

# Measures to improve student well-being

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 NETHERLANDS

## Timeline

2021 Design 2022 Design 2023 Implementation 2024 Implementation  
2025 Implementation

ID number 41998

## Background

In 2018, the National Institute on Public Health and Environment (RIVM) stated that the increasing mental pressure on young adults was one of three major societal challenges. Little is known about mental well-being of young adults in the Netherlands, including the more than 500 000 VET students. However, student well-being is an important subject that has the attention of VET colleges. Education institutions regularly have to deal with compromising images of students or teachers that are shared online, for example images or videos with inappropriate or hurtful content. Since the COVID-19 crisis and online teaching, this has increased and new variants have been added, such as screenshots of teachers or fellow students. Further, according to research, VET students did not feel heard by policy makers and researchers during the corona pandemic. The lack of attention piles on the lack of appreciation that VET students already felt in an achievement society in which VET education is labelled as 'low'.

## Objectives

- (a) Providing extra attention to the well-being of students, and VET students in particular, is an important assignment for the future.
- (b) Providing VET colleges with tools and tips to monitor and improve the well-being of students and prevent the spread of compromising images of students and teachers in order to create a safe environment, both within and outside the boundaries of the school.

## Description

There is increasing attention for the well-being of VET-students, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ministry set up different measures to improve the mental well-being of VET students and to monitor this.

### 2021 Design

In 2021, guidelines to prevent dissemination of unwanted images have been

developed and made available for colleges immediately. The problem of sharing sexually tinted, violent or insulting images is their rapid and uncontrollable spread. Spreading these images can have huge negative impact on student well-being. Kennisnet Foundation, in collaboration with the Association of VET Colleges and the School and Safety Foundation, developed an approach for VET colleges to prevent the spread of inappropriate images via social media. The approach, which takes the form of advice to VET colleges, consists of a prevention policy and a calamity policy. The following points have been included in the prevention policy:

- (a) VET colleges include in the school safety plan the rules that learners must adhere to within distance learning and use of social media;
- (b) institutions should provide guidelines on safe use of social media to both students and staff, especially informing about the criminality of insult and letting students devise their own rules;
- (c) VET colleges provide lessons about the spread of inappropriate images; such courses may be given by a citizenship teacher;
- (d) the institution appoints an officer for social media use, whose duties include monitoring the use of social media by students and teachers and acting as a point of contact for questions and problems.

### 2022 Design

This initiative, which initially focused mainly on the spread of compromising images of students and teachers, broadened its perspective. In 2022, a new approach was presented that concerns improving the mental health of the Dutch population. This approach was introduced by various ministries, including the education ministry, and focuses on measures to improve the mental health of the Dutch people. With regard to vocational education, research indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the well-being of VET students; comprehensive understanding of their well-being is vital. To achieve this, it is recommended to establish broad monitoring of the mental health of VET students, in collaboration *with* the VET students themselves, using participatory approaches.

### 2023 Implementation

In November 2023, the first MBO Integrated Safety Monitor 2023 (Integral Safety in VET) was published, focusing on the feelings of safety among students and employees in VET institutions. The monitor's overall conclusion is that while most students and employees feel safe within their institutions, there are notable differences based on factors such as education level, gender, age, sexual orientation, and the presence of a disability. Among employees, the majority also report generally feeling safe.

The research highlights a connection between perceived safety and overall satisfaction, job satisfaction, and the energy derived from work—showing that satisfied employees tend to experience a stronger sense of safety.

In response, the Minister of Education acknowledged the findings and stated that the outcomes require further interpretation and deeper analysis. The minister indicated that next steps would be determined in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

### 2024 Implementation

The results of a student survey (*Studentenpeiling NP Onderwijs*) show a positive trend for student's mental health: in 2023, 17% of students said they had (very) bad mental health, while in 2024 this was 13%.

The education minister shared the results of the study 'If you can't see the wood for the trees: In-depth study of the risk factors and solutions for performance pressure and stress among VET students'. An overarching finding is that perceived performance pressure and stress appear to be largely explained by an accumulation of multiple responsibilities. These responsibilities relate to study, work, internships, and home situations, which seem to result in feelings of overload and a loss of perspective.

In a response to the research report published in December 2024, the minister discusses the findings and recommendations of the researchers and largely endorses the four main recommendations:

- (a) reducing the accumulation of responsibilities and the resulting overload experienced by students;
- (b) strengthening students' skills to cope effectively with performance pressure and stress;
- (c) enhancing the key role of teachers and mentors in supporting student well-being; and
- (d) promoting the recognition and appreciation of VET students and fostering equality between VET, higher professional education and university students.

The minister's policy response focuses primarily on encouraging, continuing and strengthening existing initiatives and programmes that aim to improve student well-being. He notes that many VET colleges use the Lifestyle Test (Testjeleefstijl), funded jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, to assess student well-being. In addition, both the Healthy school approach (Gezonde School aanpak) and the Well-being at school programme (Welbevinden op school) support schools in embedding student well-being into their educational culture, for example by enabling schools to receive guidance from the municipal Healthcare Organisation (GGD). Furthermore, the Student Well-being Programme (Programma Studentenwelzijn, STIJN), launched in late 2023 and running until 2027, supports teachers and education professionals in strengthening student well-being in VET colleges and higher education; As part of the programme, the Trimbos Institute and ECIO (Expertise Centre for Inclusive Education) have established a national network for student well-being. The network brings together education professionals and students to strengthen knowledge sharing, building on the existing network in higher education.

