

Learn to Learn for Adult Returners

L2L4AR



Analysis of Dutch Strategic Documents

January 2014

THE NETHERLANDS

SHORT INTRODUCTION OF THE DUTCH CASE¹

Lifelong learning has been prioritised in The Netherlands over the last decades, and access to adult education for as many people as possible is often cited as an important or high priority goal. Lifelong learning and adult education is linked to the idea of self-reliance and personal achievement in society, but also strongly connected to employability and vocational training to the point where adult education and vocational education are often difficult to separate (or at least as seen by the Ministry of Education in terms of organisational structure and provision). They both emphasise basic skills and qualifications for workers to secure their positions or enhance their work life, which is seen to reflect in the labour market and society as a whole. To this aim educational institutions are given a high level of autonomy, and are encouraged to put the needs of the student first, especially related to devising learning pathways to meet the needs of disadvantaged students.

However, this importance of lifelong learning has not yet been transformed into structural state funding. In fact currently almost 50% of adult education is provided by private non-governmental institutions with no state funding (local folkhighschools, local community centres and commercial providers).

It is, however, also common that people access short vocational training courses, workshops and seminars through their employer, as there is significant funding invested in this annually. Learners can also undertake private professional training, which can amount to an acknowledged diploma (VWO, MBO, HBO, WO), or post initial education courses (marketing, accountancy, ICT, secretarial, administrative, languages etc.) The local folkhighschools also provide such courses.

Another key concern with adult education in the Netherlands is related to integration and social assimilation of immigrants. This usually takes the form of a compulsory civic integration programme, including the Dutch language, but also has a focus on providing opportunities for immigrant to gain professional skills and qualifications in order for them to find work of a suitable level. The courses aim to increase the self-reliance of newcomers, and give them more opportunities to undergo further training and find work.

There are also courses providing a broad basic education which teach the skills needed for people to function independently in everyday situations, for instance when in contact with a child's school or the healthcare services. They include speaking, reading, listening and arithmetic, and some also aim to foster self-reliance at a minimum level with, for instance, social skills.

¹ Text from EAEA Country Report on Adult Education in The Netherlands: Helsinki, 2011

Objectives of LLL and future concerns ²

Social trends and the need for lifelong learning have made adult and vocational education of crucial importance for individuals, the labour market and society as a whole. One of the aims is to ensure that every person is able to obtain a minimum basic qualification. The learner should come first, meaning that institutions must offer courses that are geared to the needs of people who have no job experience, employed people and those seeking work. A priority for the future is that adult and vocational education courses should be better attuned to each other. Various options will be available, both full time and part time, to suit the learner's personal circumstances and preferences. It is also a future priority that a new quality assurance system should be introduced to improve the quality of teaching, together with a funding system designed to encourage better performance. An example is the introduction of performance-related grants for MBO students (post 18 years tertiary education aimed towards vocational training). Adult education is also seen as important in the Netherlands for various purposes, including preparation for vocational training, assimilation and social integration of migrants and the personal and social development of people who are at risk of becoming marginalised.

More information about the Netherlands: <http://goo.gl/gWuh1u>

LEGISLATION

The Dutch educational system is governed by different acts. Each type of education has own legislation:

- Primary education: Primary Education Act (WPO), 1981
- Secondary education: Secondary Education Act (WVO), 1993
- Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB), 1996
- Higher Education and Research Act (WHO), 1992
- National Qualification Framework (NLQF), 2012
- Participation Act, 2015

These Acts are organising and structuring the education. However, they do not much about the content and the strategies. So, no words are used to write about L2L.

The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) is the most important act for us. It includes the MBO vocational training via the ROCs (regional education centres) and AOCs (agricultural education centres). All other vocational training is offered by private organisations, unified in the NRTO. Other non-formal education is decentralised and will be part of the Participation Act in 2015, which gives the municipality the opportunity to buy education from different providers.

