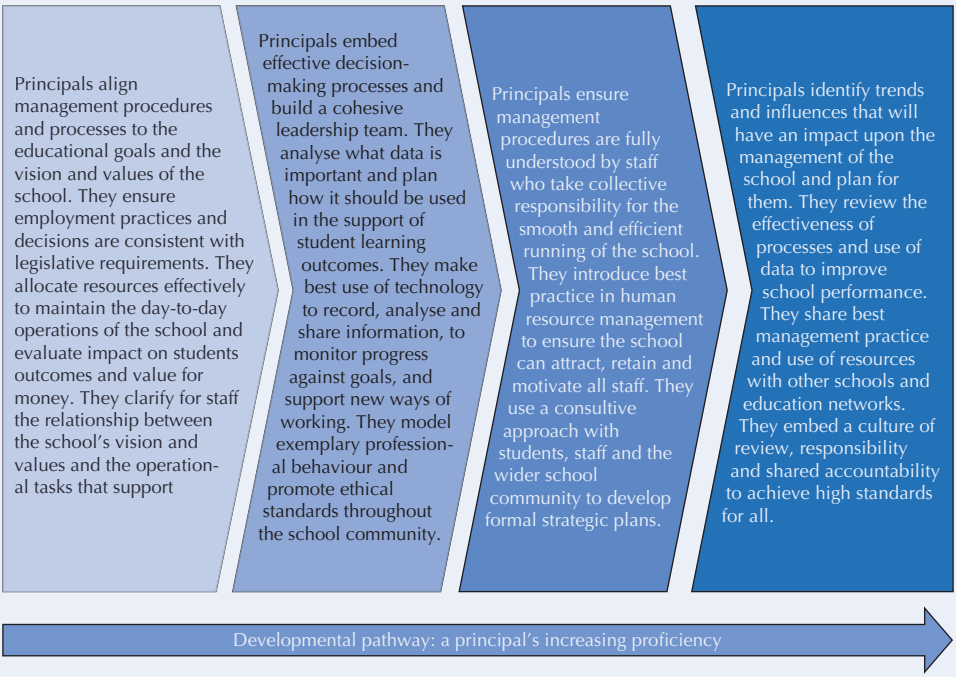
Box 6.1. **The Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles**

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the more detailed Leadership Profiles create and promote a shared vision, clarity of understanding and a common language around effective and high-impact school leadership. The Standard is applicable to principals irrespective of context or experience. What varies is the emphasis given to particular elements of the Standard as principals respond to context, capability and career stage. The Standard is based on three leadership requirements: 1) vision and values; 2) knowledge and understanding; and 3) personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills.

These requirements are enacted through the following five key professional practices: 1) leading teaching and learning; 2) developing self and others; 3) leading improvement, innovation and change; 4) leading the management of the school; and 5) engaging and working with the community.

Box 6.1. **The Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles** *(continued)*

Leading the Management of the School Profile



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Becoming a school leader

School leader salaries may not be sufficiently attractive

As in many countries, salaries for school leaders in the Netherlands depend on the size of the school (EACEA, 2015). The salary difference between school leaders and teachers is small, for example, a headmaster of a small primary school (fewer than 200 students) only earns up to 7% more than a teacher on the highest salary scale ("LB scale"). Although few difficulties in filling leadership vacancies have been reported (Lubberman, Mommster and Wester, 2015), the salaries may not be sufficient to attract the

most talented individuals. The relatively low social status of school leaders and an anticipated wave of retirements make this issue pressing (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a, 2015).

Most school leaders have some type of leadership training

School boards appoint school leaders after an open selection process. Unlike many countries, school leaders are not required to have teaching experience, although they usually do (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008; Nusche et al., 2014). Most school leaders receive non-mandatory training (Bal and De Jong, 2007). The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 showed that almost all lower secondary leaders participated in a school administration or principal training course either before or after taking up duty (OECD, 2014).

Induction of new school leaders is underdeveloped

Although research evidence suggests that quality induction programmes for new school leaders are valuable (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008), they are not common practice in the Netherlands. Less than half of recently appointed school leaders in a recent study had participated in any sort of induction and mentoring programme, and only 12% had participated in a substantial programme (Andersen et al., 2012). MoECS could look towards the examples of Ontario (Canada), New Zealand and Victoria (Australia) that have integrated such training programmes as a mandatory requirement into their national improvement strategies (see Box 6.2).

Box 6.2. **The Ontario Leadership Strategy**

Ontario designed and implemented an education-improvement strategy, Energizing Ontario Education, with three main goals: raising the level of student achievement, defined as 75% of students achieving the provincial standard in Grade 6 and an 85% graduation rate; narrowing the gaps in student achievement; and increasing public confidence in publicly funded education.

To support the education improvement strategy, the Ontario Leadership Strategy aimed to foster leadership of the highest possible quality in schools and school boards. The strategy has two goals: 1) attract the right people to the principalship; and 2) help principals and vice-principals develop into the best possible instructional leaders. Within the strategy, a leadership framework covers: 1) setting direction; 2) building relationships and developing people; 3) developing the organisation; 4) leading the instructional programme; and 5) securing accountability. This framework is adapted to local contexts used in new principal appraisal systems, and for training and development.

