

Summary Bringing the curriculum up to date

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Education prepares pupils and students for a demanding society. The labor market asks for a high quality of (professional) knowledge. Also, the 21st century makes a strong appeal to ICT-literacy, problem solving skills, critical thinking, creativity and social competences, as well as the ability to shape and control one's own learning. The present advice addresses the question how to ensure that the school curriculum, now and in the future, meets contemporary demands, thus laying a solid foundation for the personal, social and professional functioning of young people.

At the time, the Dutch education system does not provide for a systematic innovation of the curriculum. As a result, necessary innovations are often introduced too late, too much in isolation, or not at all. Also, there is insufficient coherence in the curriculum, both between school subjects and between different educational sectors. The vulnerability of education shows up especially in the increasing importance of so-called 21st century skills. The council pleads for focused attention to curriculum innovation. Both schools and government have a role to play in this effort.

Create conditions for schools to innovate their curriculum

Bringing education up to date is chiefly a task for teachers, principals, team and section leaders, as well as school governors. They are able to adapt and improve the curriculum in line with the local situation so as to respond adequately to social changes. Their commitment and professionalism provide the strategic key to this end.

To create better conditions for schools, the council pleads for an exchange and extension of knowledge in the field of curriculum innovation. For example by encouraging participation in knowledge societies and commissioning in-service training. Also, in consultation with the field of education, vision statements may be developed about knowledge and skills to be mastered by students with a view to their future needs. In this context, instruction in various 21st century skills calls for special attention. Yet another activity to keep education up to date is the development of evaluation instruments enabling schools to map out the results of their curriculum innovation.

Set up a permanent board for periodic recalibration of the curriculum

The council takes the view that government has its own responsibility for up-to-date education. In the last resort, government decides which school subjects and what subject matter deserves a place in the curriculum. Also, a measure of governmental control is needed for enhanced coherence of the curriculum and to safeguard continuing learning trajectories.

For this purpose the council recommends the installation of a permanent curriculum board. This board is to advise the minister periodically about necessary adjustment in the formal curriculum. The first recalibration of the curriculum would have to pay special attention to 21st century skills. The board would also be responsible for monitoring curriculum innovations and for the organization of a national debate about educational goals. The composition and positioning of this board should reflect the broad societal importance of education.