

# VET in the Netherlands: Key developments and emerging challenges

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# Aim of the presentation

Discuss in depth how VET has changed during the last two decades and what this tells us about the responsiveness of existing systems.

This provides the basis for a reflection on the future; for which purposes and in what direction European VET needs to develop in the next two decades.

I will discuss:

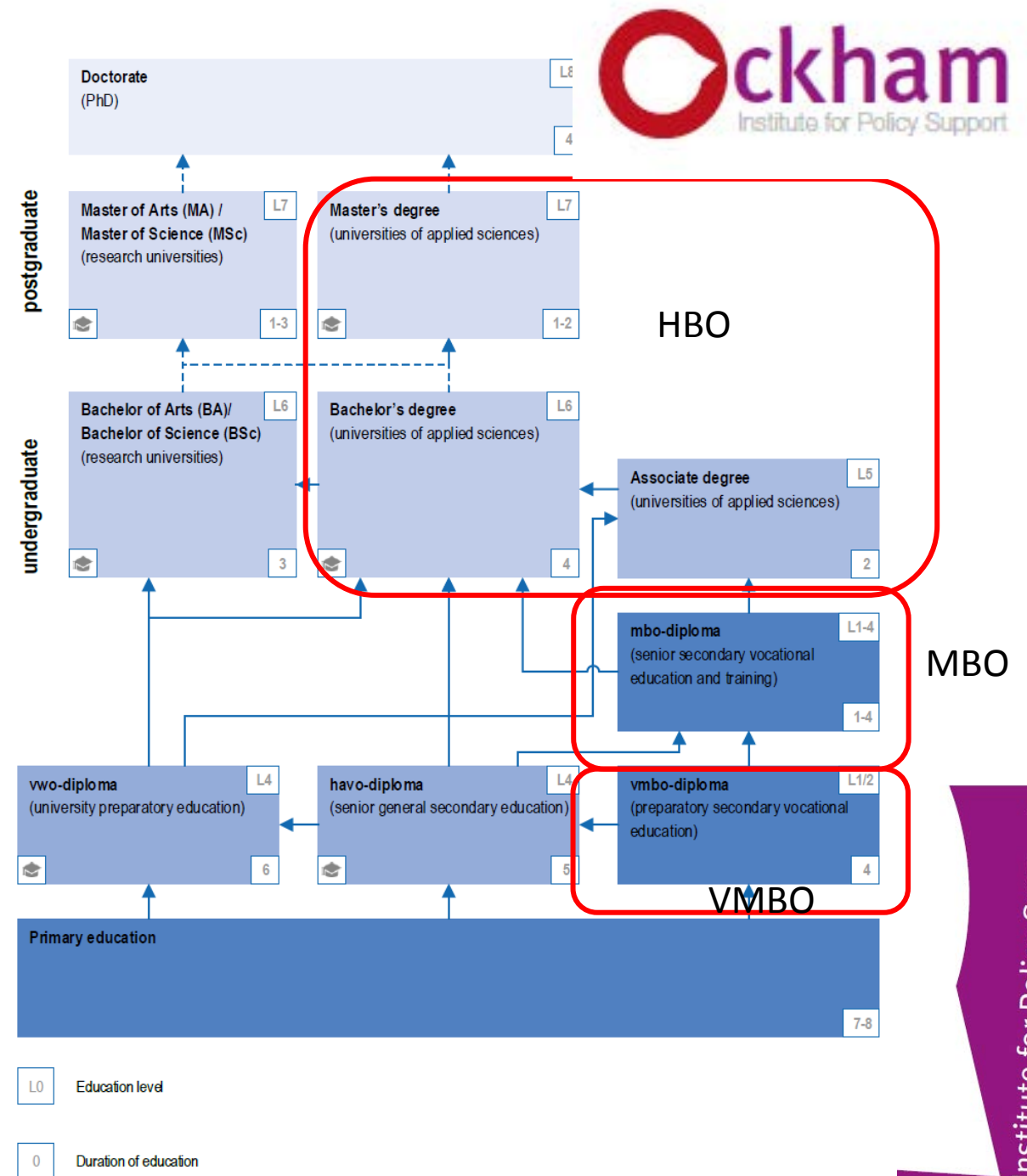
- Key developments
- Indicate dimensions that shape VET in NL in the past and in the future.

