**Education and training in figures**

- **Employment rates of graduates by programme orientation**: % of 20 to 34 year-olds with medium-level general or vocational education (ISCED 3-4) employed and not in education and training, 2014.

- **Lifelong learning**: % of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2014.

- **Early leavers from education and training**: % of early leavers from education and training, 2014.

- **Share of employees (aged 24 to 65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification and whose highest level of education involved some learning at a workplace (%), 2014.**

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**Further information**


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This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Netherlands.
The heterogeneous and multifunctional nature of upper secondary VET in the Netherlands is underpinned by three key features:

- Most publicly funded VET is provided by large social and economic actors, such as universities of applied sciences, which is different from the situation in many other countries.
- The Dutch VET system encourages innovation, especially in relation to the use of IT and the internet, which has led to the development of a large number of e-learning programmes.
- The Dutch VET system is based on a strong cooperation between schools, businesses, and other social and economic actors, which has led to the development of a large number of work-based learning programmes.

The Netherlands promotes a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing, VET teachers have an active role in designing and implementing new initiatives, and are encouraged to use their knowledge and experience to improve VET quality and effectiveness.

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Learning pathway: upper secondary VET has a level: upper secondary vocational education has programmes. Learners aged 16 or above can enter upper secondary VET (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Apart from lower secondary pre-VET programmes, there are also general programmes that prepare students for higher education: integrated lower and upper secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Some 40% of students in the third year of secondary education take part in one of these programmes.

Labour-oriented practical training (‘apprenticeship’) is available for learners not capable of entering pre-vocational education.

Upper secondary VET

Learners aged 16 or above can enter upper secondary VET (MBO). Three structural elements determine provision of MBO programmes, with differentiation according to:
- level: upper secondary vocational education has four levels leading to EQF levels 1 to 4. Student admission to a level depends on the diploma obtained in prior education. Admission to level 1 programmes is limited to learners without a prior qualification at secondary level. It is possible to progress within upper secondary VET and the highest level (leading to EQF 4) gives access to higher VET programmes offered by universities of applied sciences.
- area of study: upper secondary VET comprises programmes in several areas (sectoral): green/agriculture, technology, economics and care/welfare.
- learning pathway: upper secondary VET has a school-based pathway (BOL) and a dual pathway (BBL). In the school-based pathway, work placements in companies make up at least 25% of study time. In the dual pathway (apprenticeship), students combine work-based learning with school-based instruction; this often involves learning at work four days a week and one day at school.

In upper secondary VET, the desired outcomes of qualifications are defined in the national qualification system. Occupational standards cover one qualification profile or several interrelated ones. Social partners and education institutions represented in sectoral committees have legal responsibility to develop and maintain these standards. Once approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (the Ministry of Economic Affairs for agriculture and fishery education), VET and the highest level (leading to EQF 4) give access to higher education programmes offered in four areas: economic, technical, social, and health. The most significant changes in upper secondary VET include developments in the following areas:
- the introduction of multi-tiered pathways leading to different types of qualifications for learners with an EQF 4 level, and the development of what is known as the ‘learning pathway’ (see figure below). This pathway allows learners to develop the breadth and depth of learning they need for their future career, while ensuring that the programme of study is appropriate to their level of performance. The learning pathway is a flexible and adaptable model that can be adapted to the needs of learners, taking into account their individual learning styles, interests, and abilities.
- the introduction of a ‘continuous learning’ model for learners planning to continue their education at the tertiary level. This model allows learners to gain a better understanding of the subject matter and to develop a deeper understanding of the concepts and principles involved. The model also encourages learners to take an active role in their learning, to think critically and creatively, and to develop their problem-solving skills.
- the introduction of a ‘learning partner’ model, which allows learners to work with a mentor or tutor to help them achieve their goals. This model encourages learners to take an active role in their learning, to think critically and creatively, and to develop their problem-solving skills.
- the introduction of a ‘learning community’ model, which allows learners to work with a group of learners to help them achieve their goals. This model encourages learners to take an active role in their learning, to think critically and creatively, and to develop their problem-solving skills.
- the introduction of a ‘learning collaboration’ model, which allows learners to work with a group of learners or experts to help them achieve their goals. This model encourages learners to take an active role in their learning, to think critically and creatively, and to develop their problem-solving skills.

The heterogeneous and multifunctional nature of upper secondary VET in the Netherlands is articulated with a level of granularity. A challenge is to ensure that so that each is applied optimally is a constant challenge. In practical terms, this means that Dutch upper secondary VET works towards developing talents among the highly heterogeneous student population, from students who transfer to higher education to those for whom obtaining a basic qualification is difficult. VET and the qualifications it leads to have to be accessible to all target groups.

