

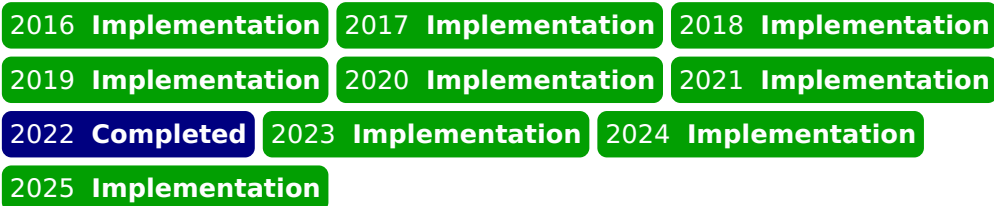
Updating VET programmes

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline



ID number 28447

Background

VET qualifications should correspond to the needs of the regional business community. In 2010, an independent committee had already indicated that the qualifications framework had more qualifications than strictly necessary and had little coherence. The committee recommended striving for a more transparent and effective qualifications framework. The minister adopted this advice and since 2016 a simplified qualification structure has been implemented.

Objectives

The main objectives are to:

- (a) improve the link between VET and the dynamics of the labour market;
- (b) ensure a better connection to higher professional education (HBO);
- (c) increase the quality of education;
- (d) increase student satisfaction and reduce dropout.

Description

In a September 2015 policy letter (*Kamerbrief met visie op mbo*), the education ministry drew attention to 21st century skills, their relevance for VET and ways to develop them. The letter announced an evaluation of the implementation process of the renewed qualifications framework and its effect on VET courses in the years ahead, and to assess whether further steps were needed to adapt VET qualifications for the future. Qualifications already included key competences such as the Dutch and English language, career orientation and citizenship and maths.

The revised structure of VET qualifications was introduced in August 2016. The number of VET qualifications was reduced by 30%, which made the structure more transparent and practical. Qualification definitions were also broadened to give VET colleges (MBO schools)

more leeway to adapt curricula to labour market needs. Each programme consists of a general part (the same subjects for the four areas of study), a profile part (*profildeel*) and optional modules; it also offers good career orientation and guidance. Optional modules (e.g. the German Language or entrepreneurial skills) were introduced to ensure the labour market relevance of curricula. They are relevant for several qualifications simultaneously. At first, optional modules had a mandatory link to an existing qualification but as of 2020 this is no longer required. Companies and education institutions jointly developed them to respond quickly to innovations or emerging needs within their region.

The first evaluation results of the implementation in 2018 showed that most VET schools expected positive effects from the new qualification structure (including optional modules for the first time) with regard to vertical permeability, student satisfaction and adaptation to labour market needs. Expectations are moderate about the satisfaction of training companies and the quality of education in VET. Still uncertain is to what extent the bottlenecks which are currently being experienced (organisational and administrative issues) will turn out to be of a temporary or structural nature.

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

As a follow-up to the evaluation of the qualifications framework in 2019, an announcement of the Minister for Education eased the development and implementation of optional modules by VET colleges, giving them more freedom in selecting specific optional modules and matching them to learners' and regional labour markets' needs.

2020 Implementation

As of 2020, it is no longer required to connect an optional module to a specific qualification at national level. Thus, optional modules can be developed independently from existing qualifications.

2021 Implementation

The measure is operational and runs as a regular practice.

2022 Completed

The measure is operational and runs as a regular practice.

2023 Implementation

The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education and the Labour Market (SBB), at the request of the Minister of Education, provided advice on further developing the qualifications framework to support a future-proof VET system. SBB concluded that societal changes necessitate greater flexibility in developing, updating, and implementing qualifications. It also emphasised the need for sustainable descriptions of qualification requirements to ensure long-term relevance while allowing room for new developments to be incorporated into curricula. The Minister acknowledges this advice and is currently examining the update cycle of the qualifications' framework.

In addition to the recommendation on maintaining relevance and flexibility in qualifications, SBB highlighted several other key areas for improvement:

- (a) Catering to diverse target groups by adapting the framework to support lifelong learning (LLO) through modular learning and recognition of prior learning, including skills portfolios and microcredentials.
- (b) Facilitating orientation and mobility within MBO programmes, enabling students

to explore options and switch programmes efficiently without extending their study duration.

- (c) Integrating a common skills language (CompetentNL) to link the qualifications framework with international standards and labour market needs, ensuring skills compatibility across sectors and education pathways.
- (d) Enhancing collaborative efforts among educators, businesses, and the SBB to tackle challenges like digitalisation and labour shortages effectively.
- (e) Improving data management and transparency to monitor cross-sectoral developments and streamline updates to the qualifications framework.

These measures aim to make the qualifications framework more adaptive, inclusive, and aligned with evolving societal and labour market demands.

2024 Implementation

Further steps have yet to be announced.

2025 Implementation

According to the 2025 Year Plan of SBB (Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven - Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and SBB will take the first steps toward optimising the Dutch VET qualification framework. In 2025, SBB encourages its sector chambers and partners to further broaden their sector frameworks, ensuring that both specialised qualifications and broader, multi-occupational qualifications are well supported. SBB will also begin replacing the data-management system that underpins the publication of the qualification structure, with a stronger focus on flexibility, skills and future-proof design. The new system aims to streamline processes and make qualification information easier to retrieve. Within the broader Lifelong Learning (LLO) agenda, SBB also prioritises improving the user-friendliness and accessibility of MBO certificates.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB)

Target group

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET infrastructure

Modernising infrastructure for vocational training

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Acquiring key competences

Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Developing and applying qualifications smaller/shorter than full

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

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

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Project evaluation](#)

[Policy letter, education ministry about change of approach to optional modules in VET, 18 December 2019](#)

[Policy letter introducing the advice of Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market \(SBB\) on the qualification framework](#)

[Advice of Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market \(SBB\) on the qualification framework](#)

[Annual plan \(jaarplan\) SBB 2025](#)

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Updating VET programmes: 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/28447>