# Demarcation

Vocational education ('beroepsonderwijs') is divided into:

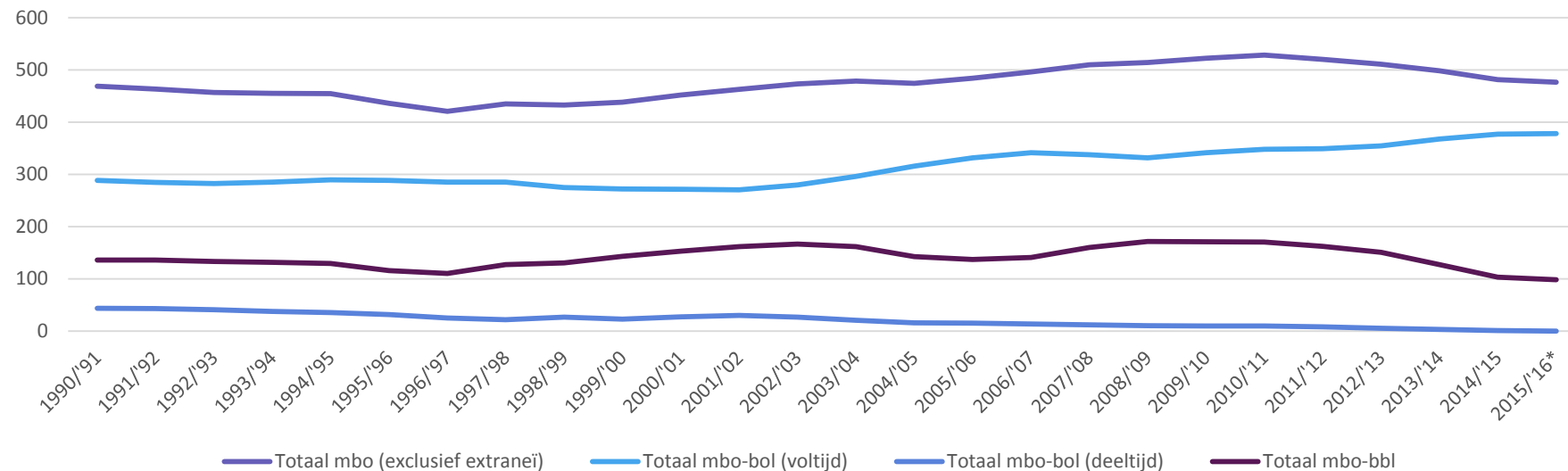
- Pre- vocational Secondary Education (Dutch abbreviation: Vmbo – Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs);
- Secondary Vocational Education (Dutch abbreviation: Mbo- Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs): level 1-4
- Higher Vocational Education (Dutch abbreviation: Hbo – hoger beroepsonderwijs): associate degree, bachelor, master (future PhD?)

When speaking about vocational education one refers in most cases to the 'mbo'.



# Some key characteristics of VET (mbo)

- Two pathways (school ('bol') and work based ('bbl')): communicating vessels
- Threefold qualification purpose:
  - to provide students for the labour market for a specific occupation or occupational field;
  - to provide the basis for further education;
  - to prepare students to fully participate into society.
- 'world-class' VET system; not a good image



# Key development 1: Increase of regulation and autonomy (larger) institutions

The VET system saw an **increase in regulation by the government**, merging schools and institutions and on the other hand an increase of autonomy of the VET schools to design and implement curricula.

- 1980s: many sector specific educational programmes, sector-specific schools. High level of pillarization ('verzuiling') of the Dutch society.
- 1980s: difficulties with complying with increasing regulation (and control) and with keeping pace with the changing demand
- In the 1980s and 1990s, start to merge into larger regional VET colleges.

The introduction of the Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB), in 1996:

- It introduced one national qualification structure
- high level of autonomy for schools in organising the VET.
- two pathways within the same system, namely the school based training and the work based training
- Introduction of qualification dossiers.

The increased autonomy of the Regional VET centres and increasing size has led to scandals and even near bankruptcy.

# Key development 2: Decreasing employers' ownership in VET governance

The **ownership, responsibility and close engagement of employers has throughout the last four decades decreased**. This is partially replaced by effective feedback mechanisms, but that did not prevent the occurrence of a barrier between the world of work and the world of education.