The minister additionally promotes and encourages:

- (a) the development of less intensive curricula, for example through more personalised learning pathways;
- (b) the reduction of workload peaks for students;
- (c) attention to students' financial situation, for instance by ensuring fair and adequate internship compensation;
- (d) the improvement of students' mental-health and study skills;
- (e) targeted support for teachers and mentors;
- (f) closer cooperation with external care and welfare organisations;
- (g) equal recognition and treatment of VET students compared with students in higher education; and
- (h) greater student participation in institutional governance and policy development.

## 2025 Implementation

Regarding the Programme for student well-being, a Framework student well-being (*Framework Studentenwelzijn*) was published in 2025, as well as accompanying guidelines on how to implement this framework.

In reaction to the Integral safety monitor in VET that was published in 2023, the education minister in a January 2025 policy letter mentions that the Working agenda VET (*Werkagenda mbo*) and the quality agenda's (kwaliteitsagenda's) of the VET institutions aim to improve the social safety at VET schools, as well as at companies where students are learning. Furthermore, the Internship pact (*Stagepact, 2023-2027*) aims to end internship discrimination which also relates to the feeling of safety.

The minister supports VET institutions to work on stronger safety policy themes such as discrimination, sexual misconduct and crime. The education ministry provides funding to the School and Safety Foundation (Stichting School en Veiligheid, SSV), the national expert organisation that supports schools in primary, secondary, and vocational education in creating a safe school climate. VET institutions can submit specific requests for advice to SSV's advisory desk and make use of the many available tools and guidelines, such as the Digital safety plan, a guideline for schools to

outline the school policy concerning social safety.

The State Secretary has asked SSV to give additional attention to supporting primary, secondary, and vocational education in developing and implementing sound safety policies. Additionally, in the same policy letter the minister stresses the importance of increasing awareness of the role of the confidential counsellor within the institution and the professional development of these counsellors. VET institutions can receive support from SSV in this regard. Furthermore, there is a guide for confidential counsellors in VET, and there are professional development opportunities available for confidential counsellors in education.

The minister aims to expand the network of expertise for social safety, which was formed in 2022 by 15 organisations (a.o. the Council for Primary Education and the Council for Secondary Education), in cooperation with the education ministry and its 'wayfinding website' that already exists for primary and secondary school, to also include VET. This network provides information on social safety, focused on how to teach students about setting boundaries, sexual orientation and gender identity. The Integral Safety Monitor in VET points out that there are specific vulnerable groups that experience a lack of safety. The education ministry provides the funding for the project 'All Inclusive' which was recently extended until July 2025. This project is a cooperation between SSV, theatre producers with a focus on human rights (Theater AanZ) and the interest group for LGBT+ people (COC Nederland), and is aimed at countering exclusion and discrimination together with teachers and students in VET.

On sexual misconduct, there have been conversations between the government commissioner and VET students. The government commissioner wants to stimulate continuity on this topic in all levels of education and is working together with the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad), Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB), Interest Group for upper secondary VET Students (JOB MBO) and the directors of the VET institutions. In addition, the education minister plans to facilitate a pilot to further develop the GELIJKSPEL-programme to make it suitable for use in VET. This programme has been developed for higher education students to make them discuss respectful manners around sex.

As VET colleges are dealing with more extreme problems on aggression and crime, the minister has ordered SSV to develop an approach in 2025, to be able to better support schools in primary, secondary and vocational education in safety challenges in violence, drugs and crime.

## **Bodies responsible**

- Council for upper secondary VET schools (MBO Raad)
- Foundation for Education and ICT (Stichting Kennisnet)
- School and Safety Foundation (Stichting School en Veiligheid)
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

## **Target group**

### **Learners**

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

## **Thematic categories**

### **Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation**

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

# European priorities in VET

## VET Recommendation

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET promoting equality of opportunities

## Subsystem

IVET

## Further reading

[Guideline for the prevention of dissemination of unwanted images](#)

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[Policy letter about an approach on improving mental health](#)

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[Factsheet on monitoring mental well-being VET students in the future \(annex to the policy letter\)](#)

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[Factsheet on research on the well-being of VET students during the COVID-19 pandemic \(annex of the policy letter\)](#)

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[Policy letter about the Monitor Integral Safety in VET, December 2023](#)

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[Letter to parliament on the student well-being approach in VET and higher education, Ministry of Education, 4 July 2023](#)

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[Policy letter of the education minister, September 2024](#)

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[Letter to parliament with policy response to research into stress and performance pressure among VET students, Ministry of Education, 2 December 2024](#)

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[Web page presenting the activities of the Programme Student Well-being](#)

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[Website of the Healthy School approach](#)

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[Letter to parliament with policy response to the Monitor Integral Safety in VET 2023, Ministry of Education, 15 January 2025](#)

### “ … ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Measures to improve student well-being: Netherlands. In 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/41998>