

Moving forward with vocational education

Preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO), senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO) are still worlds apart to many young people. The Education Council therefore believes it is time for the government, educational institutions and businesses to realise that they are all part of the learning chain. The learning careers of pupils must be the centre of the focus, and not the individual study programmes. 'Stacking' should be made possible again.

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Preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO), senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO) each make their own contribution to the development of pupils. The needs and opportunities of pupils and students in vocational education would be better served by improving links and transitions between these programmes. Schools also need to look better at what each pupil needs, and provide tailored solutions. Finally, schools and businesses also need to work more closely together.

Link funding to a pupil's learning pathway

Organisational and legislative hurdles stand in the way of smooth transitions and tailored solutions within vocational education. The current funding system is a good example of this. It assumes a fixed entry point within the year, and links funding to that moment. Anyone changing programmes at any other point in time ends up paying twice, and the new institution gets no funding for the new pupil. The Education Council calls for a system in which the funding follows the learning pathway of each pupil.

Choose better cooperation

The educational institutions also need to ensure that transitions are smoother and provide more tailored solutions. They could do this by coordinating the programmes better, by giving pupils better advice and by documenting and passing on relevant learning experiences to the new school. Better communication between teachers and teacher exchanges would encourage smoother transfers. The minister could make transitions easier by encouraging the formation of small, 'vertical' institutions that combine the three forms of vocational education (VMBO, MBO and HBO) so that pupils and students can easily switch from one programme to another (perhaps even without sitting exams).

Reach agreement on learning in the workplace

Learning on the job – within a company or social organisation – fits in well with the need of young people in vocational education to learn by doing. Many pupils, however, do not experience enough of the relationship between theory and practice. The Education Council therefore believes that schools and businesses need to make better arrangements for learning in the workplace and its relationship to studies. The arrangements need to set out aspects such as responsibilities, mentoring, assessment methods, learning goals, quality requirements, etc.