Reduced ownership of employers:

- With the introduction of the WEB in 1996, the role of employers diminished. The responsibility was shifted to the Regional VET colleges
- in 2012, Government Rutte II), the 17 sectoral knowledge centres were integrated in the SBB. Although, this institution is partially employer-owned, it can be seen as another moment where the involvement of employers/companies is diminished.

# Key development 3: Labour market responsiveness has been a main reform-drive

The **labour market responsiveness has been a main reform-drive throughout the last four decades**; what is understood by responsiveness is however undergoing a revision as well with more emphasis on transversal skills focusing more on employability instead of direct employment.

- It underlies the introduction of the WEB in 1996
- It underlies the most recent restructuring of the qualification structure and emphasis on creating more flexibility through elective parts (keuzedelen) and cross-over qualifications.

More flexible to changing demands:

- The recent revision of the Qualification Files (all Qualification Files are renewed by August 2016), allowed the introduction of 'elective parts' and experimentation with cross-over qualifications.
- VET provision is organized in close relationship with the labour market and there are numerous feedback-loops.

However:

- it remains difficult to make use of the facilities and new technological tools and systems in the companies in the education of future employees.
- there is a shortage of technically trained employees in the Netherlands at all levels.



# Key development 4: Competence-based VET and modular approach

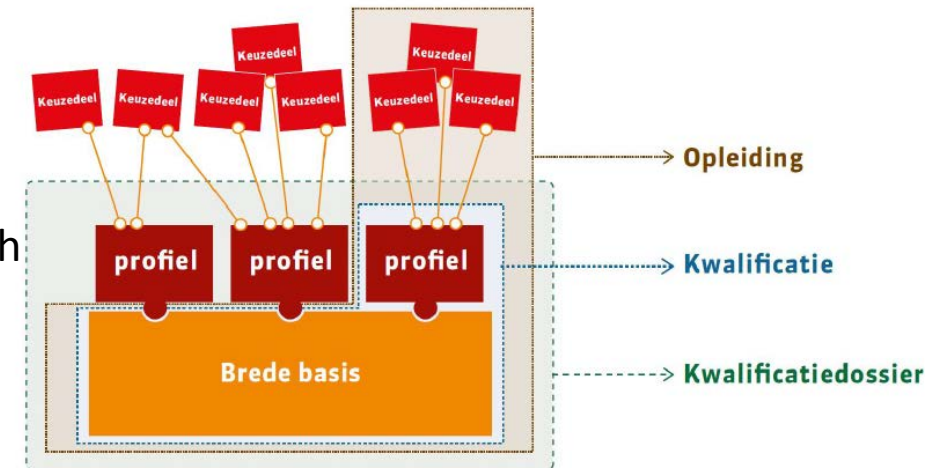
The VET system underwent a gradual transformation from a supply-driven to a demand driven approach. Upon completion of this approach, a more flexible and modular approach is currently being gradually applied.

- Competence-based VET:

- WEB 1996: a shift from learning a subject, to developing a competence related to the profession.
- In 2002 the competence based qualification structure was introduced and from 2004, VET schools began experimenting with competence-based education. The Qualification Files are one important component in this development

- Towards more modular provision:

- 2015: new qualification structures. There was a need for more harmonised language for designing qualifications and they should respond better to the needs of the labour market.
- 2016. all VET schools work with the revised qualification files. With the revision, qualifications are more structured in the basic structure, profile modules and elective modules.
- From 2017 onwards, for VET schools it will be possible to respond to labour market developments by offering cross-over qualifications.