Box 6.2. **The Ontario Leadership Strategy** *(continued)*

New school leaders need to have an undergraduate degree; five years of teaching experience; certification by school level (primary, junior, intermediate, senior); two specialist or honour specialist additional qualifications (areas of teaching expertise) or a masters degree; and have completed the Principal's Qualification Programme (PQP), a 125-hour programme with practicum.

Source: OECD (2010), *Improving Schools: Strategies for Action in Mexico*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264087040-en.

Strengthening leadership quality

School leader performance could be improved

The Inspectorate of Education (2014a) judges the performance of school leaders in primary and secondary education as adequate overall, but more than a third of leaders score below standard on one or more competences, and few are good or excellent. Primary school leaders were found to be good at building trust and acting credibly, but less skilled in anticipating risks and solving complex problems. Secondary school leaders are knowledgeable of regulations and their application, but less able to reflect on their own actions, to create a professional learning culture and to use data. Other reports have noted the limited capacity of school leaders to provide educational leadership and shape human resource management policies (e.g. Education Council, 2013; Oberon, Kohnstamm Institute and ICLON, 2014). Our analysis corroborates these findings.

Little is known about school leaders in upper secondary vocational education (MBO)

In the Netherlands, as in many countries, school leadership in vocational schools is an important but largely unexamined topic. Vocational school leaders typically have to manage a much more diverse teaching force than a non-vocational school – often including people with an industry rather than academic background. They need to establish close working relationships with employers who provide work-based learning, and very often, particularly at the lower MBO levels, need to address the needs of disadvantaged students with the weakest academic performance. These are multiple and profound challenges, but little information is available about leadership in upper secondary vocational schools. The development of competence standards for team leaders/middle management in MBO would be a step forward.

Leadership for schools as learning organisations

School leaders play a key role in transforming schools into learning organisations

The requirements for school leaders need to be linked to a shared vision of effective schooling. This relates to the idea of a school as a learning organisation, which is promoted in the Netherlands through the Teachers Agenda 2013-2020 (MoECS, 2013). Research shows that teacher effectiveness depends on collaborating with and learning from colleagues (Schleicher, 2011; Hattie, 2008), and school leaders play a vital role in establishing collaboration (Fullan, 2006; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008). However, according to TALIS 2013, less than half of Dutch principals (43%) actively support co-operation among teachers to develop new teaching practices and observe instruction in the classroom (OECD, 2014). School leaders need to allocate sufficient time and other resources for collaborative working to succeed (Silins, Mulford and Zarins, 2002; OECD, 2015; see Box 6.2). Additional time and resources for peer review and other forms of peer learning have been incorporated into the 2014-17 collective labour agreements and sector agreements for primary and secondary education.[1] The amended Education Time Act is expected to provide secondary schools with more flexibility to organise collaborative learning activities. But many school leaders, as well as school boards and teachers, are not pursuing collaborative working and learning with sufficient vigour (MoECS, 2015; Oberon, Kohnstamm Institute and ICLON, 2014).

Box 6.3. **Key characteristics of the "school as learning organisation"**

This OECD review draws on learning organisation literature and other research that covers organisational behaviour, knowledge management, learning science, school improvement and effectiveness. The school as learning organisation model consists of seven dimensions, each containing a number of elements validated by a group of international experts.

1. Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students.
2. Promoting and supporting continuous professional learning of all staff.
3. Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff.
4. Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration.
5. Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning.
6. Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system.
7. Modelling and growing learning leadership.

Box 6.3. **Key characteristics of the "school as learning organisation"** *(continued)*

An example of one of the school as learning organisation dimensions and underlying key elements is presented in the table below.

School as learning organisation dimension	Elements
Modelling and growing learning leadership	• School leaders model learning leadership, distribute leadership and help grow other leaders, including students. • Leaders are pro-active and creative change agents. • School leaders develop the culture, structures and the conditions to facilitate professional dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange. • School leaders ensure that the organisation's actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values. • School leaders ensure the school is characterised by a 'rhythm' of learning, change and innovation. • School leaders promote and participate in strong collaboration with other schools, parents, the community, higher education institutions and other partners. • School leaders ensure an integrated approach to responding to the learning and other needs of students.

Source: Kools, M. and L. Stoll (2016), "What makes a school a learning organisation?", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 137, OECD Publishing, Paris.

School leaders are often not able to use data effectively

The capacity of school leaders to use data and guide teachers in the use of data has become a central tenet in school improvement, especially to raise test scores and change school culture (Wayman et al., 2009). In the Netherlands, many school leaders lack this capacity (Oberon, Kohnstamm Institute and ICLON, 2014; Schildkamp and Poortman, 2015; Inspectorate of Education, 2015). In TALIS 2013, for example, 16% of Dutch principals (compared with a TALIS average of 11%) reported that they had not used student performance data to develop the school's educational programmes (OECD, 2014). Several reports have also questioned schools' self-evaluation capacities (Blok, Sleegers and Karsten, 2008; Janssens and De Wolf, 2009; Inspectorate of Education, 2015), and an OECD report (Nusche et al., 2014) underlined the importance of building school leaders' capacity to evaluate their own schools.