² Text from EAEA Country Report on Adult Education in The Netherlands: Helsinki, 2011

HISTORY OF FORMAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION³

The current MBO is the result of more than a century vocational education. The government took more responsibility for vocational education. Initially vocational education is a matter of business. With the introduction of the Act on secondary education in 1863 was still Thorbecke government intervention unnecessary. Only resigned in 1919 the government to care for a wide spectrum of training in itself with the Industry Education Act. Gradually, the government responsibility still further. As apprenticeship (the current apprenticeship training) came in the sixties under the responsibility of the government . Other tasks, such as training and educational work, came ultimately the responsibility of the Ministry.

There is a growing emphasis on a good connection between education and the labour market. The influence of business on the training offer has increased. Beginning eighties, this was deployed with the opinion of the committee Wagner. This committee advocated for more involvement of the private sector in education. With the introduction of the Law Vocational Education and Training (WEB) in 1996, the industry has been given an important role in the development of the qualification structure.

In the nineties, the WEB schools obliged to go to regional training centres , along the ROCs. The AOCs existed already. The ROCs were to provide better connection to the labour market and to combat youth unemployment. There was a demand for a wide range of training for the ROCs. Without a wide range a ROC was not eligible for funding.

A fourth trend is that of a smaller government and deregulation. For example, the lump sum financing was introduced. Responsibility for educational accommodation is decentralized to vocational schools.

After a broad, exploratory base period, students nowadays specialize in the superstructure from secondary school in one of the technical directions. Eventually, these young people are both a VMBO as an MBO diploma at level 2.

POLICY DEBATE⁴

The question is whether the initial vocational training is not too specific. The economy is dynamic. That may mean learning skills for a job is detrimental to the future employability . Especially the middle of the professions seems not immune. A well- educated workforce is even more relevant for our prosperity. A second reason why we need a flexible workforce is the shift to services and knowledge. This shift is a result of increased rationalization of production processes and associated with globalization. Many expect that this development will continue and there must be a global division of labour. Knowledge base is indispensable. According to the OECD, however, takes the importance of broader 21st century skills (problem solving, social and communication skills , creativity, flexibility). Here we can also see the relevance of L2L.

³ Text from discussion paper *Een toekomstbestendig MBO* (a future sustainable MBO),2013

⁴ Text from discussion paper *Een toekomstbestendig MBO* (a future sustainable MBO),2013

The appeal route for many parents and students are now a negative selection. This may be partly due to the image of vocational education. According to the SCP⁵ is a risk therefore that pupils generally are practical-minded, choosing secondary schools, while they have more talent for the professional route. That is a waste of talent, that extra detrimental because there is such a high demand for professionals. Only slightly more than half of the graduates took the degree within the nominal study. According to the inspectorate not all courses are in the basic in order. In particular, the development of the quality of examination with respect to the previous year deserves attention. Moreover, MBO is not challenging enough.

There are some good developments. Vocational scored as internationally well core skills (OECD / PIAAC). Furthermore, the number of early school leavers decreased for the tenth year in a row. And Dutch MBO students regularly win awards in the international World Skills competition.

On average, the connection with the labour market is in order. According to the ROA⁶ MBO-graduates find a job usually in less than a month. However, some programs train more people than there is demand in the labour market. This leads to school leavers who find a job or a job below their level. Especially unemployment still before you started your career is negative for career opportunities, health and happiness. A good education and a good mastery of core skills increase the chances (good paid) work.

Future-proof MBO requires a high quality vocational education. Therefore been tightened in educational need is necessary. It is the quality of vocational education agreements, the increase the level of literacy and numeracy, shortening and intensifying MBO- learning pathways and the generalization of the training requirements for MBO2. This tightening may cause it might be for certain groups of young people difficult to complete. These are vulnerable young people from the practical education, from secondary special education, dropped out or just after vocational school and youth in the entrance courses. In addition, these are young people at all levels of vocational training who have limitations. They face barriers in receiving education, or have to the end of the course some distance from the labour market. Each transition is a challenge for these young people, who once again have to become familiar with a new, initially less secure, environment.

