

# Summary A narrow view of the quality of education

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The Education Council gives an overview of the state of affairs in Dutch education once every four years. The Council presents empirical developments and analyses the policies pursued by government and the education community. He asks the following questions: What shape is our education system in? What changes in policy are needed to achieve sustainable improvements?

Education in the Netherlands achieves above-average performance with average financial resources. Yet it is not sufficiently prepared for the future. Basic quality is good, but barriers hold back further improvement and innovation.

## Three risks in education now

First, there is too little vision on what education should teach pupils and students. Recently, the primary focus was on measurable goals, in particular aimed at raising performance in language and mathematics. In policy much less attention was paid to the broader palette of subjects, 'Bildung' and vocational education. Secondly, performance-enhancing measures have left schools with insufficient space to put their own emphasis in their curriculum or to innovate. Finally, the self-esteem of pupils who do not perform well in academic skills is under pressure. The early selection for either prevocational secondary education (vmbo), or different levels of general secondary education (havo/vwo) already accentuated cognitive differences between pupils of different social backgrounds. The growth of homogenous classes may yet increase social differences as well.

To minimise these risks, the Education Council formulates three challenges for educational policy.

### Challenge 1: make broad quality transparent

The Education Council is of the opinion that policy makers, educational institutions, teachers and others together should develop indicators for the learning outcomes of subjects like history, economics, philosophy, cultural education and civics, and should also devote attention to advanced skills (problem solving, collaboration, communication and ICT literacy). What is needed are empirical indicators, as well as benchmarks for other educational efforts. It is for institutions themselves to shape their own identity - an indicator of the quality of education in itself.

### Challenge 2: maintain control of central goals, demand more professional input from schools

Government needs to become better at setting out frameworks. It needs to take greater control of key governance issues, but render educational institutions more autonomy when it comes to learning content. Increased professionalism of school governors, school leaders and teachers is therefore necessary. To work in education is not simple. Nevertheless – and also *because of this* – the Education Council considers it reasonable to make continuing professional development compulsory for teachers and to establish a public register of teachers. The Education Council also holds the opinion that requirements for school leaders and board members should be increased as well.

### Challenge 3: foster a greater appreciation of non-cognitive capacities

Society also needs creativity, problem-solving abilities, collaboration, cultural and moral sensitivity, consideration and craftsmanship. Improving the self-esteem of all young people and offering everyone the best life opportunities requires greater appreciation of these capacities. The Education Council calls for appealing and high quality vocational education with sufficient opportunity for practical application so that craftsmanship is given the space it deserves. More personal differentiation within teaching programmes should be possible. Finally, the Education Council proposes to facilitate at school more contact for pupils from different social backgrounds.