

Bridging routes between pre-vocational and upper secondary VET

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline

2016 Implementation	2017 Implementation	2018 Implementation
2019 Implementation	2020 Implementation	2021 Implementation
2022 Implementation	2023 Implementation	2024 Implementation
2025 Implementation		

ID number 36189

Background

In 2010, an intensive debate with teachers, school leaders, administrators, and businesses on the renewal of pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) started. It led to amendments to the Secondary Education Act that entered into force in August 2016.

Objectives

The reform puts VMBO in a better position to:

- (a) respond to changes and needs of upper secondary VET and the regional labour market;
- (b) address the decline in student numbers and fragmentation.

Description

New programmes in pre-vocational secondary education were introduced in August 2016, renovating content (in line with modern occupational practice and curriculum developments in upper secondary VET-MBO) and structure (over 30 programmes will be replaced by 10 flexible profiles).

In February 2017 and May 2018, the education ministry sent a letter to parliament on the subject of Strong VET (*Sterk beroepsonderwijs*). Following the advice of the Education Council in June 2015 and in response to the manifesto for the future of upper secondary vocational education issued by the council of VET colleges (*MBO Raad*, April 2016), measures to redesign and reposition pre-vocational education were explored. All stakeholders were consulted on how to strengthen the position of pre-vocational education and upper secondary VET in the education system. Measures include:

- (a) strong regional cooperation between upper secondary VET schools, pre-vocational schools and the business community to smooth the transition from pre-vocational

- education to upper secondary VET, to share expertise and facilities of other schools in the region and to support the labour market relevance of (pre-)vocational education;
- (b) adapting existing legislation as an incentive for schools to develop consecutive learning routes encompassing pre-vocational education and upper secondary VET. A legislative proposal was expected to be submitted in 2019;
- (c) merging, in 2021, two programme types: the theoretical learning pathway (general education) and the combined learning pathway (general/vocational education) in lower secondary pre-vocational education. In this new pathway theoretical learning will be enriched with practical/vocational components to improve the transition to upper secondary VET and upper secondary general education (HAVO).

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

According to the 2019 draft legislation on Strong VET, as of August 2020, pre-vocational secondary schools (VMBO) and VET colleges (MBO) will be able to jointly offer an uninterrupted learning route: VMBO-MBO. These joint education programmes will start in the third year of pre-vocational education and result in obtaining a VET diploma at EQF level 2, 3 or 4. One of the new possibilities is that (vulnerable) youngsters may complete their VET level 2 course within a school for pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO).

2020 Implementation

Legislation on Strong VET came into force in 2020. Lower secondary pre-vocational schools (VMBO) and VET colleges (MBO) are allowed to jointly offer an uninterrupted learning route: VMBO-MBO. In these new pathways, the two programme types (the theoretical learning pathway and the combined learning pathway in lower secondary pre-vocational education) are merged.

To gain experience with the more practically oriented pathways in lower secondary pre-vocational education a pilot runs from December 2020 till 2024.

2021 Implementation

Implementing provisions were approved in November 2021 so that vertical school communities will no longer face two benefit regimes.

2022 Implementation

The legislation on the 'administrative harmonisation in VET' (Wet bestuurlijke harmonisatie beroepsonderwijs) came into force in January 2022. It is possible for VET Colleges (MBO) and pre-vocational schools (VMBO) to form so-called vertical comprehensive schools. These are collaborations between a VET College and at least one pre-vocational school, forming one administrative and organisational unit.

The programme 'Strong VET' (Sterk beroepsonderwijs) has been completed in 2022. Information on all regional partnerships and guidelines for the development of partnerships have been published online, on the project's website.

2023 Implementation

To further support the transition from lower secondary pre-vocational education (VMBO) to upper secondary VET (MBO) or upper secondary general education (HAVO), a subsidy scheme facilitated the establishment of 383 follow-up programmes at lower secondary pre-vocational education schools in 2023. Both schools and students have expressed enthusiasm for these programmes, as they provide valuable tools to ensure

smoother transitions to upper secondary education. In light of their success, the Minister of Education has decided to extend the subsidy scheme.

2024 Implementation

In May 2024, the introduction of a new exam subject to the curricula of the theoretical learning pathway (VMBO-TL) and the combined learning pathway (VMBO-GL) was announced in the Dutch Government Gazette (Staatsblad, 2024, number 137). This development builds on a pilot that ran from 2020 to 2024, involving around 150 schools, which tested the introduction of the practice-oriented subject. The practice-oriented subject enables students to apply knowledge and skills through assignments involving real-world principals, providing a hands-on learning experience. In other words, students carry out practical, real-life assignments at or for companies and institutions. This allows students to experience what they are good at and what they are not so good at. They also orient themselves towards further education and the professional world. This can help students make the transition to further education.

The initiative aims to improve students' orientation and facilitate their transition to upper secondary vocational education (*MBO*) and aligns with broader efforts by the Ministry of Education to strengthen the connection between theoretical education and practical application, ensuring students are better prepared for vocational training. Additionally, the extension of the subsidy scheme's pilot phase reflects the positive reception of these practice-oriented programmes and the expected benefits for students' transition to upper secondary education. As of the 2024/2025 school year, the practice-oriented subject also became an examination subject. All VMBO schools offering the combined and/or theoretical learning pathway are allowed to offer this subject.

2025 Implementation

The dedicated subsidy to support schools in integrating the practice-oriented subject has been introduced horizontally. Schools in pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) can apply for subsidies to offer a practice-oriented subject in the combined learning pathway (VMBO-GL) and in the theoretical learning pathway (VMBO-TL) in January 2026. Subsidies range from 25 000 to 75 000 euros. This subsidy is intended to support schools in this regard.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Target group

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and professional higher education

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

[Letter to parliament: New programmes in pre-vocational VET](#)

[Letter to parliament: Legislative proposal on Strong VET](#)

[Announcement of the legislation on Strong VET in the Official Gazette](#)

[Subsidy regulation for the implementation of the pilots for practically oriented programmes in pre-vocational secondary education](#)

[Letter to parliament: Decision to amend various education decisions](#)

[Legislation on administrative harmonization in VET](#)

[Website of the programme Strong VET](#)

[Policy letter, education ministry, 21 December 2023](#)

[Dutch Government Gazette, 21 May 2024](#)

[Subsidy scheme for practice oriented subject in combined and theoretical learning pathways](#)

“ ... ” Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/36189>