Sustained effort is necessary to transform schools into learning organisations

MoECS has implemented several support programmes, including the recently stopped School Has the Initiative that aimed to help schools develop into learning organisations. The MoECS Developmental Model Learning Organisation was developed to support self-evaluation and improvement planning towards this purpose. MoECS could focus on other elements that are essential for a learning organisation (see Box 6.3), expand the focus on feedback provision to other forms of collaborative learning and give more emphasis to collaboration with other schools and teacher training institutions (see Chapter 5).

There is scope for more sharing of good practice

The review team learned of many examples of strong performing schools (see for example www.excellentescholen.nl). Several of these schools participate in support programmes, such as Foundation Teacher (Box 5.2) or the Data Teams initiative of the University of Twente (Schildkamp and Poortman, 2015) in which teachers and school leaders work together to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There is much to gain from learning more about the structures and processes of high-performing schools and the work of their school leaders (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a).

Continuous professional development

A primary education school leaders register became mandatory in 2015

School leaders need to continuously upgrade their skills, not least to serve as role models for teachers to do the same (Fullan, 2014). Following the examples of Australia, Ontario (Canada) and Scotland (Schleicher, 2011; van Dijk, Gaisbauer and Scheeren, 2013) the Netherlands established a mandatory register for primary school leaders and (in 2016) a voluntary register for secondary school leaders. But these registers on their own are not sufficient and registration is disconnected from school leaders' actual performance. Four out of ten school leaders also overestimate their own competence levels (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a). To make registration more meaningful, it could be linked with career advancement and used to hold school leaders accountable as in Australia and Scotland (Lawrence et al., 2006; Donaldson, 2010).

Many school leaders face barriers to professional development

While, in principle, school boards play a pivotal role in managing school leaders, not all school boards do so adequately in respect of professional development (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a, 2015; AVS, 2012). Although almost all Dutch principals participated in some form of professional development in the 12 months prior to the TALIS 2013 survey, training intensity was low (half the cross-country TALIS average). About one in five did not participate because it was too expensive (19.4%) and conflicted with their work schedule (20.8%), and 12% said that lack of employer support was a barrier to participation (OECD, 2014). The General Association for School leaders (AVS) says that three quarters of primary education school leaders feel they face barriers to their professional development (AVS, 2012). School boards, however, say that the weak motivation of school leaders is a barrier to professional development.

School boards need to develop their capacity to conduct and use appraisals effectively

Although school leaders' performance partly depends on the constructive appraisal and feedback of their supervisors (Inspectorate of Education, 2014b), one in ten primary and one in five secondary school boards do not hold yearly appraisal discussions with their school leaders (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a). A large minority (38%) of school leaders say that appraisal by the school board led to no concrete measures to support their professional development (Andersen et al., 2012). The Inspectorate believes that the absence of personal development plans is often an obstacle, and many school boards may lack the skills in conducting appraisals (Inspectorate of Education, 2014a). Scotland and Ontario have developed appraisal guidance with supporting materials and instruments (OECD, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The Netherlands has also developed an online instrument for primary school leaders (the NSA EFFECt), but not yet for leaders at the secondary level.

Recommendation 9: Develop a leadership strategy that promotes professional collaboration and a culture of continuous improvement

The leadership strategy needs to be systematic

Various initiatives have sought to strengthen school leadership in the Netherlands. But these need to be more systematic and more ambitious. The Netherlands should therefore develop a leadership strategy that includes:

- Promotion of collaboration among school leaders, teachers and school boards and the linked development of a culture of continuous

improvement. This should fit MoECS ambitions of transforming all schools into a learning organisation.

- MoECS should consider establishing a mandatory national induction programme for school leaders, guaranteeing the quality of the induction and mentoring support. School boards should ensure that all new school leaders participate in the programme. Successful completion of the induction period could serve as a starting point for inclusion in mandatory school leadership registers (for all levels).
- School boards should ensure annual appraisals for all school leaders – not as a bureaucratic exercise but as a practical and relevant means of facilitating professional development. Adequate training should be provided to school board members for conducting appraisals and personal development planning that is aligned to school goals.
- The Netherlands should continue building the capacity of school leaders and leadership teams to conduct school self-evaluations. School leaders should have the capacity to: promote collaboration within and beyond the school and actively take part; establish strategic partnerships (with schools, teacher training institutions, businesses, etc.); use data and promote the use of data; and foster self-evaluation in a learning culture geared towards continuous improvement. Schools, particularly poor performing schools will need support if they are to develop into learning organisations, which is a key objective of the Teachers Agenda 2013-2020. Strong school leaders are a precondition for this to happen.

Note

1. The sector agreements describe the ambitions for the respective sectors (primary education and secondary education) for the period from 2014 to 2017. The agreements cover priorities, objectives, measures and investments.

