



VET in the Netherlands

Study results and advice from school determine the type of secondary education that learners follow after leaving primary education at age 12. In 2019, in the third year of secondary education, 53% of students followed lower secondary pre-vocational programmes (VMBO). Almost 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).

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 47% of students in the third year of secondary education took part in one of these programmes in 2019.

Labour-oriented practical training (*praktijk-onderwijs*) 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). Most publicly funded VET is provided by large multi sectoral regional training centres (ROCs). Sector-specific schools and agricultural training centres also provide VET programmes. 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 lower secondary level. It is possible to progress within upper secondary VET; the highest level (leading to EQF 4) gives access to higher professional bachelor programmes offered by universities of applied sciences. In 2019, more than half of VET students were enrolled in level 4 programmes;
- area of study: upper secondary VET programmes are available in four areas ('sectors'): green/agriculture, technology, economics and care/welfare;
- learning pathway: upper secondary VET offers two equivalent pathways: a school-based (BOL) and a dual (BBL). In the school-based pathway, work placements in companies make up 20% to 59% of study time. In the dual pathway (apprenticeship), students combine work-based learning (at least 60% of study time) with school-based instruction; this often involves learning at work four days a week and one day at school.

Post-secondary VET

Specialised programmes (EQF 4) are open to graduates of MBO programmes (EQF levels 3 to 4). Their duration is one year.

Higher professional education

Higher professional bachelor programmes (HBO) are open to all EQF level 4 graduates. Around 36% of graduates of middle management VET programmes enter HBO programmes; 64% enter the job market. HBO programmes last four years.

On completion, they can give access to a professional master degree programme, an option not yet extensively used.

Two-year associate degree programmes (short-cycle higher education, EQF 5), are open to all EQF level 4 graduates. Their graduates can continue to HBO programmes; the remaining study load is subject to exemptions granted by each programme.

