Q1. Is there a stable legal basis for apprenticeships in your country?

The Law on Education and Vocational Education and Training (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs) was adopted on 31 October 1995.

The law defines key elements of apprenticeships at system level, leaving the VET institutions a high level of freedom to shape education and training.[1] These key elements are, for example:

- the country-wide structure of qualifications;
- study duration;
- stakeholders’ (Ministry of Education, education institutions, social partners, companies, etc.) responsibilities in relation to setting up educational programmes;
- stakeholders’ responsibilities in relation to ensuring learning objectives are in accordance with contractual agreements at international level.

An important part of vocational education and training consists of learning in practice, known as work placement (beroepspraktijkvorming, bpv). We differentiate between practice placements (school-based pathway, BOL) and apprenticeships (work-based pathway, BBL). The school based pathway (BOL) has between 20% and 60% BPV. The apprenticeship pathway (BBL) has 60% BPV or more.

As of the school year 2015/2016 programmes can offer a combination of school-based VET (BOL) and apprenticeships (BBL). This is an experiment which runs until 2021. Combined programmes must be school-based in their first year and may then, depending on the duration and the set-up of the programme, make a transition to a one or multi-year apprenticeship in the second, third or fourth year.[2]


Q2. Is there an official definition of ‘apprenticeship’ or 'apprentice' in your country?

The requirements which the dual pathway (beroepsbegeleidende leerweg or BBL) has to fulfil are clearly defined in the Education and Vocational Education Law. According to the law, Article 7.2.7, apprenticeships are educational programmes leading to a vocational qualification.

The programmes must comprise 850 hours of education per year, of which at least 200 hours must be school-based instruction (begeleide onderwijsuren) and of which at least 610 hours must be work placement (beroepspraktijkvorming, bpv).

In practice, this means that apprentices usually spend 1 day per week in the education institution and 4 days per week in the company.\[1\]


Q3. At which level do apprenticeship schemes exist in your country?

Four types of programmes with durations from 1 to 4 years exist at upper-secondary level.[1]

- Entry level programmes (1-1.5 years, ISCED 254, EQF1).
- Basic vocational programmes (2 years, ISCED 353, EQF2).
- Professional education programmes (3 years, ISCED 353, EQF3).
- Middle-management VET programmes (3-4 years, ISCED 354, EQF4).
After finishing a middle management VET programme there's a possibility to enroll in a specializing programme for which a diploma of a professional education programme of the same vocation is required (1-2 years, ISCED 453, EQF4).\[2\]

All four programmes can be followed in different pathways; as an apprenticeship (BBL) or in a mainly school-based pathway with periods of training in companies (so called beropesopleidende leerweg or BOL). There's also the possibility to follow a programme in a third pathway, non funded by the government. In the third pathway, work placement (beroepspraktijkvorming, bpv) is mandatory, but without a minimum defined hours required.

After graduation students will enter Associate Degree (EQF 5) or Higher Education (EQF 6). To follow a second course on level 4 is an exception and not relevant.


Q4. How well-established are apprenticeship schemes in your country?

The current VET system is based on the 1995 Law on Education and Vocational Education and Training. VET education, including apprenticeships, existed long before that but in a different, more granular structure.[1]


Q5. Relevant information that is essential to understanding the specificity of apprenticeships in the country and which does not fit under the scheme specific sections below.

In the Netherlands work based learning (praktijkleren) is in the heart of VET. Work based learning in VET is also of importance for different programmes for learning on the job and life long learning, for both youngsters and adults, working, unemployed and/or disabled. Apprenticeship is mostly a combination of an employment contract and a separate learning agreement. Those are normally not connected as 1 contract.