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Chapter 7

Strengthening accountability and capacity in Dutch school boards

School boards in the Netherlands enjoy extensive autonomy in various areas and have become increasingly responsible for the quality of education. However, their accountability is open to question. School boards, which vary in scale, sometimes also face significant capacity challenges. This chapter examines the major policy developments and performance of school boards in the Dutch school system. It explores how the accountability of school boards can be improved by making their workings more transparent, and opening up their operations to meaningful challenge. It highlights the importance of strengthened management capacity in school boards, which is balanced by giving more authority to school leaders.

School governance

School boards have a key governance role and are highly diverse

In the decentralised Dutch educational system, religious organisations and associations of citizens are free to start a school and receive public funding, provided they meet government regulations. Since the 1980s, the government has devolved further responsibilities to schools. Schools managed by local government have been taken over by private foundations (although schools themselves remain public) and lump sum financing[1] has been introduced, which gives school boards the freedom to make their own spending choices (van Twist et al., 2013). Conversely, some re-centralisation has taken place through the establishment of national learning objectives and examination programmes. Mergers of school boards have been promoted as larger school boards were considered to be more professional and financially stable (Van Wieringen, 2010; Hooge, 2013; Frissen et al., 2015). Nowadays, close to half of school boards in primary education and secondary education consist of one school (Table 7.1), with the school principal fulfilling the double role of governor and principal. The other half of school boards run more than one school and are responsible for the vast majority of schools and students in the Netherlands.

Table 7.1. **Number of school boards and schools by level of education, 2014**

	Primary education (PO)	Secondary education (VO)	Upper secondary vocational education (MBO)
Number of schools	7156*	642*	68
Number of school boards			
Number of schools managed by school boards	1 115	335	66
1	491	240	64
2 to 5	216	77	2
6 to 9	124	11	0
10 to 19	201	6	0
More than 20	83	1	0

Note: *Includes special primary education schools and (secondary) special schools.

Source: Data provided by MoECS.

School governance has improved

School boards in the Netherlands enjoy extensive autonomy (OECD, 2011) regarding the allocation of resources, personnel, infrastructure of buildings, and curriculum and assessment. The recently adopted Good Education, Good Governance Act 2010 further confirmed their responsibility for the quality of education. According to the Inspectorate of Education (2015a), most schools are properly governed, and school boards, internal supervision and employee participation are becoming increasingly professional. The percentage of school boards facing multiple or long-term quality problems is falling, especially in secondary education

Sectoral associations represent school boards at the national level

Following the example of MBO-Raad (the Netherlands Association of Vocational Education and Training (VET) Colleges), during the last decade similar associations have been established for primary and secondary education: the PO-Raad (2006) and VO-Raad (2007) respectively. These associations represent school boards at the national level and their influence on policy making has grown, as is evidenced by the sector agreements (see Chapter 6). Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 summarised the roles of the different stakeholders in the school governance structure.

Financial instability

The vast majority of schools are of good quality

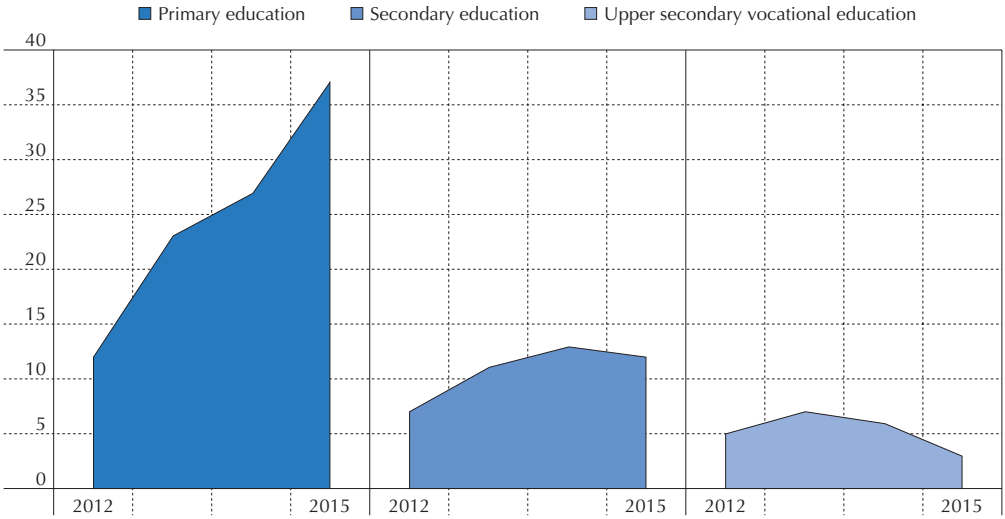
The lump-sum funding model was introduced in upper secondary vocational education in 1991, in secondary education in 1995, and in primary education in 2006. This provided school boards with the freedom to make their own spending choices. As this approach depends upon the capacity of school boards (Fullan and Levin, 2009; Honig, 2003, 2006), a positive development is that school boards, as well as internal supervisors, are becoming increasingly professional (Inspectorate of Education, 2015a). This seems to have had a positive impact on the financial situation and quality of education.