At the same time, the challenge is to raise the quality and effectiveness of upper secondary VET. Key objectives are to reduce early leaving and to increase programme completion. Recently, basic skills requirements (language, elementary mathematics) were made stricter to improve quality. Central testing of these basic skills is currently being implemented in VET. The challenge for VET programmes is to keep a good balance between transversal skills and job-specific knowledge and skills. Funding quality is also a core aim of the ‘teacher 2020’ strand of policy, launched by the Education Ministry and the VET sector, which encourages VET teachers to obtain a master degree and offers them flexible opportunities to do so.

A third challenge is to increase VET efficiency by moving towards an all-embracing streamlined qualification system for medium-level vocations and corresponding upper secondary VET programmes. Recent policies have reduced the number of programmes and qualifications while ensuring their availability across the country. More recently, policies have also been introduced to reduce the number of programmes and qualifications within upper secondary VET, and to introduce new funding principles for VET programmes, including per capita funding with incentives rewarding faster programme completion.

Guaranteeing the VET system’s accessibility was high on the VET policy agenda until 2010, since then, efficiency and quality have been receiving more attention.
Study results and advice from school determine the type of secondary education that learners follow after leaving primary education at age 12. In the third year of middle secondary education, 32% of students follow lower secondary pre-vocational programmes (VMBO). Half of VMBO students are in vocationally oriented programmes; the rest follow general programmes offered by VMBO schools. VMBO is the main route to upper secondary vocational education and training (VET). Among this lower secondary pre-VET programmes, there are also general programmes that prepare students for higher education: integrated lower- and upper secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Some 40% of students in the third year of secondary education take part in one of these programmes. Labour-oriented practical training (praktijkonderwijs) is available for learners not capable of entering pre-vocational education.

Upper secondary VET

Learners aged 15 or above can enter upper secondary VET (MBO). Three structural elements determine provision of MBO programmes, with differentiation according to:

• level upper secondary vocational education has four levels leading to EQF levels 1 to 4. Student admission to a level depends on the diploma obtained in prior education or on performance to level 1 programmes is limited to learners without a prior qualification at lower secondary level. It is possible to progress within upper secondary VET, and the highest level (leading to EQF 4) gives access to higher VET programmes (offered by universities of applied sciences).

• area of study: upper secondary VET programmes and programmes for students with difficulties (sectors): green/agriculture, technology, economics and care/welfare;

• learning pathway: upper secondary VET has a school-based pathway (BOI) and a dual pathway (BBL). In the school-based pathway, work placements in companies make up at least 25% of study time. In the dual pathway (apprenticeship), students combine work-based learning with school-based instruction; this often involves learning at work four days a week and one day at school.

In upper secondary VET, the desired outcomes of qualifications are defined in the national qualification system. Occupational standards cover one qualification profile or several interrelated ones. Social partners and education institutions represented in sectoral committees have legal responsibility to develop and maintain these standards. Once approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (the Ministry of Economic Affairs for agriculture and nature), schools – in cooperation with enterprises providing work-based learning – develop curricula based on the qualification profiles.

Tertiary VET

Higher professional education (tertiary level VET, HBO) is open to students with upper secondary general education diplomas and graduates of level 4 upper secondary VET programmes. Around 35% of such VET graduates enter the job market; the rest continue to higher professional education. Most pursue a four-year professional bachelor degree programme which, on completion, gives access to a professional master degree programme, an option not yet extensively utilized. Also, two-year associate degree programmes (short-cycle higher education) open to HBO level 4 graduates and leading to EQF 5 have recently been developed.

Continuing VET

There is no institutional framework for continuing vocational education and training (CVET). CVET provision is market-driven with many suppliers. Dual VET (the BBL pathway) can also function as CVET to adults. Social partners stimulate CVET through sectoral training and development funds. In 2014, there were about 120 such funds. Most approach and finance training in an employer-specific way. They help employees keep abreast of changes in technology, society even in sectors, offer special arrangements for older workers, and support the implementation of effective human resource management policies at sector level. Most funds also support projects that help young people find employment or take initiatives to sustain or expand apprenticeship places.

The heterogeneous and multifunctional nature of upper secondary VET in the Netherlands is a challenge for quality assurance. Efforts to gain a good balance are not so obvious, so that each is applied optimally is a constant challenge.

