

About the quality of vocational education

19 april 2011

Through the Action Plan for senior secondary vocational education (MBO) entitled *Focus on Expertise 2011 to 2015*, published in February 2011, the government is aiming to improve the quality of vocational education. The Minister for Education, Culture and Science asked the Education Council to issue its opinion of the main proposals in the Action Plan and their implementation. The Education Council endorses the approach of the Action Plan towards improving the quality, manageability and appeal of vocational education, but believes that there is room for improvement in certain areas. The Education Council made five recommendations.

Recommendation 1: keep vocational training distinctive and practice-oriented

The link between vocational training and professional practice is essential for the appeal of vocational education. Internships are an important element of this. Major reductions in the teaching time available for internships can put pressure on this element. Furthermore, students, parents and prospective employers should be clear about what profession a student has been trained for. Caution should be exercised when enrolling a student for a more general form of training.

Recommendation 2: embrace the transfer opportunities in the vocational training column

It is important that students can transfer from preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) to senior secondary vocational education (MBO), and subsequently to higher professional education (HBO). Some measures in the Action Plan could hamper this. The Education Council recommends that the universal right to transfer from senior secondary vocational (MBO) to higher professional education (HBO) be left unchanged. In this context, it is particularly important to assess the risks associated with the proposed changes to the funding system. Additionally, the Education Council also recommends that further studies are conducted into the proposed reduction in the nominal duration of level 4 study programmes.

Recommendation 3: formulate a future vision on adult education

Education for adults is part of the current system of vocational and adult education. This requires a long-term vision by the government on publicly funded adult education. From this perspective, the proposals made in the Action Plan would need to be considered, including the scrapping of adult general secondary education for people over the age of thirty years.

Recommendation 4: go for an outcome-oriented approach

An outcome-oriented approach can be used to build on the quality of vocational education in the years ahead. This implies that there will be more substantive milestones for institutions and teachers. Milestones have already been defined for the core subjects of Dutch and arithmetic/mathematics, which are crucial for progression and transfer; and centralised examinations will be introduced for English in senior secondary vocational education (MBO). It would also be worth exploring whether milestones are possible for other subjects too. The Education Council also recommends that further investigation of the extent to which examinations for the vocational subjects can be subjected to further normalisation and equivalence testing so that the value of MBO diplomas increases.

Recommendation 5: ensure that the introduction is realistic

The introduction of the Action Plan could be speeded up by affording institutions insight into the packages of legislation and regulations that have been announced, and by giving institutions time to make the necessary changes. The announced implementation programme must be clearly embedded in terms of roles and responsibilities, and it should be in keeping with the self-regulating capacity of sector, the institutions and professionals.

Finally, the Education Council recommends that more investment is made in the professionalism of teaching staff in vocational education. This recommendation is not set out in detail in this report, as a separate report on this will be published at the same time as this response to the Action Plan.