The weak finances of some schools creates risks

The financial situation of schools has improved in all sectors in recent years, partly due to additional government funds in 2013 (Inspectorate of Education, 2015a, 2015b). However, schools do not have much financial leeway: the number of primary schools under financial supervision by the Inspectorate of Education has increased considerably, although this is partly

due to a change in financial monitoring by the Inspectorate (Figure 7.1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2015b).

Figure 7.1. **Schools under special financial supervision, 2012-2015**



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2015b), *De financiële staat van het onderwijs, 2014* [The Financial Situation of Education, 2014], Inspectorate of Education, Utrecht, www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/binaries/content/assets/nieuwsberichten/2015/de-financiele-situatie-in-het-onderwijs-2014.pdf.

Capacity challenges in school boards

Not all school boards have the capacity to resolve problems

Unstable financial circumstances, sometimes linked to declining school rolls, make it difficult for some school boards to safeguard the quality of education. While the annual report of school boards requires a thorough analysis of risk, reporting is often still too general (Inspectorate of Education, 2015b).

School boards need to do more to support weak schools

Alongside the work of the Inspectorate and other bodies, school boards themselves can do more to support weaker schools. Hooge et al. (2015) revealed that school boards interact *less* with schools that are known to function or perform poorly and/or where the school principal is known to be less competent. This is the opposite of what would be most useful.

But the capacity of school boards is very variable

School board members may be volunteers or professionals; parents of students in the school; citizens from the local community; members of a religious or life philosophy; or professionals with specific expertise, such as law, finance, human resources or education. In smaller school boards particularly there may not be any members with a professional educational background. While some school boards formulate ambitious performance demands, exert pressure and provide support to their schools, others seem to be less committed to quality goals (Nusche et al., 2014).

A strategic improvement culture is underdeveloped in many school boards

Several sources, including OECD interviews with key stakeholders, suggest that many school boards lack the capacity to drive improvement (Inspectorate of Education, 2015a; Bekkers et al., 2015; Nusche et al., 2014). School boards are often preoccupied with the short term, while research evidence shows that financial and human resource strategies need to be linked to leadership and effective management in order to deliver educational goals (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009). The growing number of staff on payroll and temporary contracts may make it difficult to build a high quality workforce (see Chapter 5).

Box 7.1. **Board Leadership Development Strategy, Ontario, Canada**

As part of the Ontario Leadership Strategy, each district in the province is provided with funding and support to develop and implement a Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS). The goals of the BLDS mirror the goals of the Ontario Leadership Strategy, that is, to: 1) attract the right people to leadership roles; 2) develop personal leadership resources in individuals and promote effective leadership practices in order to have the greatest possible impact on student achievement and well-being; and 3) develop leadership capacity and coherence in organisations to strengthen their ability to deliver on education priorities. The ministry support districts (i.e. school boards) by assessing **impact**; setting **high-quality goals**; implementing **evidence-based strategies** that will give the best results; and **monitoring** the implementation of those strategies.

The Board Leadership Development Strategy Manual was developed to support Ontario school boards (districts) in implementing their BLDS, and to guide planning and reporting. Directors, supervisory officers, principals, vice-principals, supervisors, managers, teachers, and others who work in the field of education may find the manual helpful in understanding leadership development in districts across the province.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Education (2015), *Leadership Development*, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/actionPlan.html.

The professionalization of school boards should be intensified

The sector agreements encourage board members to share experiences by participating in networks; school boards can also call on a wide range of professional development opportunities. Following the examples of education systems such as Northern Ireland, Ontario (Canada) and Victoria (Australia) (OECD, 2013; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008), work in the Netherlands has also started on competence standards for secondary school boards. Such capacity building may naturally be linked to that of school leaders and internal supervisors (see Chapter 6 and Box 7.1).

The accountability challenge for school boards

School boards lack democratic accountability

Current members of the school board jointly recruit and appoint ordinary board members, while professional board members are appointed by the internal supervisory council of the school. Board members are therefore different from their equivalents in many other OECD countries, such as England (United Kingdom), the Flemish Community of Belgium, Slovenia and Sweden, where professional board members are elected officials (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008; OECD, 2011). Compared to these countries, school boards in the Netherlands therefore lack democratic accountability (Hooge and Honigh, 2014).

Internal supervisory bodies do not always hold school boards accountable

Internal supervisory councils do not always succeed in their role as an independent monitor of the school board. Some highly publicised incidents have revealed that internal supervisory councils have sometimes failed to address malpractice in school boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2015a; Bekkers et al., 2015). In response, MoECS has proposed the legislation: Strengthening of the Administrative Powers Law (2015), which requires the internal supervisory council to report any malpractice or risks in the quality of education to the Inspectorate. These changes may help clarify the roles and responsibilities of the internal supervisory council and hold them accountable. Parents and education staff are sometimes reluctant to become members of the council, and school boards do not always sufficiently involve the participation council in important decisions (Inspectorate of Education, 2015a). The proposed legislation usefully expands the powers of the participation council. Through other measures, like the support provided for the Strengthening Participation Council project (*Versterking Medezeggenschapsraad project*)

up to 2019, MoECS aims to strengthen the functioning of the participation councils in primary and secondary schools.