# Key development 5: emergence of VET at higher levels (Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS))

1993 Comprehensive Higher Education and Research Act

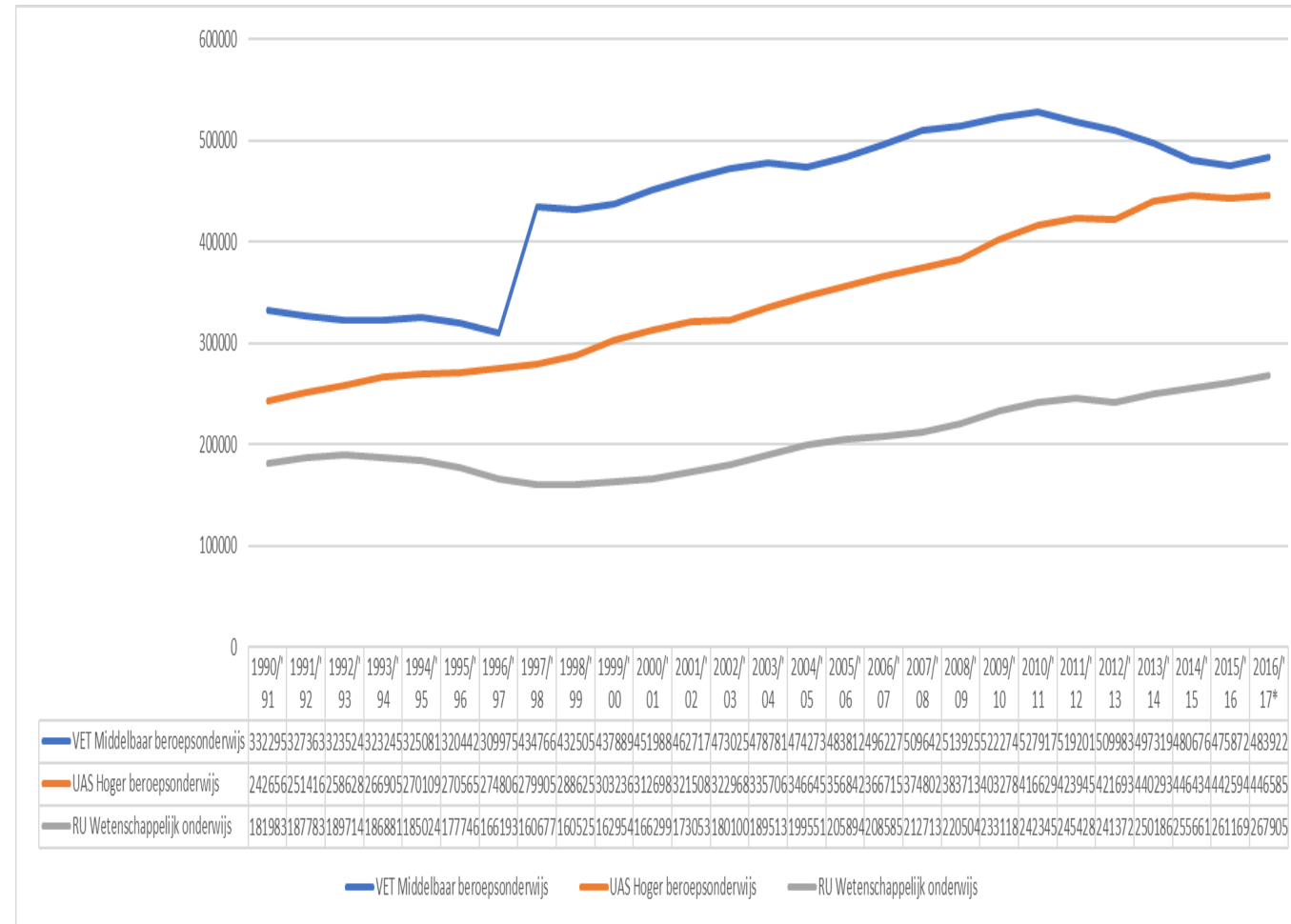
Increase of **student numbers** in UAS: student numbers grew from 181,100 in 1975 to more than 450,000 in 2016.

A reduction in the number of institutions: from 375 in 1983 to 37 in 2016

Increased maturity as a well-recognised, valuable and full part of the higher education sector, as indicated by enhanced institutional autonomy

Introduction of the **Associate Degree** (level 5) as self-standing degree (since 2018; previously, part of BA).

- Transition Qualification between VET and HE
- Enable Life Long Learning, reaching out to working adults



# (Future) challenges for the VET system

Strike a balance between:

- Small – large institutions
- Regulation – autonomy
- Standardisation – flexibility (responsiveness)
- Cooperation – competition
- Higher skills levels (LM demand) – inclusiveness (societal function)
- IVET – lifelong learning
- Employer involvement – employer ownership

Reforms take long (more than a decade): see for instance introduction WEB (1996) and WHW (1993).

Next step: further modularisation?