In practical terms, this means that Dutch upper secondary VET works towards developing talents of highly heterogeneous student population, from students who transfer to higher education to those for whom obtaining a basic qualification is difficult. VET and the qualifications it leads to have to be accessible to all target groups. At the same time, the challenge is to raise the quality and effectiveness of upper secondary VET. Key objectives are to reduce early school leaving and to increase programmes completion. Recently, basic skills requirements (language, elementary mathematics) were made stricter to improve quality. Central testing of these basic skills is currently being implemented in VET. The challenge for the VET programmes is to keep a good balance between transversal skills and job-specific knowledge and skills. Raising quality is also a core aim of the ‘teacher 2020’ and ‘BOI’ projects planned by the Education Ministry and the VET sector, which encourages VET teachers to obtain a master degree and offers them flexible opportunities to do so.

A third challenge is to increase VET efficiency by moving towards an all-embracing streamlined qualification system for medium-level vocations and corresponding upper secondary VET programmes. Recent policies have targeted an increase in the number of basic level qualifications while ensuring their availability across the country. More efficiency is also achieved by reducing the nominal duration of programmes in upper secondary VET, and by introducing new funding principles for VET programmes. This is done through per capita funding with incentives rewarding faster completion programmes.

Distinctive features of VET

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the VET programmes have been designed with the objective of:

• most publicly funded VET is provided by large employers (average of 15 000 enterprises releasing 12 000 Sector-specific schools and agricultural training centres provide dual VET programmes, offering VET for young people and adults (VET) and general education for adults. They are also active on the continuing VET market, with privately funded programmes. Government-regulated VET programmes are also offered by private providers under certain conditions:

  • school-based and dual pathways in upper secondary VET lead to the same diplomas. Participation in each corresponds to the economic cycle; the crisis of the economic boom, the number of students in the dual pathway increases, while it decreases in the school-based pathway, the opposite happens during an economic recession;

  • education institutions have a relatively high degree of freedom to shape VET provision. The VET law only provides a broad framework outlining key elements at system level; institutions receive a lump sum for their tasks;

  • the Netherlands promotes a culture of evidence-informed VET policy and practice and encouraging best practices. Measuring initiatives include providing VET schools regularly with up-to-date regional labour market information and early school leaving data, and implementing plan-do-check-act mechanisms as a basis for organisations to evaluate and improve their practices. To reduce the gap between research and practice in education, research and intelligence are raised, and the qualifications it leads to have to be accessible to all target groups. At the same time, the challenge is to raise the quality and effectiveness of upper secondary VET. Key objectives are to reduce early school leaving and to increase programmes completion. Recently, basic skills requirements (language, elementary mathematics) were made stricter to improve quality. Central testing of these basic skills is currently being implemented in VET. The challenge for the VET programmes is to keep a good balance between transversal skills and job-specific knowledge and skills. Raising quality is also a core aim of the ‘teacher 2020’ and ‘BOI’ projects planned by the Education Ministry and the VET sector, which encourages VET teachers to obtain a master degree and offers them flexible opportunities to do so.

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Guaranteeing the VET system’s accessibility was high on the VET policy agenda until 2010, since then, efficiency and quality have been receiving more attention.

Challenges and policy responses

Three principles, to some extent conflicting, are crucial for the VET system’s accessibility: quality, quantity and balance. Shifting a good balance so that each is applied optimally is a constant challenge.

In practical terms, this means that Dutch upper secondary VET works towards developing talents of highly heterogeneous student population, from students who transfer to higher education to those for whom obtaining a basic qualification is difficult. VET and the qualifications it leads to have to be accessible to all target groups. At the same time, the challenge is to raise the quality and effectiveness of upper secondary VET. Key objectives are to reduce early school leaving and to increase programmes completion. Recently, basic skills requirements (language, elementary mathematics) were made stricter to improve quality. Central testing of these basic skills is currently being implemented in VET. The challenge for the VET programmes is to keep a good balance between transversal skills and job-specific knowledge and skills. Raising quality is also a core aim of the ‘teacher 2020’ and ‘BOI’ projects planned by the Education Ministry and the VET sector, which encourages VET teachers to obtain a master degree and offers them flexible opportunities to do so.

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Further information


Employment rates of graduates by programme orientation % of 20 to 34 year-olds with medium-level general or vocational education (ISCED 3-4) employed and not in education and training, 2014

Lifelong learning % of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2014

Share of employees (aged 24 to 65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification and whose highest level of education involved some learning at a workplace (%) 2014

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Netherlands.

NB: Break in time series in all countries; definition for national target differs in DE, DK and ES; no national target in the UK.

Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 9.10.2015.
Education and training in figures

Further information


Employment rates of graduates by programme orientation
% of 20 to 34 year-olds with medium-level general or vocational education (ISCED 3-4) employed and not in education and training, 2014

Lifelong learning
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Early leavers from education and training
% of early leavers from education and training, 2014

Share of employees (aged 24 to 65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification and whose highest level of education involved some learning at a workplace (%), 2014