Performance appraisals of board members by the internal supervisory board are not routine

If the school board includes professional salaried members, then the internal supervisory council is also the employer of the board members. While in this case the council is expected to regularly evaluate the performance of these professionals, this does not always happen. This is particularly concerning given the findings by Hooge et al. (2015) that some school boards are less engaged with poor performing schools than with better performers. The Inspectorate of Education should monitor whether internal supervisory councils have the capacity to and are conducting performance appraisals.

Some competence standards for school board members are under development

Agreed competence standards for school board members could usefully guide the professionalisation of school boards, and steps in this direction at secondary level are therefore to be welcomed. Such standards should be developed for all levels of education and be used by school boards and internal supervisory councils to guide boards and inform their professional development.

The division of labour between school leaders and school boards is unclear

Good governance depends on the clarity of roles and responsibilities (Inspectorate of Education, 2015a; Bekkers et al., 2015). Hofman et al. (2012) showed that while most school boards expected school leaders to be educational leaders (83%), less than half of school leaders saw themselves in this way (45%). School leaders regularly get caught between the school board and the participation council. While everybody looks to the school leader to guide decision-making in the school, this role is not formalised. As discussed in Chapter 6, the role of school leaders needs to be strengthened in relation to school boards and the participation council. For example, the co-signing by all school leaders of the board's annual report could usefully strengthen their role (OECD, 2015; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008).

Accountability through transparency

Good progress has been made in improving access to data

Public knowledge of the work of school boards – transparency – is a precondition of proper accountability. The Netherlands is in a strong position in this regard, with various online websites (e.g. www.scholenkeuze.nl, www.1000scholen.nl, www.scholenopdekaart.nl) that provide information about schools to parents, students and other potential users. MoECS work in this respect is considered good practice among ministries in the Netherlands by the General Accounting Office (General Accounting Office, 2014). However, there remains scope for improvement (MoECS, 2015; Inspectorate of Education, 2015a; Van Dael and Hooge, 2013). A recent study (GfK, 2015) showed that shared data and information, and their presentation, do not always meet the needs of parents, many of whom do not know where to look for information about schools (MoECS, 2015). In response, MoECS is involving parents in the further development of the website www.scholenopdekaart.nl, and intends to promote its existence to parents in collaboration with the sector councils.

Some internal supervisors and school leaders have indicated that they need more and/or better information to do their job properly. Although a lack of skills and experience to interpret and use data and information plays a part (see also Chapter 6), reports suggest that school boards are not always providing supervisors and leaders with easy-to-use information (Blokdijk and Goodijk, 2012; Honingh and Hooge, 2012; Bekkers et al., 2015).

Annual reports should all be available online

The annual report by school boards should draw together information on resources and what the school boards achieve with those resources. However, although the sector codes of good governance call for making annual reports publically available online, only half of the general secondary school boards, and even fewer primary school boards, did so in 2014 (Kersten, 2015; Honingh and van Genugten, 2014). The Netherlands should consider following the examples of England (United Kingdom), New Zealand and Victoria (Australia) by making the public posting of annual reports mandatory as this reinforces public accountability and informs stakeholders about school objectives, achievements and use of resources (Tooley and Hooks, 2010; OECD, 2013; OECD/SSAT, 2008).

Lump sum financing creates an additional accountability challenge

Under "lump sum" financing, school boards have full discretion over the funds supplied to them by central government. This approach is similar to that pursued by, for example, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark

and Latvia, and contrasts with some other decentralised education systems that earmark at least some funds for specific purposes (Fazekas, 2012). At the time of writing, the Netherlands is exploring alternative mechanisms of school financing. The stated goals of central government regarding funding – for example the Euro 150 million shared with schools in 2013 through the lump sum to recruit new teachers and improve mathematics teaching – is not always backed by earmarking of the funds, or even accountability mechanisms to report how much was actually spent on its stated purposes. While earmarking can be too rigid or an administratively burdensome approach, school boards should account for how they have used additional resources and to what end. This calls for capacity building among school boards and for stronger internal and external transparency, including through publicly available school board annual reporting.

Box 7.2. **Peer learning among school boards – examples from the Netherlands**

In September 2012, PO-Raad launched a number of activities around the theme "Steering on Education Quality", including collegial visits. The aim of these visits is to support school boards with professionalisation, and the Code of Good Governance forms the starting point. The rationale of the collegial visitation is that school boards utilise each other's expertise. Their professional drive gets a boost through structured visits to share knowledge and experiences and prepare their content properly. Until now, 24 school boards have participated in the collegial visitations. From this experience, the Primary Education Council aims to develop a solid, functional and durable visitation for the primary education sector.

