

Macro-efficiency in VET

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline



ID number 36269

Background

The Act on macro-efficiency in VET came into force in 2015. The main reason for introducing this act was the imbalance between the number of learners enrolling in different VET programmes and the demand in the relevant sectors of the labour market. Second, there were inefficiencies and overlaps in the supply of training as too many regional providers were offering courses preparing for a particular VET qualification. Consequently, there were too few learners per VET college (MBO school) and negative effects for their manageability and the quality of courses.

Objectives

The aim of the law is to achieve a better match between the training offer and labour market demands and subsequently a more efficient spatial distribution of the training offer for labour market needs and accessibility for learners (travelling distances).

Description

Self-regulation is a tradition in the VET sector, but the Act on macro-efficiency in VET gives the Minister for Education the right to deprive a VET college of its rights in case of non-compliance with one of the following obligations:

- (a) to allocate learners to courses with a sufficient labour market perspective;
- (b) to achieve an efficient regional distribution of VET programmes.

The Council for upper secondary VET schools (*MBO Raad*) and the Cooperation organisation for vocational education, training, and the labour market (SBB) have been in charge of working out the details of the act. They have developed a method to assess VET colleges' performances on both criteria. The Minister for Education was satisfied with the initiatives taken by the sector but has the right to intervene if necessary. The government expects the VET sector to take action if the obligations are neglected by a particular college.

A second issue related to macro-efficiency is how VET schools and their boards will anticipate and deal with the expected decline in enrolments. The government may eventually intervene and take a more active role if necessary.

The act aims to benefit VET learners, who will have better chances to find a job related to their training. An independent commission for macro-efficiency in VET (CMMBO) was also set up to serve as an advisor to the ministry.

2015 Implementation

The act came into force in 2015 and is in the implementation phase. The VET sector is still developing methods to implement the act in practice. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science evaluated its implementation in 2019 and retains the competence to deprive VET colleges of rights if the implementation by VET colleges is unsatisfactory.

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

The 2019 evaluation of the law on macro-efficiency shows that the impact of the act, particularly for increased regulation of surplus education and student flows, was limited at first, but is now underway.

On 20 June 2019, SBB published the effects of applying the new efficiency method; at the request of the Minister for Education, SBB had applied the method to four popular VET qualifications: artists, desk-top publishing (DTP)/media making, fashion and media design. One of the main conclusions of SBB was that influx reducing measures needed to be taken for these qualifications.

2020 Implementation

The measure is operational and runs as a regular practice.

2021 Implementation

The measure is operational. In 2021, the Commission on Macro efficiency MBO published advice on economic and administrative qualifications, due to concerns about their labour market value. Especially at EQF level 2, the labour market value of qualifications is limited. Yet, at higher levels, the qualifications provide better access to the labour market. These qualifications are often used by students for orientation and upskilling, especially by those students who have not yet developed a clear view on the educational and occupational path they want to follow. Therefore, the Minister for Education concludes that, although labour market relevance at lower levels is limited, in all regions these qualifications should remain available.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, the Commission on Macro efficiency MBO published a new advice on economic and administrative qualifications. This advice includes a preliminary outline of an ideal-typical way to shape education, in order to strengthen equity of opportunity.

Also in 2022, a taskforce called Educating with Opportunities, (Kansrijk Opleiden), was appointed. On behalf of the Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB), this taskforce formulated a course of action on macro-efficiency in VET and the labour market. This taskforce identified 5 central points that are needed to face challenges regarding macro-efficiency:

- (a) offering an entirely practice based, continuing pathway, from pre-vocational secondary education to higher professional education, as an equivalent route alongside the theoretical route
- (b) strengthening information and orientation before and during studies, and adjusting of regulations that hinder this,
- (c) promoting cooperation between schools as well as between schools and companies to continue promising education and better fulfil the duty of care that educational institutions have,
- (d) reinforcing the use of VET infrastructure that is already in place and
- (e) further improving of regional cooperation, especially in the field of lifelong learning, to make the existing cooperation more fruitful.

