

# Inclusive education for VET

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 NETHERLANDS

## Timeline



ID number 40022

## Background

In recent years, efforts have been made to make primary and secondary education more accessible for learners with special educational needs (SEN), who would typically be in special primary (SO/SBO) or secondary special education (VSO). Also, more customisation in VET for SEN learners should enable them to enter and complete a study programme.

Contrary to primary and secondary education, VET does not have a separate education system in which special needs learners can receive specialist and intense support and guidance. Therefore, VET schools design their own learning and assessment methods, considering learners' potential limitations from the beginning of the programme. They are also obliged to justify the way they apply inclusive education in their annual report. Schools advise these learners about the programmes best suited for them, increasing their chances to complete them and get a degree or qualification for a certain profession. They upload on their website the type of support they offer. Learners' educational contracts include, as an appendix, the agreement on the specific support each one should receive. Learners can also get a statement from the school when they are not capable of complying with all the demands of obtaining a diploma but want to do the study programme anyway.

In 2014, the Inclusive Education (*Passend onderwijs*) Act was introduced. One of the elements of the act was a shift in the financing system from central government to the regions. Participation of SEN learners in VET is mainly regulated by the law on equal treatment for students with handicaps and chronic sickness. According to this law, VET schools are obliged to adapt their education courses to also cater to students with disabilities. Examples of adaptations in the study programmes are changes to the amount of supervised education hours and/or practical training or adapted examination procedures. VET aims to ensure accessibility for a broad group of potential learners. Inclusive education (*Passend Onderwijs*) enables them to complete a VET programme by offering them additional support if necessary, taking away possible obstacles and offering tailored education to each learner.

## Objectives

The aim of the improvement agenda for inclusive education in VET for 2020-25 is to further ease the entry of special needs learners and learners with disabilities to VET and give them the adequate extra guidance they need to complete a VET programme.

## Description

In October 2020, the education ministry presented to parliament (in a policy letter) the Improvement agenda for inclusive education in VET for 2020-25.

In this letter, the minister, based on the evaluation of inclusive education in VET (*Passend Onderwijs in het MBO*) and on advice from the Education Council (Onderwijsraad), both issued in 2020, concluded that although learners are mostly satisfied with the support provided by VET schools, there is still room for improvement. The importance of inclusive education in VET is high, because one third of the students have to deal with learning difficulties, disabilities or chronic diseases. These learners are at risk of exclusion. Also, students with a migration background, including refugees, need extra support for further education and access to the labour market. The agenda was drafted after extensive consultation with many stakeholders (JOB, JongPIT, Ieder(in), Ouders en Onderwijs, the MBO council (MBO Raad), AOB, BVMBO, SBB, VNG, Ingrado, VNO-NCW en MKB-Nederland). The labour and health ministries were also closely involved. All parties are committed to work jointly on realising tailored education approaches addressing learners' specific needs in the best possible way. The agenda is focused on four central points:

- (a) learners' intake and parents' involvement;
- (b) improving the quality of in-school support offered by education teams;
- (c) promoting cooperation among schools and youth and adult care institutions;
- (d) enhancing career guidance during internships and when entering the labour market.

### 2020 Approved/Agreed

In October 2020, the Improvement agenda on inclusive education in VET (2020-25) was approved and put into effect.

### 2021 Approved/Agreed

In 2021, the Improvement agenda was still being worked on.

### 2022 Implementation

In 2022, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science provided an update on the Improvement agenda. According to the update, progress has been made on the four central points of the agenda, but further steps are still necessary. The progress made on the four central points is described as follows:

- (a) improving of learners' admission and parents' involvement: the goal is to gather all relevant information about facilities for students with functional limitations or support needs who want to study MBO on one website. Over the past years, the relevant website with the title mbo accessible, has been improved and a guide for students suffering from a chronic disease has been developed. To improve the involvement of parents a parent network is being established.
- (b) improving the quality of support provided by teaching teams: to strengthen the quality of support, institutions organized knowledge sharing sessions and developed practical handouts.
- (c) improving cooperation between VET schools, youth care and adult care: in 2022, an inspiration document was developed to provide examples of cooperation between VET schools and stakeholders in the social domain. The document outlines which stakeholders are relevant partners for certain issues.
- (d) improving guidance for students with support needs during internships and their first steps on the labour market: a manual on guiding students with extra support needs in internships and on the labour market (*BPV-handboek*) has been developed. It includes overviews, tips and information for professionals.

### 2023 Implementation

In 2023, the Minister of Education provided a further update on the Improvement agenda. While progress has been made on the agenda's four central objectives, further steps are still necessary. The progress made on the four central points is described as follows:

(a) improving of learners' admission and parents' involvement:

First, despite progress, one in three students still reports insufficient information about additional support during the initial phase of their programme, and half of all students remain unaware of where to seek help with support-related questions. To address this, the Expertise Centre for Inclusive Education (*Kennispunt MBO Passend Onderwijs*) and the Council for Upper Secondary VET Colleges have developed a roadmap for the enrolment process, aimed at providing clearer guidance. Second, with regard to parental involvement, half of VET colleges now implement active policies to engage parents. Examples include inviting parents to meetings and organising dedicated information sessions for them;

(b) improving the quality of support provided by teaching teams:

Since 1 August 2023, VET colleges are required to formalise support agreements before a student is enrolled. Furthermore, teaching teams were not directly surveyed this year on the progress that has been made. Nevertheless, training managers have sometimes observed a lack of sufficient expertise within their teams highlighting a need for additional professional development to ensure the provision of appropriate education;

(c) improving cooperation between VET colleges, youth care and adult care:

The Netherlands Youth Institute (*Nederlands Jeugdinstituut*) has published a report that provides an overview of issues students may face across various life domains. It also includes several practical examples of successful collaborations;

(d) improving guidance for students with support needs during internships and their first steps on the labour market:

Awareness of inclusive education during internships and the transition to the labour market has increased. However, the implementation progress has been limited due to a lack of capacity, knowledge, and expertise within educational institutions and training companies. To address this, the education ministry has launched a training programme titled "Guidance During Internships and Apprenticeships (BPV) and the First Steps on the Labour Market". This programme incorporates best practices from the "Manual for Guiding Students with Support Needs" (*BPV-handboek*).

