



Brief note of national developments on curriculum policies and practices

Country: The Netherlands

Contributor: Dr Ilya Zitter, Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (ecbo)

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The concept of “Outcomes” is not new to education and training; what is now undoubtedly evident is the massively increased salience and prominence of this concept over the past few years in national and European policies and in any discussion about curriculum reform. In common with “learning outcomes”, “outputs”, “attainments”, “products” “aims”, “objectives”, “capacities”, “assessment standards” or “(key) competences”, outcomes of learning feature in many official curricula and other documents. However, there are important conceptual differences between these terms and not yet a clearly marked delimitation. Taking into consideration these different understanding, we would like you to provide some brief information on the following issues:

1. Up to what extent curriculum policies in your country consider/introduce outcome-oriented approaches? Please indicate which levels/types of education and training such reforms address.

Since 2004, it was formally permitted to experiment with competency-based qualification frameworks. The qualifications frameworks specify the competencies (integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes) of professionals on leaving upper secondary vocational education with a diploma. The process of making these frameworks is directed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. A national coordination organisation facilitates the process in which different stakeholders, both educational and from (regional) professional practice, play their part.

In august 2010, all upper secondary vocational educational institutes were obliged by law to implement these competency-based qualification frameworks. This was recently postponed to August 2011.

2. What is the rationale behind these reforms? What do they aim to achieve?

The rationale behind the national implementation of competency-based qualification frameworks were to focus on the needs and capabilities of individual learners. Upper secondary vocational education should attract (new) learners, suit and challenge learners, and be flexible enough to adapt to a diverse learner population.

3. What are the new features/characteristics/principles that these new outcome-oriented curricula introduce?

The national curriculum reforms focus on the ‘*what*’ of education (i.e. the competency-based qualifications frameworks), while giving the educational institutes the lead in ‘*how*’ to educate towards these required formal qualifications. As a consequence, a diverse and broad variety of competency-based is developed. However, in this variety, similar features can be identified:

- More real-life, authentic tasks or projects as part of the curriculum.
- Closer collaboration with professional practice, (regional) businesses and institutes.
- An emphasis on self-directed and collaborative learning.
- The role of teachers is shifting towards coaching and facilitating learning-to-learn.

4. What is the current stage of implementation of these reforms?

All educational institutes are working on implementing the necessary curriculum changes needed to educate learners towards the new, compulsory competency-based qualification frameworks. Progress is at very different stages. While some institutes are stuck in the process of ‘window dressing’ to comply with new regulations, many other institutes have embraced the new directions and have rigorously innovated their educational programs.

5. What are the main challenges faced?

The main challenges are the consistent implementation of curriculum changes and equipping teachers with the necessary skills. Both challenges also require adequate educational leadership.