This is why there is an entrance training opportunities should provide for these vulnerable young people. On the entrance training are no graduates. This allows vocational schools teaching in this target focus, which the educational efficiency will increase. Students with all kinds of problems to be admitted to the course entrance, provided that they have no qualifications. Students of the entrance courses are broader education than the case is nowadays. Their chances on the labour market are therefore increasing.

The target exhibits also a wide variety ranging from natives and immigrants with low literacy and numeracy skills to highly skilled immigrants who want to learn the Dutch language. But in addition, it is also about people without benefit to those with a paid job. It is important, that each of them can

⁵ Dutch Social Cultural Plan Office

⁶ Dutch Council for Education

follow a training can that best suits his / her needs and opportunities. This can be a Dutch language or math program at a Regional Training Centre (ROC) or a private language service provider, but also trained by the employer or a section around provided by a volunteer. Municipalities should be able to see from the education budget all these different initiatives of formal, non-formal and informal education to purchase. In practice, there is need for this. Having regard to the intended goals the aim is to be the extension of the discretionary as much as possible to keep up with the decentralization of responsibilities to municipalities, which is equipped by 2015⁷.

A future spending MBO requires the best possible connection with the labour market. Employability in the long term, a broader base are better. Given the unpredictable nature of the labour market is an important to have the choice of a young person in which between the general secondary education and vocational route is neutral. For the longer term, there are indications that the middle of occupations under pressure will be placed. The national qualification with all government-approved training should take this into account. Broader qualifications increase opportunities for graduates to participate. Broader qualifications do more justice to the dynamics of the labour market. Furthermore, this development requires that it remains possible to stack diplomas on the way to a higher level.

In an uncertain dynamic labour market, lifelong learning is crucial. The labour market requires a broad employability and therefore both generic skills and subject-specific knowledge. It is widely recognized that workers and employers have primary responsibility for organization and financing of the training of employees. For they enjoy the benefits. In practice, the responsibility of employers and employees are visible in the O&O funds⁸. Government-funded vocational education plays a minor role in educating adult employees. Adults ask another pedagogical approach and a more flexible layout and organization of education.

TACKLING ILLITERACY

The number of illiterate people is increasing rapidly despite of the well-known Dutch approach of combatting illiteracy. Approximately half of the illiterate people in paid work. In the group of 45-54 years, this is even 70%. Of the non-poor literacy (all ages) has about 66% paid work. From the PIAAC survey is clearly shown that participation in the labour clearly related to the level of proficiency. Low literacy have proven more trouble finding and keeping a job. 1.3 million of the Dutch with a proficiency level below 2F (input level vocational education) is 30% 'inactive', ie without paying job, possibly part-time. An increase in illiterate elderly can go wring the labour market when the "baby boomers" are going to retire.

More than half of the low literacy currently has a paid job, according to a recent research from the University of Maastricht to illiteracy in Netherlands. In the age group 45-55 years even 70% is particular concern qualitative deficits rather than quantitative shortages. It is obvious that during the life of employees the mastery of core skills decreases gradually. This decrease causes a loss of

⁷ Participation Act 2015

⁸ Training & Development Funds

productivity and possibly less good match between labour demand and labour supply (lack of quality). At this time, however, there are plenty of initiatives aimed at lifelong learning and one can use the current offer in adult education and general secondary adult education to counteract this decrease in core skills. Moreover the illiteracy approach, where employers play a role, is aimed to reduce such a decrease.

Women are sadly over-represented among low-literate. That is not a coincidence but a legacy of the old breadwinner model. The same applies to female marriage migrants. The basic skills of people with little or no work going backwards faster than that of individuals who have an employment relationship. Moreover, the employer often plays an important role in encouraging workers to improve their level of reading and writing. There are programs as 'Language for Life' and 'Language For Home' of the foundation Lezen en Schrijven (reading and writing), where volunteers search low-literate women and teach them in group. Other options to improve the language skills of women in an accessible manner are explored as well, for example working from a specific digital learning environment. This is a successful proven tool in achieving low-skilled and low-literate adults by provide support in an informal and accessible way. Following this way participants can, for example, increase their language skills at home rather than in a course outdoors. In this way the non - working women increases their chances of economic independence.

