

Position and development of adult education in the Netherlands

Regulation concerning adult education and vocational education and training (VET)

In 1996 in the Netherlands the Regulation of Adult Education and Vocational Education (WEB) became reality. Because of this regulation many small specialised schools for secondary vocational education are merged to big units. After merging the amount is determined and these institutions are (still) financed by the government for accomplishing their educational task. This is the so called public infrastructure in education. There are three institutions, which can be distinguished. The Agrarian Training Centres (AOC's), specialised Vocational schools (like graphic education, education in timber and furniture, education in the fresh nutrition area) and Regional Training Centres (ROC's) in which education in different areas (like competence, commerce, prosperity and care) take place besides adult education. The vocational education is related to the levels EQF 1 till 4. Concerning adult education this means Adult Secondary Education (EQF2 and EQF4) and basic education on level EQF1. The NLQF also has an "extra level" on basic education. The course of basic education aim increase of literacy and numeracy, but also competences concerning health, participation in society etc. The municipal authorities have a lot of possibilities in determining the framework of purchasing courses.

Financing adult education and vocational education and training (VET)

Vocational education is financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) based on input, so to speak, amount of students, and output (diplomas obtained). The institutions (schools) are directly financed. Adult education is also financed by the Ministry of OCW. But the ROC's will be financed by the municipal authorities. The municipal authorities are obliged to purchase courses for adults at the ROC's for national money of the Ministry of OCW they receive. For that the ROC's develop contracts with the municipal authorities in their region. The height of the amount, which municipal authorities receive, depends on objective criteria like the amount of citizens, their level of education and ethnicity.

The MBO Raad

The MBO Raad is the national umbrella organisation of the vocational education and training and adult education. All vocational schools, ROC's and partly the AOC's are member. The MBO Raad promotes the interests of these institutions by the ministry of OCW.

Development of adult education: "Integration" (for immigrants)

During the last decennium several developments in the area of adult education occurred. First of all there was the discussion about the integration (education for immigrants who come to the Netherlands or already live here and are not yet able to speak the Dutch language correctly). From the beginning the ROC's had the task to realise this form of education, called NT2 (second language for immigrants). From the first of January in 2007 the budget for this education is transferred to another Ministry and municipal authorities could also purchase education by other commercial training institutions. Due to the fact that the ROC has collective conditions of employment and own schools (buildings) they cannot compete with other

training institutions concerning these cases. The so called "open market" meant, more or less, the end of the public infrastructure of NT2 education. Also a couple of commercial training institutions went bankrupt. Therefore quality of the NT2 education suffered a lot.

Further development in adult education

The ROC's can use a budget (on demand of the municipal authorities in 2007) for Adult Secondary Education (VAVO) and basic education (with exception from NT2 for integrating new immigrants). The amount of adults participating in courses concerning the native language is approximately 5000 a year, already from 1996. Nevertheless there are 1.5 million Dutch citizens in the Netherlands, who struggle with reading and writing or better said are illiterate. It appears municipal authorities purchase a lot of different courses from the ROC's. It varies from cycling course to courses for parents concerning the use of internet by their children and adolescents. But also projects focusing on stimulating people to participate in society. The courses were not always focused on improving reading-, writing- and numeracy skills. The question is whether this is the main task of the ROC, the main task of an organisation concerning education. Those projects are better and cheaper if developed by other organisations.

Besides this in 2006 "Stichting Lezen & Schrijven" started chairmanship of Princess Laurentien. Stichting Lezen & Schrijven has, among other things, the purpose to make problems with illiteracy widely known and the Princess and her organisation succeed very well in this project. The amount of adults who participate in courses of language and numeracy is doubled, but is way to low concerning people who suffer from illiteracy.

Interest concerning literacy and numeracy in Dutch education

Within this period, also in vocational education, more attention is paid towards illiteracy and numeracy. For the core business of education, these skills were less important, but the Ministry of OCW has decided to develop a framework for illiteracy and numeracy, in which levels of skills in functioning are established. Within all these forms of education it's necessary to work with these levels. Also in vocational education. Besides the Ministry of OCW decided that these skills has to be assessed with a central generic test in order to determine the level required. If not, one does not get a diploma. In 2010 50 million euro's of 200 million euro's will be used for vocational education instead of adult education. Subsequently in 2011 35 million has been cut down on adult education. Besides in politics recently one started a discussion concerning the budget of adult education, which should, just as in integration (for immigrants), go to the free market. Besides this the discussion about the effort of volunteers concerning adult education is also growing.

