

Citizenship education

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline

2022 Implementation 2023 Implementation 2024 Implementation

2025 Implementation

ID number 43518

Background

Over recent years, civic education has become more prominent in vocational education and training (VET) and the interest in citizenship education increased. In 2017, this led to the civic agenda, which has now been evaluated and concluded. However, it appears still difficult for VET schools to give civic education a full place in education. At the same time, despite positive developments, the quality of citizenship education is still too often below standards. That is why the education ministry has proposed a new action plan, consisting of a set of measures, to improve the quality of citizenship education and help give citizenship education a structural place in VET curricula.

Objectives

The goal of the action plan and the related set of measures is to improve the quality of citizenship education in VET.

Description

Citizenship education plays a vital role in preparing students for full participation and functioning in society. In the Netherlands, this means fostering a culture of mutual respect, upholding democratic principles and the rule of law, and recognising and respecting individual freedoms. It also means empowering people by strengthening their civic and social skills, and enabling them to develop critical thinking and functioning in society. This includes understanding one's rights and responsibilities and actively questioning them. This approach requires a critical attitude, reflection on how society is organised and on identity issues such as who you are in relation to the others. Citizenship education plays a key role in this and is important not only for the individual, but also for our society as a whole.

The Ministry proposed a set of different measures to improve the quality of citizenship education in VET in the coming years. Among the measures are stricter supervision by the Inspectorate of Education, recalibration of qualification requirements, an exploration of the introduction of an outcome-obligation or a broadening of the current effort-obligation, intensifying the efforts to professionalise teachers, developing tools to monitor the quality of citizenship education and a new collaboration with the minister of Primary and Secondary Education and stakeholders, called *Expertisepunt MBO Burgerschap*. The education ministry is in the lead in implementing the measures, in cooperation with VET providers,

stakeholders, teachers and students. To ensure a careful process, and taking the individual character of citizenship education in VET into account, the ministry decided on the involvement of an independent expert group, consisting of a diverse team of experts, and the stakeholders MBO Raad, NRTO, JOB, BVMBBO, trade unions, teachers and students. The goal of the action plan is to support colleges in shaping their renewed task in citizenship education, in order to improve its quality in VET in the coming years.

2022 Implementation

The education ministry has proposed a set of measures to improve the quality of citizenship education in VET in the coming years.

- (a) Reassessment of citizenship qualification requirements: offer clearer and more coherent content for qualification requirements, be precise about the minimum quality requirements, offer a better match between the learning objectives for citizenship education in lower and upper secondary education.
- (b) Exploring the introduction of a result obligation or an extension of the best efforts obligation: offer an insight into results or introduction of a so called effort obligation (both aspects contributing to quality assurance of citizenship education), in order to secure more clarity regarding possibilities for improvement. In cooperation with VET providers, the education ministry will work out the best way to do this.
- (c) Intensification of teacher professionalisation: good education requires competent teachers. Further professionalisation and a framework of what skills a good citizenship teacher should have, is necessary. New teachers are appointed on the basis of their competence profile, while existing teachers receive necessary training to improve their skills where needed.

The measures are not in effect yet.

Moreover, on July 1, 2022, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture, and Science announced that the existing *Expertisepunt MBO Burgerschap* would formally transition into the broader Expertise Centre for Citizenship. The centre is a joint initiative of four partner organizations: Stichting School & Veiligheid, the Netherlands institute for curriculum development (SLO), ProDemos, and the Kennispunt MBO Burgerschap. It provides up-to-date information, guidance, and support for implementing citizenship education following the introduction of stricter Dutch citizenship legislation in 2021. It serves the entire primary, secondary, and vocational education sectors.

2023 Implementation

The minister commissioned an expert group to provide advice on:

- (a) the essential core content of citizenship education;
- (b) how to introduce stronger obligations for students;
- (c) whether additional legislation or regulations are necessary.

Over the past year, the expert group worked extensively on these recommendations, supported by broad consultations with students, teachers, schools, scientists, and other experts to ensure diverse perspectives informed the advisory report.

Based on the advice of the expert group, the education minister announced the initiation of the process to recalibrate the qualification requirements for citizenship education. Moreover, the minister is taking steps to amend the Education and Vocational Education Act (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs, WEB*) to explicitly outline the current effort-obligation for VET institutions regarding citizenship education.

The proposed amendments will require VET institutions to visibly address the new qualification requirements for citizenship education and monitor students' development in this area. To support the intensification of teacher professionalisation, the minister has allocated an annual budget of EUR 30 million. Finally, the minister has introduced a plan to monitor the citizenship skills of VET students.

2024 Implementation

The proposed amendments to the Education and Vocational Education Act (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*, (WEB) regarding the recalibrated qualification requirements have been postponed until 2026 to allow for the strengthening of the legal foundation first. Additionally, the minister has announced the introduction of an institutional exam for citizenship education.

Following a study that highlighted the diverse educational backgrounds of citizenship teachers, the minister has imposed additional qualification requirements for these teachers. To ensure all students have access to the necessary resources, the minister has allocated an additional EUR 10 million to provide citizenship learning materials free of charge.

2025 Implementation

The proposed legislation amendments to the Education and Vocational Education Act (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs* - WEB) regarding the recalibrated qualification requirements for citizenship education for learners are still under preparation. To support VET colleges to implement the proposed citizenship qualification requirements, the Expertise Centre for Citizenship published guidelines on 29 October 2025. It is planned that, from the 2026/27 school year onwards, citizenship will become a mandatory exam subject for all VET students.

The legislative proposal introducing additional training requirements for teachers is also still being developed. A research report by ResearchNed, KBA & Expertisecentrum Nederlands has been published outlining the goals and content of the supplementary training programmes, which are intended to strengthen the competencies of teachers of basic skills, including citizenship education.

Basic skills, among them citizenship, have now been incorporated into the quality assessments conducted by the Inspectorate of Education. In addition to the existing monitoring of students' Dutch language and numeracy competencies, the minister has also expressed the intention to monitor the citizenship competencies of VET students in the future.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Inspectorate of Education

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Education professionals

Teachers

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Acquiring key competences

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

[Letter to Parliament on reinforcing citizenship education in VET](#)

[Letter to Parliament on reinforcing citizenship education in VET](#)

[Letter to Parliament on tackling basic skills of VET students](#)

[Policy letter on basic skills and citizenship education](#)

[Reaction Council for upper secondary VET schools on citizenship exams](#)

[Policy letter on the progress in the approach to basic skills in VET, Education ministry, 19 May 2025](#)

[Guidelines for the new qualification requirements citizenship](#)

[Legislative proposal amendment to the Education and Vocational Education Act](#)

[Research report outlining the goals and content of the supplementary training programmes, ResearchNed, KBA & Expertisecentrum Nederlands](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Combating discrimination in the workplace

In 2015, within the City deals programme, the labour ministry concluded agreements with the Netherlands' five main cities: Amsterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven, Leeuwarden, Zaanstad (including: their municipalities, schools, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), employers and intermediate organisations

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ … ” Cite as

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Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025
update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/43518>