The 'Action Plan Low Literacy 2012-2015' appoints literacy as a fundamental condition sustainable employability for self-reliance of citizens and social cohesion. The labour market dimension is central. The strategy to tackle illiteracy includes many forms, including a commitment to employees, job seekers and employers. For that reason the foundation Lezen en Schrijven has been asked to identify in cooperation with employers branches which are located large groups of low literacy. Another instrument is a language scan developed by employers organisations and trade unions to test whether employees need training in language skills. In addition, there is the Ambassador network, which (former) employees in the field of illiteracy are asked to focus a few years their efforts in a certain sector (chosen by themselves) to encourage actions addressing illiteracy.

With the current Action Plan Low literacy (2012-2015), the government aims to address the agenda to combat illiteracy. In addition, there is € 53 million annually available for municipalities bet on adult education, specifically aimed at improving the Dutch literacy and numeracy. For the development of innovative methods for low literacy a series of pilots under the title 'Language for Life' has been running since 2012 to address and achieve more low levels of literacy. These pilots, carried out by the foundation Lezen en Schrijven have a focus on the target group of 45-65 years and are continuously evaluated. Additionally the Dutch Parliament has recently decided to make € 5 million available for tackling illiteracy on annual basis. The current Action Plan includes a specific focus on the illiteracy labour component.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (NLQF)

The Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF) is a new way of describing Dutch qualification levels. It is a systematic organisation of all existing qualification levels in the Netherlands, from Level 1 basic

education to the Master's degree at level 8. Qualifications are classified in NLQF levels and are given a level indication. The framework consists of an Entry Level followed by 8 levels, Level 1 being the least complex and Level 8 the most complex.

The NLQF aims to facilitate students and labour market mobility by providing an insight into the levels of all qualifications recorded by the National Coordination Point NLQF in the National Coordination Point (NCP) register. The NLQF provides transparency in that it facilitates a comparison of qualification levels nationally and, thus, national mobility.

The NCP records Government-regulated qualifications (The qualifications of the Ministries of Education Culture and Sciences; Healthcare, Welfare and Sports and Economics Affairs; Food and Natural and Living Environment) in the NCP Register of qualifications. All other qualifications are first assessed and level-determined by the NCP and then recorded in the Register.

The Dutch Qualifications Framework offers providers of qualifications which are not regulated by the Government the possibility of having such training programmes and qualifications classified at a level of the NLQF. Procedures and criteria for this process are in place. The NLQF offers opportunities to bring. Nationally formal education (secondary, vocational, college / university), the system of non-formal education and the development of APL in a binding framework At the international level, the link with the EQF LLL creates more transparency, greater mobility and a better view of the achievement of a higher level of knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is clear that the Dutch government demonstrates a backward and retiring attitude towards lifelong learning in general and L2L in particular. The focus is on access to the labour market and strengthening employability. Initiatives and responsibility are expected from the social partners. Adult and vocational training is decentralised more and more. There is only a national strategy for tackling and combatting illiteracy.
2. There is no attention for key competencies, new skills, etcetera in the legislation, but it is a main topic in policy development.
3. Current policy debates on vocational training and tackling illiteracy demonstrate a wide attention for L2L.
4. The National Qualification Framework does not mention L2L, but key competencies are included in the different levels. Moreover, NLQF makes it possible to qualify non-formal education courses if requested.
5. The retiring government's policy creates a lot of spaces for public and private providers of education.
6. The awareness of the necessity to work on key competencies and skills for the future is high in the Netherlands, but due to the lack of stimuli by the Government there is only fragmented knowledge and experience. Most attention has been paid to writing and reading skills, and numeracy skills. There is also a rising interest in strengthening digital competences. However, there is less specific attention for other key competencies like L2L.