In September 2015, Foundation LeerKRACHT presented the LeerKRACHT school boards programme for the coming year with the theme "Every day a little better together" for better education. In this programme, which is a collaboration with PO-Raad, VO-Raad and MBO-Raad, participants visit (large) commercial companies, such as Randstad, Philips, Achmea, Albert Heijn and Bol.com, that are known for their continuous improvement culture. In addition, participants are encouraged to share their experiences. The aim of the programme is for school boards to learn how to establish and maintain an improvement culture in their schools, and the role of leadership in this process.

Sources: Primary Education Council (2015), *Bestuurlijke visitatie Spiegel voor bestuurlijk handelen* [Governmental Visitations. Mirror for Administrative Action], Primary Education Council, The Hague, https://www.poraad.nl/files/publicaties/publicaties_pdf/brochure_bestuurlijke_visitatie_spiegel_voor_bestuurlijk_handelen.pdf; Foundation LeerKracht (2015), "Wat moeten we van schoolbesturen verwachten?" [What should we expect from school boards?], www.stichting-leerkracht.nl/blog/achtergrond/wat-moeten-we-van-schoolbesturen-verwachten/.

The "horizontal dialogue" is underdeveloped in many schools

The codes of good governance call for school boards and internal supervisory councils to organise dialogue with stakeholders at all levels, this is also referred to as the "horizontal dialogue". Research shows the

potential of such dialogue to promote organisational learning (Schechter and Mowafaq, 2013; Senge et al., 2012). While this dialogue needs to take place in an atmosphere of trust and respect (Fullan, Cutress and Kilcher, 2005; Cerna, 2014), this is not always the case in the Netherlands (Frissen et al., 2015; Hooge et al., 2013; Bekkers et al., 2015: Inspectorate of Education, 2015a).

Recommendations 10-11: Enhance the accountability and capacity of school boards and rebalance their authority

Recommendation 10: The accountability of school boards should be substantially improved by making their workings more transparent and by opening up their operations to meaningful challenge

Accountability mechanisms need to be strengthened

A lack of democratic accountability (for example when school systems are no longer run by locally elected individuals) needs to be balanced by more robust and transparent accountability arrangements. The annual reports of school boards should all be available online and should fully document how resources are used and to what end. Where funds are provided by central government for specific purposes, the reports should explain whether those resources have been used for those purposes, and if not provide a justification. These justifications, and indeed all operations of school boards, should be open to meaningful challenge by the Inspectorate and the internal supervisory council.

Recommendation 11: Building on existing initiatives, systematically enhance the strategic leadership capacity of school boards and develop their professionalism. Rebalance the authority of school boards by giving more authority to school leaders

The capacity of school boards and internal supervisory boards needs improvement

The professionalisation of school boards and internal supervisors has rightly received increasing policy attention. Efforts should focus on enhancing capacity, and peer-learning opportunities among board members and internal supervisors across the Netherlands should be pursued. Competence requirements for school board members should be developed (building on initiatives at the secondary level), and regular appraisals for board members should be a requirement.

Rebalance the authority of school boards, school leaders and teachers at local and national levels

Key actions often need to be taken at the school rather than board level. In recognition of this it would make sense for school leaders to be co-signatories of the school boards' reports, and also be meaningfully involved in report drafting. School leaders could be given more responsibility for the quality of education. At the national level, school leaders could be given a stronger voice, as has been seen with the inclusion of representative organisations of school leaders (General School Leaders Association, AVS, and Network for School leaders, NVS) and teachers in future sector agreements.

Note

1. Lump sum funding means that school boards receive an amount of funding based on the number of enrolled students on 1 October. The amount largely depends on the composition of the student population of the school (number of students, age and education type). Primary schools and general secondary schools also receive an additional amount for performance-oriented working and the professional development of teachers and school leaders ("the performance box"). Senior secondary vocational schools receive additional funding for quality agreements (MoECS, nd).

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Annex A

Terms of reference: OECD education policy review of the Netherlands

Introduction

The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills will perform a review of the Dutch education system. This review is intended to provide policy makers, educators and other stakeholders with an external analysis which combines an international comparative perspective and quality analysis with an independent view.

The review will be performed through a customisation of the standard OECD review methodology and is expected to result in new insights into how the Netherlands' education system is functioning and performing. The review is expected to provide a comprehensive analysis and function as a "stress test" of the Netherlands' education system to identify strengths and challenges to the system, the potential to cope with these and to identify opportunities for further improvement. The system review will be based on relevant data and evidence which the OECD has accumulated since the last system review in the Netherlands (1989-1990), together with other published material (see section 2 below).

Context

The Dutch education system is considered to be among the best performing across OECD countries. The Netherlands is a high performer in PISA 2012 in mathematics, reading and science, although mathematics performance has decreased across PISA cycles. Also, the 2012 Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) showed that Dutch adults have above-average literacy.

As with many high performing education systems, the issue is where and how to invest in order to further improve the performance and effectiveness of the system. To this end, the OECD review of the Dutch education system will inform the government on the strengths and challenges and provide policy options for moving the system forward.