The taskforce developed a four-point approach to address the challenges in education and the labour market:

- (a) Atlas on educating with opportunities: a comprehensive resource containing facts, figures, research, trends, and developments.
- (b) long-term agendas: created by sector chambers to outline strategic goals and actions.
- (c) binding agreements: commitments specifying what each stakeholder contributes based on their roles and capabilities.
- (d) arbitration mechanism: a process to intervene if stakeholders fail to reach agreements on sectoral commitments or do not fulfil them.

2023 Implementation

The Board of the Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market (*Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven, SBB*) is tasked with translating the taskforce's advice into concrete actions. The Atlas VET and labour market has already been published, providing essential insights. Additionally, three pilots are underway in sector chambers to develop and implement long-term agendas.

2024 Implementation

The representatives of the labour market in the board of the Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB) informed the minister of their decision to withdraw from the Educating with Opportunities project. They cited the inability to establish cooperative and binding agreements within the SBB board as the primary reason for this decision.

The representatives of VET within the SBB expressed regret over their labour market partners' decision and reaffirmed their willingness to continue the project collaboratively. However, both parties ultimately agreed to end their joint efforts on the initiative. The minister is now assessing the consequences of this decision and discussing the next steps.

Given the decline in enrolments and student numbers, the minister has requested the regions most affected by this trend to develop plans to address the issue. From 2025 to 2027, these regions will receive EUR 90 million to safeguard the quality and availability of VET. The funding can be utilised to improve coordination among VET colleges, strengthen their regional presence, or facilitate mergers with other institutions.

2025 Implementation

The Dutch government is responding to sharply declining VET student numbers in several regions - projected to drop by more than 25% in some areas by 2038 - which threaten the quality and accessibility of provision, particularly outside the Randstad. To address this, EUR 90 million has been allocated for 2025-2027 under the MBO Work agenda Working together on talent, through the Scheme for additional resources for MBO student decline. VET colleges in affected regions must develop joint regional plans demonstrating how they will maintain a future-proof and regionally balanced

training offer. In the first round, five regions (Achterhoek & Twente, Groningen & Drenthe, Friesland, Noord-Holland Noord and Zeeland) received EUR 67 million for measures such as safeguarding EQF level one to two programmes, creating regional learning hubs, sharing facilities and restructuring technical provision, while three regions were asked to refine their plans ahead of a second submission round.

The Minister also shared insights from the Macro-Efficiency Committee (CMMBO), which highlights cross-regional challenges and contributes to the development of the forthcoming Pact on Training for the Labour Market of the Future. The committee found significant differences between regions in developing collaboration structures; while some regions can be considered to be pioneers, in other regions forming plans is still at an early stage. Differences in levels of organisation between regions determines how vocational education (*MBO*) can connect; this is a key explanation for why the quality and intensity of collaboration between institutions gets better off the ground in one region, compared to other regions. The Minister will use these insights in the next step of elaborating this Pact.

A broader reform of MBO funding is being prepared for 2029 to secure long-term regional accessibility, with the Minister emphasising the growing need for collaboration rather than competition among VET colleges to sustain high-quality provision in shrinking regions.

Bodies responsible

- Council for upper secondary VET schools (MBO Raad)
- Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB)
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Commission on Macro efficiency MBO (CMMBO)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

Cooperation organisation for vocational education, training and the labour market (SBB), news item

Policy letter, education ministry, Reaction on second advice CMMBO on economic and administrative qualifications, 9 November 2021

Policy letter on the CMMBO advice on economic and administrative education

Policy letter on the Taskforce Asscher and CMMBO (Taskforce Educating with Opportunities / "Kansrijk Opleiden") on strengthening the connection between education and labour market

Advice of the Taskforce Education with Opportunities

Policy letter on progress with regard to Kansrijk Opleiden

Atlas VET and labour market

Policy letter on the impasse in the project Educating with Opportunities

Letter of the representatives of the labour market in the board of the Cooperation organisation (SBB)

Letter of the representatives of VET in the board of the Cooperation organisation (SBB)

Policy letter on declining student numbers

Letter of CMMBO to the Minister of Education on Cross-regional observations from initial discussions on the MBO Shrinkage Scheme (April, 2025)

“ … ” **Cite as**

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