Policy MBO Raad concerning adult education

The MBO Raad subsequently underlines the following policy with regard to adult education: Education is education, education is qualifying, education is taught in educational institutions and the national organization for Inspection of Education ensures its quality. The MBO Raad has therefore realised (in cooperation with other organisations) the integration of adult education in the NLQF (Netherlands Qualification Framework), in order that a connection to EQF can be made. The next step was the need for

established levels in literacy and numeracy, just as in the rest of education, but adjusted to adults concerning the "Illiteracy" framework (which started in 2011) formulated as core business of adult education by the Ministry of OCW. More concrete: "Literacy includes listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using that, looking at the frame of common technology, to communicate and handle information". The next step is to realise qualification. In what way can adults obtain a diploma and how does examination look like? Subsequently what is important is good course requirements (including learning materials), but especially also good qualified teachers.

Amendment of the law in adult education

In adult education several changes will be realised starting from the first of January 2013. The budget concerning Adult Secondary Education (VAVO) is no longer spent by municipal authorities to the ROC, but the ROC now receives this budget directly of the Ministry of OCW. The MBO Raad supports the opinion that this should also be the case in basic education. This, therefore, because starting on the first of January 2013, the field of adult education has to realise formal education for adults. Courses in education are determined in regulation concerning the following:

- courses in Dutch language and numeracy, focusing on literacy and numeracy and on the access level of vocational education (level 1F and 2F);
- courses in Dutch as a second language (level 1 and 2), aiming a diploma in Dutch as a second language;
- courses in Dutch as a second language focusing on a basic level of the Dutch language.

Cooperation in the region

Stichting Lezen & Schrijven has received resources from the Ministry of OCW to promote the cooperation in the region between a lot of organisations, which are involved in illiteracy. The MBO Raad shares the opinion the ROC's are an important partner for Stichting Lezen & Schrijven. This public infrastructure can be used to take care of qualitative good education controlled by the national organization for Inspection of Education. In the next few years cooperation has to be established, in which everyone has to contribute by using his or her own expertise and profession.

Learning from each other in Europe

The developments concerning adult education in the Netherlands are not unique. In all European countries adult education, illiteracy, numeracy and basic skills are getting more and more important. Concerning adult education The Netherlands has been able to learn by Ireland. By including the lowest levels in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) concerning adult education "the invisible became visible". Because of that the Netherlands was inspired. Besides that the English program "Skills for life" has initiated an institution in the UK from which the Netherlands can learn. It especially involves the curriculum, which has been developed in order to involve and educate volunteers. And in many countries there also has been thought about the qualification structure for teachers working in adult education. BASKET (Professional Development of Basic Skills Trainers) is an example of a European project, which has been started from the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) in which they discuss education and extra training for teachers

and teacher trainers in adult education. For the Netherlands (and for the MBO Raad in order to be able to realise the investment in this policy) this project is of great importance, because here also raises the question of qualification for teachers. Due to inspirational conversations with experts in a meeting with BASKET in London on the Institute of Education of the University of London we now are working on a basic profile of the teacher in vocational education and training and adult education with different qualifications, under which language and numeracy. The meeting in Bonn produced (based on a presentation of Scottish colleagues) ideas to look at the different roles of volunteers, teachers and specialists. What kind of knowledge and skills do they have to require concerning their involvement in adult education? And do we know what the workforce looks like in the Netherlands? And what training and extra training possibilities are there actually already realized in the Netherlands, which can be used for various groups?

A public infrastructure for illiterate people

The ROC's would like to contribute to education for people with illiteracy. Research points out that by the effort of adult education language skills increased among 60% to 80% of the participants and 40% to 60% of the participants gets a better place in society. Besides that it appears that as a "side effect" 20% of the participants get better opportunities on the labour market. So adult education makes sense and is effective. The MBO Raad shares the opinion that the limited budget that's left over for basic education also has to be part of the national budget for education. Then financing can be arranged based on the amount of participants (input) and performances (output). Then adult education needs to suffice to the quality requirements, which are used in vocational education. Also basic education, after all, is education, makes sense and is effective. This public infrastructure has to be preserved for the 1.5 million people with illiteracy.

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Woerden, December 2012*