It is important to take into consideration that there are a number of relevant and complementary reports and evaluations that can feed into the OECD Education Policy Review of the Netherlands:

- National evaluations of the system: There have recently or will be several national evaluations of the system, some of which may run simultaneously to the system review.
- A number of policy reports by state advisory bodies have been recently published, which will serve as input to analysis of the review.
- OECD reports and data: 1) the recent OECD report on Evaluation and Assessment in the Netherlands; 2) outcomes of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS) and PISA; 3) the Education Policy Outlook, notably the country profile of the Netherlands; and 4) the recent Skills Beyond School Review of the Netherlands.

Main questions and specific themes

The OECD review of the Netherlands' education system will analyse the functioning of the education system, as well as the methods and the potential to assure and enhance education quality and the potential to deal with challenges to the system and/or to education quality. This implies that four basic questions will be addressed:

- How is the Netherlands' education system functioning and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- Which characteristics may explain the way in which the system functions?
- Is the governance and financing of the system effective and appropriate for enhancing education quality?
- How can the performance of the system be sustained in the future (opportunities and challenges)?

Within the framework of this approach, specific attention will be given to a selection of themes which at present claim priority within the Netherlands' political and public debate on education. These themes are:

- How can the quality and outcomes of the system be further improved, and moved from "good" to "great"?
- How can students' motivation be improved?
- In what way can the quality of teachers and school leaders be optimised?
- What potential does the governance system have to enhance its agility and responsiveness to changes?

The specific approach to each of these four themes is given below. In each case, the approach is chosen to increase insights on how policy input and/or funding affect educational outputs and outcomes.

Improving the quality and outcomes of the system, and moving from "good" to "great"

The review will address:

- The degree to which the system realises the general aims of quality (effectiveness), efficiency, equity and access.
- The functioning of the early tracking for enhancing student performance and motivation (system's position on the scale between a comprehensive and a categorical system).
- The interaction and collaboration among the various stakeholders of the system in realising – through mutual support and synergy – an effective day-to-day functioning of the system.

The review will inform the Netherlands on how it can enhance the performance of its education system and move it from "good" to "great". Therefore, the review will identify ways for policy makers, educators and other stakeholders to mobilise the fast increasing amount of evidence to actually achieve this aim.

Of particular relevance in this respect is the assurance and enhancement of educational quality. The international comparison should inform the Netherlands how its education system is performing compared to other systems. Addressing this and similar questions, the review will contribute to a definition of educational quality of relevance for the Netherlands (and other countries).

Besides this, the review will provide views on how the quality of education may be monitored/evaluated, assured and enhanced. In this context, the role of the Inspectorate of the Netherlands will be addressed. Particular attention will also be given to new forms of accountability, with a view to stimulating as well as monitoring the quality of education.

Improving student performance and motivation

The review will analyse the ways in which the Netherlands' education system accommodates students, focussing on – amongst other things – how the system motivates and supports them to better (individual) performance. At present, the Netherlands is performing satisfactorily in accommodating low-achieving students, but evidence has shown that students with a higher potential tend to under-achieve. An overarching aim of the Netherlands' education policy is to motivate and challenge all students, regardless of their background or their talents, to fully realise their potential.

The current effort to revitalise vocational education and to strengthen its position regarding general education is a crucial element in this overarching aim. The review will take these policies into account and provide guidance on how to motivate students and also how to commit them to match their educational achievement with their talents and potential.

In addition, attention will be given to the question of how a school system with early-tracking actually performs regarding equity and student motivation.

Optimise and strengthen the quality of teachers and school leaders

The review will analyse the position of teachers within the system and specifically focus on their potential to be carriers of innovation, to help them develop from "good" to "great", and to motivate and commit students. The review should provide guidance on how to further enhance the teachers' potential to differentiate their didactic approach in accordance with the needs of their students.

In addition, the review will evaluate potential progress in policies aimed at strengthening the professionalism and competences of teachers and to stimulate schools to become learning organisations.

With regard to school leaders, the review will analyse how the demand of changing governance and financing modalities (regarding central steering vs. school autonomy) influence their position and role within the system. The review will also take into account the position of school boards in their role as competent authority and employer.

Enhancing the system's governance and financing in order to improve responsiveness to change

The review will provide guidance on how the Netherlands' education system may enhance its sustainability and prepare for future challenges and opportunities. The focus will be on methods to enhance the system's governance and financing, including its agility and its sensitivity to changes in demand. The review will draw on expertise gathered by the OECD work on Governing Complex Education Systems, which aims at creatively using and optimising governance mechanisms and knowledge options.

In addition, the review will analyse new leadership modalities as they are brought about by the application of system level steering which is characteristic of the Netherlands – that is to say: steering at system level while leaving a lot of autonomy to individual institutions. It will provide guidance on how the system's potential for demand sensitivity may be developed by a balanced application of this "detached steering".

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has recently started a reappraisal of the school curriculum (in the form of a public debate initiated by the government) which represents another approach. The review will take this reappraisal into account.

Scope

The review includes primary education, secondary education, and vocational education and training. Higher education is excluded from the review, but it will include the transition from upper secondary education to higher education, as well as teacher training institutes.

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Chapter 7. Strengthening accountability and capacity in Dutch school boards

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