In February 2023, the Joint agenda for VET, (*werkagenda MBO*) was published, a covenant between national VET stakeholders. The ambitions of the Improvement agenda, are also outlined in this working agenda for VET. Signatories have committed to sustained efforts to ensure appropriate education for learners with special educational needs (SEN) in the years ahead.

## 2024 Implementation

In June, a new scheme regarding inclusive assessment in VET has been published in the Government Gazette (*Staatscourant*). This scheme applies, action-oriented working, by examining the barriers a student faces during assessment and removing them. Before this new scheme, it was only explained what special arrangements were possible for certain common disabilities. The terminology used is closely aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Act Equal Treatment, regarding disability or chronic illness. Furthermore, the regulations explicitly state that students with chronic diseases can receive adjustments during assessments even without a statement from an expert.

In August 2024, the Expertise Centre for Inclusive Education (*Kennispunt MBO Passend Onderwijs*) published guidance to support education professionals in translating the inclusive-education framework into practice in their VET college. The guidelines offer accessible tips, advice, and clear explanation of the legislation requirements.

In December, the 2024 Monitor on inclusive education in VET (*Monitor Passend Onderwijs mbo 2024*) was published. It reported on the progress of implementation of

the 'Improvement agenda for inclusive education in VET 2020-25'. The 2024 assessment reported continued positive progress in the implementation of the Improvement agenda for inclusive education in VET. Students with support needs are generally satisfied with the assistance they receive, yet implementation remains under pressure due to high staff workload, limited capacity for individualised guidance and insufficient attention to staff well-being. Between one quarter and one third of surveyed students still experience challenges related to inadequate support, limited understanding of their needs and unclear communication.

The survey also shows that students with support needs are rarely refused entry to VET; those who meet the formal requirements are usually admitted, although around 10% refrain from applying due to unclear information about admission procedures and available support. Since 2023, the obligation to formalise and annually review support arrangements for students with disabilities or chronic illnesses has increased administrative burden, but has improved documentation. There is a growing shift towards offering basic support rather than additional, diagnosis-based support, which has broadened access but created extra pressure on teaching teams and highlighted shortages in staff and financial resources. Support during internships and the transition to the labour market has improved, although providing inclusive support in workplace settings remains difficult due to limited expertise and capacity. Nearly 80% of municipalities hosting VET institutions have established agreements on youth and municipal support, often at regional level, but the type, scope and accessibility of this support vary considerably. Municipalities generally view their support as effective, yet the survey identifies a need for closer cooperation and clearer delineation of responsibilities between VET institutions, municipalities and external care partners.

### 2025 Implementation

The Improvement agenda for inclusive education in VET is planned to reach its completion in 2025. The Minister has indicated that the outcomes of the 2024 Monitor on Inclusive Education in VET (*Monitor Passend Onderwijs mbo 2024*) will inform the development of new policy in this area. As of October 2025, the forthcoming policy has not yet been announced.

Following a petition and a citizen letter expressing concerns about the difficulty of the mathematics exam for students with dyscalculia and other persistent numeracy problems, the Minister commissioned research into this issue in VET. The research report, published on 19 May 2025, confirms that a small group of students are unable to pass the mathematics exam due to such difficulties. For these students, it is essential to make use of available provisions, such as extended exam time or adjusted test formats. The Minister has committed to working with the sector to ensure that these support measures are better communicated and more effectively used. In addition, the Minister has asked the MBO Exams Cooperative (Coöperatie Examens MBO) to continue refining and improving adapted examinations for students with special needs.

## Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
- Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport
- Council for upper secondary VET schools (MBO Raad)

## Target group

### Learners

Learners with disabilities

### Entities providing VET

## Thematic categories

### Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Lifelong guidance

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET promoting equality of opportunities

### Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

## Subsystem

IVET

## Further reading

[Policy letter on the evaluation of inclusive education and the advice of the Onderwijsraad, Education ministry, 5 October 2020](#)

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[Policy letter on the progress report on inclusive education, Education ministry, 24 June 2022](#)

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[Website 'mbo accessible', which provides information on support options for students in VET](#)

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[Policy letter on the progress of the Improvement agenda for inclusive education in VET, Education ministry, 21 December 2023](#)

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[Regulation regarding inclusive assessment in VET, Government Gazette, 31 June 2024](#)

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[Monitor on inclusive education in VET - survey 2024, KBA, ECBO, ResearchNed, 03 December 2024](#)

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[Guidelines for appropriate education in secondary vocational education, Kennispunt MBO Passend Onderwijs, August 2024](#)

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[Policy letter on the progress of the early school leaving action plan, Education ministry, 24 May 2025](#)

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[Reaction to a citizen letter on solutions for students with dyscalculia in VET, Education ministry, 26 May 2025](#)

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Inclusive education for VET: 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/40022>