

Strengthening the position of VET students

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline



ID number 36236

Background

Every young person, regardless of their financial or personal situation, should have equal access to education to develop themselves to the maximum.

Objectives

The legislation aims to strengthen the position of upper secondary VET students via six measures.

Description

Although the law focuses on VET students in a vulnerable position, it is also relevant to all VET students.

The legislation introduces VET student funds and a fund at each VET institution for the support of vulnerable students aiming to reduce dropout rates due to financial reasons. Each public VET college (MBO) is responsible for creating its own VET student fund. For this purpose, it may use resources from the general funding it receives from the government (lump sum). The lump sum will be increased by EUR 10 million per year for this purpose.

The law also includes measures specifically focusing on pregnant MBO students.

In addition, it enables VET colleges to issue VET declarations (*MBO verklaring*). The introduction of VET declarations intends to provide early school leavers with a statement of their study achievements. The VET declaration will state, for example, test and assessment results, examination components obtained, the learning experiences in the workplace, etc. The declaration helps students to validate what they are capable of and in doing so it eases their transition to the labour market. Currently, the Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB) is testing a prototype in the education and business communities.

Finally, to strengthen the position and status of VET learners, the term student has been introduced in laws and formal regulations to replace the rather vague concept participant.

2019 Legislative process

The legislative proposal to strengthen the position of MBO students was issued.

2020 Approved/Agreed

The law to strengthen the position of VET students was adopted in July 2020 and entered into force on 1 August 2020, except for the VET student fund and the VET declaration, which will enter into force on 1 August 2021.

2021 Implementation

The template of the VET declaration was published in the Official Gazette in January 2021.

Legislation on VET (WEB) stipulates that every VET college has a student council. The Youth Organisation for VET (JOB) and the council for VET colleges (MBO raad) presented a document describing student facilitation of representation throughout the education process. This document can be used by schools and student councils to record the support needed for establishing and running such a council (for instance, guidance or coaching by a teacher or staff member, working and meeting spaces for the student council, and help with communication so all learners in VET schools are informed).

The 2021 bill on the Improvement of the legal protection of VET learners proposes changes to the Adult and vocational education act (WEB) into force as from August 2023. The bill affirms the universal right for all VET learners to be informed of their rights and obligations. It also tightens the preconditions for the duty of care of schools regarding learners with disability or chronic illness; the aim is to enable better monitoring by the education inspectorate as, according to the education ministry, there is still a significant number of learners that indicate they lack sufficient support. It also foresees changes in the Adult and vocational education act (a new article) to ensure extra care for learners with disabilities or chronic diseases (for instance, accessible facilities for learners to submit a complaint or objection).

2022 Implementation

Within the legislative proposal on the reinstatement of the basic scholarship in higher education, several changes are proposed to align the position of students in VET to higher education students. The bill abolishes, amongst others, the additional earning limit in VET and aligns the repayment requirements in VET with those already in place for students in higher education (i.e. from 15 to 25 years).

2023 Implementation

According to the parliamentary letter on equal treatment for VET students, the Dutch government outlines efforts to ensure equitable treatment for students in upper secondary vocational education (MBO). The document highlights the following key points:

- (a) Participation of VET students in student life: the Working Agenda on VET (*Werkagenda MBO*) outlines agreements to promote the equal participation of VET students in student life. Municipalities, VET institutions, and the Youth Organisation for VET (JOB) collaborate to create opportunities that align VET student experiences with those of their peers in higher education. Examples include organising a joint introductory period with higher education students, facilitating membership in student sports clubs, and ensuring access to shared catering and social facilities.
- (b) Financial provisions: Financial equity is also addressed within the legislative proposal to reinstate the basic scholarship. A significant measure is the alignment of interest rates on additional loans for VET students with those applied to higher

education students. Previously, the lower interest rate was exclusive to higher education, but this provision ensures greater financial parity for VET students.

(c) Participation in decision-making: to strengthen student participation in decision-making, the Council for Upper Secondary VET Schools (*MBO Raad*) and the Youth Organisation for VET (JOB) have committed to developing guidelines for facilitating student councils within VET institutions. To ensure the quality and effectiveness of these efforts, the Minister of Education will initiate a biennial monitoring exercise starting in 2024, focusing on the progress and impact of student participation initiatives in VET.

2024 Implementation

According to the April 2024 newsletter on VET (Vocational Education and Training) published by the Dutch education ministry (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*), a temporary measure has been introduced to promote equal treatment between underage VET students and their peers in higher education. The measure aims to address the costs of textbooks and licenses for VET students under the age of 18, who are not eligible for student grants unlike their older counterparts or higher education students.

Starting from the 2024/2025 academic year, these students will receive an allowance of up to EUR 60. Implementation of this allowance will be entrusted to the VET institutions, which can choose from three options: providing a discount voucher worth EUR 60, transferring EUR 60 directly to eligible students, or supplying books or licenses valued at EUR 60. This initiative seeks to alleviate financial burdens and ensure equitable access to essential educational materials for underage VET students.

2025 Implementation

The 2025 report on the equal treatment of MBO students compared with higher education students shows that MBO learners still face substantial barriers to participating fully in student life, including restrictions in accessing student sports and cultural activities, unequal financial provisions, limited accommodation options, and obstacles linked to local regulations and institutional practices. The report highlights the great diversity within the MBO student population and emphasises that municipalities and educational institutions can play a key role in improving accessibility by adapting policies and removing unnecessary barriers. It concludes that national legislation should also be adjusted where needed to ensure that MBO students receive equal opportunities and support, enabling an inclusive and meaningful student experience.

In a policy letter to parliament in May 2025, the Minister of Education send his reaction on the abovementioned research report on the equal treatment of VET students. The minister reaffirms his commitment to the implementation of the agreements on equal treatment as outlined in the Working Agenda on VET. He also expresses the hope that the report's findings will provide municipalities and VET institutions with practical tools and best practices to create a more inclusive and accessible student experience for VET students, tailored to their specific needs.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Learners with disabilities

Thematic categories

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET promoting equality of opportunities

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

[Legislative proposal to strengthen the position of MBO students](#)

[Publication of the Act to strengthen the position of VET students in the Official Gazette](#)

[Publication of a document regarding the facilitation of student councils in VET](#)

[Policy letter on retroactive deregistrations, education ministry, 14 October 2021](#)

[Memo in response to the report regarding improvement of legal protection for MBO-students, education ministry, 27 May 2021](#)

[Legislative proposal on the reinstatement of the basic scholarship in higher education](#)

[Policy letter on equal treatment of VET students, July 2023.](#)

[News item, Financial compensation for textbooks and licences for minor VET students, 24 April 2024](#)

[2025 report of ECBO on the needs of MBO students in student life issues](#)

[2025 Policy letter accompanying the 2025 report on equal treatment of MBO students](#)

Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Strengthening the position of VET students: 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/36236>

