

Colophon

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Basic secondary education. Upgrade and view of the future. Recommendation of the Education Council issued to the State Secretary of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs, dated October 2001.

The recommendation (in Dutch) can be ordered by using order number 20010428/592.

Summary of recommendation

Basic secondary education Upgrade and view of the future

On the request of State Secretary Adelmund, the Education Council has again addressed the question of basic secondary education in the Netherlands. The primary reason for this was an evaluation undertaken by inspection bodies, shown in *Werk aan de basis* ('Work on the foundations') and the extensive policy reaction to this in *Ruimte voor kwaliteit in de basisvorming* ('Room for quality in basic secondary education').

The Council believes that the philosophy at the core of the objectives of basic secondary education (promotion of high educational standards, social cohesion and equal opportunities) is still fully justified. However, the organisation of Dutch secondary education urgently requires upgrading. The recent evaluation results demonstrate this unequivocally.

Renewal over the long term

There is every reason to review the question as to what pupils should know and be capable of at the end of their compulsory education in order to properly enter tertiary education,

obtain paid employment and otherwise participate in society's functioning. The developments in society at both national and international levels confirm this clearly.

These developments include:

- The rising 'knowledge intensity' of society's processes;
- Individualisation and differentiation between cultures and social structures;
- Demographic developments that are leading to a greying of teaching staff and increase in the numbers of pupils needing special attention;
- The increasing importance of information and communication technology as an instrument of knowledge transfer and information processing;
- Rising globalisation and parallel regionalisation.

The Council feels that such a thorough review will require time. It thus argues for a policy development and review process that should result in proposals and products that will be practically implementable as of the year 2010.

It foresees three key elements in this innovative process:

- Employing competence as guidance for the detailing of education curricula;
- The integration of information and communication technology in the learning and learning support processes;
- A significant level of influence from the schools themselves in the development and implementation of the projected renewal.

The Council also feels that this renewal should be able to call upon wide social consensus and involvement. It therefore proposes a rapid evaluation of how the management and coordination of the proposed policy and development process should look. It argues for a clearly visible and accessible point of coordination that will be able to maintain broad and pluriform contacts and networks.

Adjustment over the short term

In the period up to 2010, adaptations and adjustments will have to be made to the basic secondary education process that will reduce the problems of *overload* and *disintegration* in the supply of teaching capabilities. At the same time a bridge will have to be built towards longer term renewal. The Council has therefore formulated a proposal for the short term. By short term it means that after a policy and development period, proposals and products will be created that are implementable and usable from the year 2004.

In their proposals for the short term the Education Council has remained closely committed to current practice in basic secondary education. It is considered undesirable that fundamental changes be introduced in the short term. This for the reasons below:

- The capacity for innovation and change at schools is limited;
- Recent changes already introduced with regard to the learning processes and departments in the intermediate vocational sector (vmbo) and special needs support sector;
- Echo effects of the renewal efforts in the second phase of secondary education (havo and vwo) are now becoming visible in the basic secondary sector and need time to crystallise.

For the short term future the Council proposes splitting the current broad set-up of basic secondary education into a *core curriculum* and a *differentiated curriculum*.

The core curriculum will contain those areas of knowledge that are essential to all groups of children for further study and career, and that form part of a balanced and broad education. The differentiated curriculum will contain those subjects that respond to the preferences and needs of the pupils in relation to the capabilities of the school. To allocate the available time between the core and differentiated curricula, the Council proposes a ratio of five/eighths (core) to three/eighths (differentiated) of educational time over a period of two years.

The Council proposes the following structure for the core curriculum:

- A cluster of basic subjects – Dutch, English and Maths.
- A cluster of natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology and technology).
- A cluster of social-cultural subjects including history, civics, geography and art.
- Physical education.
- Ict know-how will also have to represent a part of the core curriculum.

The differentiated curriculum could include the following subjects:

- German, French and Friesian
- Health care and economics
- Religious education, philosophy and ideology
- Classic languages
- Modern foreign languages such as Arabic and Turkish
- Learning activities directed at selecting study and profession.

The Council further argues for the formulation of core objectives at three levels. It emphasises the importance of explicit tests either via the exam programme or by means of a school's own achievement tests. As a form of support national sample tests should be developed.

The foregoing proposals imply changes in the organisation of schools and the school product. Successful implementation of these proposals will mean the government providing clear objectives and limits to authority, and the schools themselves obtaining the opportunity to develop and grow at their own tempo and to organise themselves and develop in their own way. The government will have to set limits from the viewpoint of continuing care for basic education.

The Council is very conscious of the fact that implementation of the proposed changes will be complex. It considers the proposed curricula implementable, but for this an extensive and targeted support for implementation by national government will, in its opinion, be necessary. Likewise it is considered necessary that the implementation process take place in close consultation with all involved parties. In the view of the Council national government should fulfil the following conditions:

- Adaptation and refining of the core objectives;
- Adaptation of current rulings and legislation. The Secondary Education Act, the Core Objectives Order and the Organisation of Secondary Education Order will all have to be changed;
- Analysis of the consequences of the proposals for the position of the subjects that could make up part of the differentiated curriculum, and respectively for the retraining of the teachers of these subjects and the budgets available for this;
- Prompt application of introductory and post-introductory training for teachers;
- Stimulatory financial measures. The Council proposes the setting up, extension and support of training initiatives, pilot projects leading to the raising of policy making freedom for schools, organisational improvement and a reduction in the teaching load of teachers.
- An integrated development and implementation path for the learning sector Science, in which various variants will be detailed, learning resources will be developed and training will be initiated and supported.
- A development path promoting the relationship between the subjects of geography, history and civics.
- Development and promotion of the use of sample tests.
- Prompt provision of information on the changes to come, targeting parents, pupils, teachers and school management.

The introduction of the proposals will be a complex yet necessary task. The Council therefore considers it urgently necessary to mobilise all expertise that is available in the country. It therefore proposes that for the implementation of the necessary projects and services, public calls for tender are made. In the allocation of assignments it recommends

government to apply the important criterion of the level of influence that schools, as interested parties, will have in their development and implementation.