

Lifelong learning catalyst

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline

2022 Approved/Agreed

2023 Implementation

2024 Implementation

2025 Implementation

ID number 43545

Background

One of the foundations of the Dutch economy is a well-trained workforce. However, due to major societal transitions and the correspondingly changing labour market, training continues beyond completing initial education. For quite some time, lifelong learning has been on the national agenda of education, the government and the business sector. However, the current system of lifelong learning presents four challenges. First, there is insufficient insight into the required knowledge and competences (skills) of the future. Second, there are insufficient opportunities to learn these skills. Third, public education institutions are insufficiently equipped for this challenge. Finally, the learning culture in the Netherlands is insufficiently developed. Given these challenges, the government has honoured the grant for the national Lifelong learning catalyst (*LLO katalysator*).

Objectives

The Lifelong learning catalyst (*LLO katalysator*) aims to achieve an independently functioning lifelong learning ecosystem in which organisations (for example companies) and professionals (adult learners) can adequately respond to the rapidly changing labour market and society. This should lead to higher participation in lifelong learning and thus strengthen economic growth.

The role of the catalyst is to:

- (a) initiate and coordinate cooperation between education, business, and government;
- (b) create new solutions where there are 'gaps';
- (c) provide necessary resources to efficiently and effectively organise national and regional lifelong learning.

Description

The Lifelong learning catalyst (*LLO katalysator*) is an initiative of VET colleges, applied universities and research universities to boost life-long learning nationally and regionally. The *LLO katalysator* project, from 2022 to 2027, focuses on various objectives, including the demand-oriented development of (modular) training programmes.

The education ministry is responsible for the project. To achieve the project's goals, all educational/knowledge institutions, MBO-HBO-WO, work together with regional stakeholders such as economic boards, branches, companies, and institutions. They focus on issues that require collective efforts to achieve results. The education councils of the universities in the Netherlands, the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and the MBO Council play a preparatory role in ensuring that the process gets off to a good start.

The catalyst uses a bottom-up learning approach along economic and social transitions. It starts small, using existing networks. The region is the primary structure for designing, building and testing solutions. When possible, solutions will be upscaled nationally.

The catalyst consists of four building blocks.

- (a) (Building block 1) Mapping the skills of the future. The development of an 'LLO-Radar' provides insight into the skills needed for the future of the (regional) labour market.
- (b) (Building block 2) Encouraging lifelong learning solutions for transitions (e.g. energy transition). The catalyst facilitates and encourages lifelong learning solutions focused on skills needed for the transitions in (existing) cooperation structures or 'co-creation labs'. The catalyst supports the formation of these labs with guidance and practical tools and facilitates knowledge sharing between the regions.
- (c) (Building block 3) Encouraging educational institutions to offer successful, transition-oriented life-long learning solutions in a scalable, affordable, high-quality and accessible structural manner.
- (d) (Building block 4) Stimulating a learning culture. Through targeted advice and public campaigning, employees and employers are activated to participate in life-long learning.

Through regional transition deals between education institutions, organisations and government, training demand and supply are brought together in line with each region's economy, social tasks, and the people working there.

A total of EUR 392 million is available for this project, of which EUR 167 million has been unconditionally allocated for the realisation of the first phase. The remaining EUR 225 million has been conditionally allocated.

2022 Approved/Agreed

This project was in the start-up phase. A pilot in the energy and resource transition was in preparation.

2023 Implementation

On June 2023, the official kick-off of the Lifelong learning catalyst programme took place. This festive event marked the start of the programme's executive phase.

In the first application round for the second and third building blocks, held in October 2023, a total of 43 Lifelong Learning applications were submitted. Of these, nine applications were for the second building block, which focuses on promoting lifelong learning solutions for transitions, and 34 were for the third building block, aimed at professionalising educational and knowledge institutions for lifelong learning. Among the submissions, 14 were for small projects, while 29 were for large projects.

2024 Implementation

The fourth building block, which focuses on fostering a positive learning culture, has not yet been launched. Discussions have been held with various organizations, including the SER, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the NRO, and others involved in learning culture programmes, to avoid duplicating efforts, as many initiatives already exist to promote learning culture. Extensive research has been conducted on factors that foster a positive learning environment, and the Lifelong learning catalyst initiative aims to consolidate and share this knowledge.

Significant differences in learning cultures exist across sectors, with some industries slower to adopt a development-focused mindset. The Lifelong learning catalyst seeks to activate companies and individuals, particularly in SMEs, to participate in lifelong learning programmes. It is also exploring how education can enhance workplace learning cultures, complementing existing initiatives. At the National lifelong learning (LLO) conference on 29 February 2024, a session with Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) gathered input on the fourth building block and explored how learning culture is being addressed in approved applications for the second and third building blocks. This feedback will inform the activity plan for the fourth building block, which will be shared publicly once finalized.

The National lifelong learning (LLO) conference on February 29, 2024, also marked the launch of the first building block, known as the LLO-Radar. This session focused on defining the goals and requirements for the LLO-Radar, identifying key challenges, and setting priorities for its development. The Lifelong learning catalyst is working on various development directions for the LLO-Radar, with the next phase being the pilot stage, where testing and building components of the radar will begin. The process for the first building block is being structured to remain realistic and flexible during implementation, which is essential for developing such innovations.

In July 2024, 36 projects were notified that they would receive grants from the Lifelong Learning Catalyst following the second application round, for which applications were submitted in April 2024. These grants will support projects focused on promoting lifelong learning solutions for transitions (second building block) and professionalising educational and knowledge institutions for lifelong learning (third building block).

2025 Implementation

In 2025, the Lifelong learning catalyst initiative continued to expand. Following the third application round, the Dutch government allocated EUR 36.6 million to 39 new projects in the second and third building blocks, bringing the total number of funded initiatives to 94. These projects focus on collaboration between employers, VET schools, universities of applied sciences, research universities, and private training providers, including sector-specific training schools.

A key priority in this round is reskilling and upskilling professionals for the energy and resource transition, as part of the second building block. Regional initiatives are now underway across the country. Examples include efforts on greening the manufacturing sector (Friesland province), training programmes to support the shift toward circular production in the food industry (food valley region) or training professionals for roles as process coordinators, capable of addressing complex challenges such as grid congestion (port of Rotterdam).

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Council for upper secondary VET schools (MBO Raad)
- Universities of the Netherlands (UNL)
- Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen)

Target group

Learners

Adult learners

Entities providing VET

Companies

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and professional higher education
Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

Subsystem

CVET

Further reading

[Website Lifelong learning catalyst](#)

[Policy letter on addressing labour shortages, June 2022](#)

[News item Council for upper secondary VET schools on formal kick-off of LLO catalyst](#)

[News item on 39 new granted Lifelong learning catalyst projects on lifelong learning, March 2025](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Measures to promote lifelong learning

Several measures have been developed by the education and labour ministries to stimulate enrolment in lifelong learning. The measures concern both the supply side and the demand side of the adult training market.

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

CVET

“ … ” Cite as

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