

Summary Educational Policy after the Dijsselbloem Commission

2 October 2014

The Dutch Second Chamber has asked the Education Council to inquire into the influence of the Dijsselbloem Commission on educational policy. (In the years 2007-2008 this commission assessed the realization of educational innovations.) A supplementary request was to ascertain whether the outcome of this inquiry would be a reason for change in current educational policy.

In response to the first request the Council has found that the influence of 'Dijsselbloem' was limited. Initially the Dijsselbloem Commission restored the confidence of the education community in government by being sharply critical of policy making in the preceding years. However, this confidence did not hold out, also because recommendations of the Commission were not implemented. The division of roles between government and field was not substantially changed. Government is still closely involved in school education. Out of the proposed review framework for reliable policy making the main issue to get attention was how to create support, but this attention proved to be insufficient. After 'Dijsselbloem' politicians have avoided discussions about the system, for fear of – once again – 'imposing' innovations. Whereas in fact they are responsible for the system.

In response to the second request (should current policy be changed?) the Council considers that a new perspective on educational policy is needed. Relations have been altered by deregulation and growing autonomy – in its further policy making government will have to reckon with more and varying stakeholders. In the Dijsselbloem Commission this issue remained in the background, but since it has manifested itself more and more strongly. The Council does not regard educational policy as a linear, centrally controlled process in which design and implementation are successive phases. It is a dynamic and cyclical process requiring a different role for government.

Recommendation 1: Confine the role of government to tracing main outlines and making firm choices about these lines

Government has to watch over a good quality of education by ensuring that the system can function properly. Some of the chief concerns of government are teacher policy, easy transitions and educational coherence. In these areas government can make firmer choices. Politicians should not shrink back from interfering with the system, and should exercise restraint in intervening (in a fragmented way) in the set-up of teaching in schools.

Recommendation 2: Look for new ways of representation

Government has to invest permanently in good relations with the education community. It should not limit itself to sector organizations and trade unions as discussion partners, but be continually looking for (other) relevant actors and modes of consultation in order to gain wide support for new policies. The views of principals, (unorganized) teachers, parents and students deserve attention as well.

Recommendation 3: Make better use of information from science and educational practice

The Dijsselbloem Commission considered that evidence often played a limited role in educational innovations. The Council repeats the plea of the Commission for a better use of scientific knowledge, adding that other (practical) knowledge can be of equal use all along the policy making process. Some examples of this practical knowledge are signals about the effects of policy (on all levels), monitoring, and systematic (*ex ante* and *ex post*) evaluation.