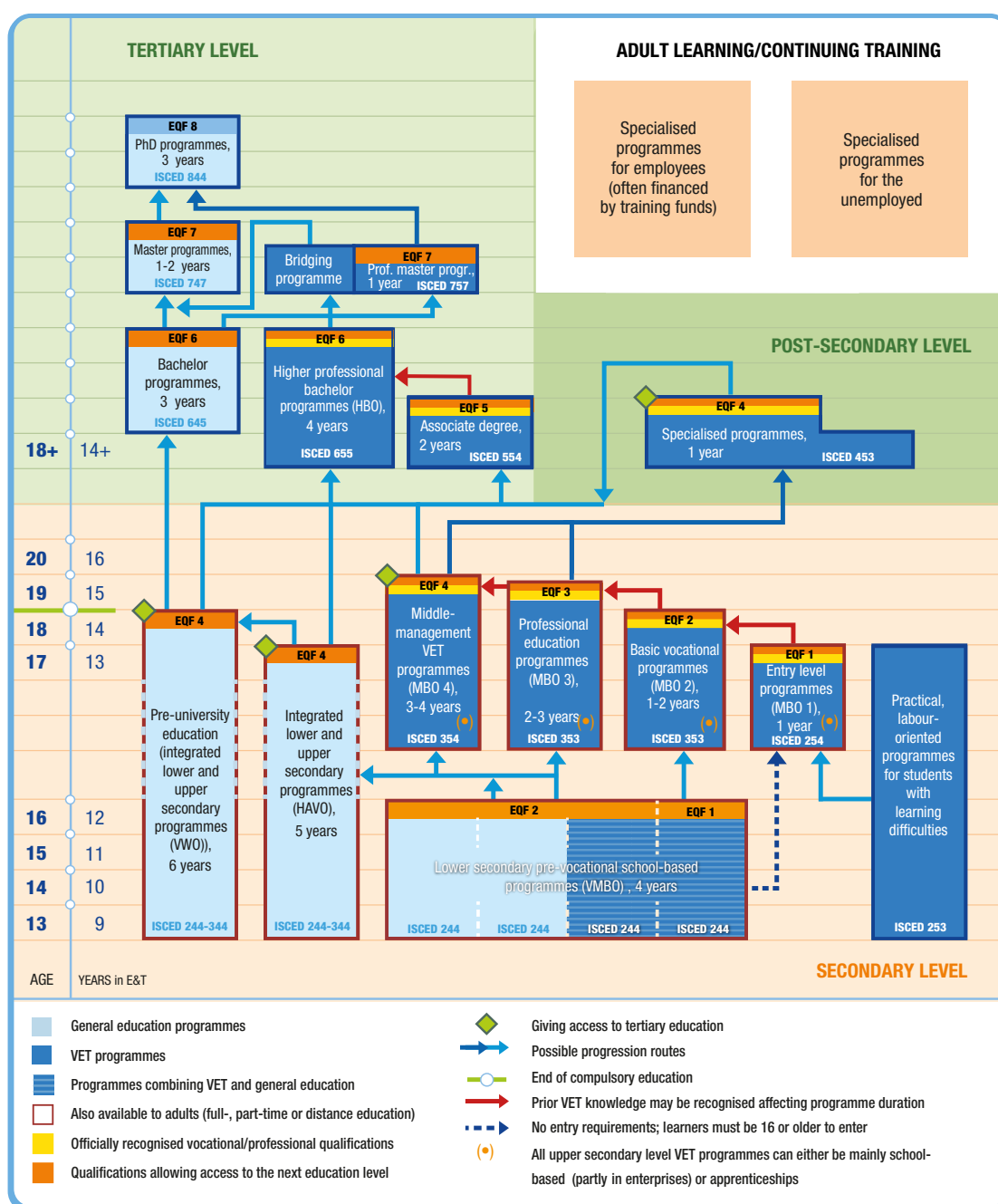
Continuing VET

There is no institutional framework for continuing VET (CVET); provision is market-driven with many suppliers. Dual VET (the BBL pathway) can also function as CVET for adults. Social partners stimulate CVET through sectoral training and development funds. They help employees progress in their careers, sometimes even in other sectors, offer special arrangements for older workers, and support the development 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.

Distinctive features of VET

The heterogeneous and multifunctional nature of upper secondary VET in the Netherlands is unique. Key distinctive features are:

- ROCs have an average student population of 11 000 providing IVET for young people and adults and general education for adults. They are also active in CVET, with privately funded programmes. Government-regulated VET qualifications 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 is influenced by the economic cycle; for instance, in periods of economic boom the number of students in the dual pathway increases;
- the intended outcomes of qualifications are defined in the national qualifications system. Occupational standards cover one qualification profile or several interrelated ones. Social partners and education institutions represented in sectoral committees have a legal responsibility to develop and maintain these standards. Once approved by the education ministry, schools – in cooperation with enterprises providing work-based learning – develop curricula based on the qualification profiles;
- 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 encourages innovation. Recent 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 organisation and programme development. Research and intelligence are increasingly used to improve VET quality and effectiveness, both by involving professional researchers and by encouraging teachers to engage in research activities.



NB: ISCED-P 2011.
 Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Netherlands, 2020.

Challenges and policy responses

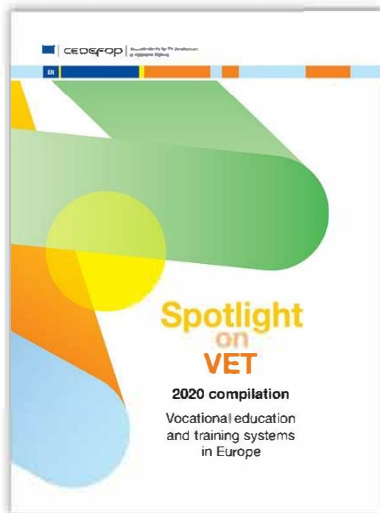
The VET sector is challenged to take greater responsibility ('ownership') for programme innovation, quality assurance, and responding to the needs of regional business world. The policy agreement, formally signed by the education ministry and the VET schools in February 2018, validated the shared policy aims for 2019-22. Subsequently, all schools should come up with a plan for programme innovation in response to regional needs and priorities, to be implemented in close collaboration with regional stakeholders/ businesses.

There are three national priorities in the sector-based policy agreement. All VET schools have to take action to:

- improve their labour market outcomes (reducing youth unemployment);
- facilitate equal opportunities in education and training;
- support young people, particularly from disadvantaged groups.

Funding is available for activities linked to these priorities; it is partly performance-based, meaning that the total budget will depend on whether targets are met and to what extent.

Besides these priorities, schools are free to set their own goals, ideally after having consulted their regional stakeholders.



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