

# The path to higher professional education

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## Situation outline

### *More students from senior secondary vocational education*

The pattern of students entering higher professional education (HBO) has changed significantly between 2000 and 2010. The proportion of students entering from senior secondary vocational education (MBO) has seen a big increase. At the same time, the number of students entering from pre-university education (VWO) has fallen. This tendency has been seen in higher professional education in general, but also specifically in teacher training (for primary school (PABO) and the lower (intermediate) years of secondary school (*tweedegraads*)). In total, 30% of the students embarking on higher professional education (HBO) have previously followed a programme of study in senior secondary vocational education (MBO); that translates to 30,000 students. For senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO) the proportions are 41% and 9%, respectively. For primary school teacher training courses, about 34% of students (or 4,500) come from senior secondary vocational education (MBO). For senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO), the figures are 42% and 7%, respectively. For intermediate teacher training programmes (for the lower years of secondary school), the intake of students from senior secondary vocational education (MBO) is 20%, while 33% come from senior general secondary education (HAVO) and 8% from pre-university education (VWO).

### *High drop-out rates and low yield from MBO and HAVO*

Furthermore, there is a high drop-out rate (this figure includes those changing programmes) in the first year of higher professional education (HBO) programmes. In 2008, 34% of students with a senior secondary vocational education (MBO) background dropped out, while 39% of senior general secondary education (HAVO) students dropped out. On primary teacher training programmes, the rates were 40% (MBO) and 32% (HAVO), respectively, and for intermediate programmes 37% and 42%.<sup>1</sup> After five years of study, the yield for senior secondary vocational education (MBO) students is 54% for all higher professional education (HBO) programmes, 60% for primary school teacher training programmes, and 50% for intermediate teacher training programmes.<sup>2</sup> What is striking is that the yield after five years of higher professional education (HBO) studies is higher for those with a senior secondary vocational education (MBO) background (54%) than for those with a senior general secondary education (HAVO) background (46%). In the case of primary school teacher training, there is little difference in this aspect between those with a senior secondary vocational education (MBO) background and those with a senior general secondary education (HAVO) background. For the intermediate teacher training programmes, however, those with a senior secondary vocational education (MBO) background score much better (50%) than those with a senior general secondary education (HAVO) background (32%). The fact that students with a senior general secondary education (HAVO) background have a higher drop-out rate after one year and a lower yield in general can be largely attributed to the relatively large proportion of students from HAVO changing study programmes after one year. They actually drop out less often than those with a senior secondary vocational education (MBO) background, although they do switch to other programmes – both within and outside their own sector – more frequently.

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<sup>1</sup> For students entering from senior general secondary education (HAVO), drop-out rates in the first year are 32% for primary school teacher training and 42% for intermediate teacher training. For those entering from pre-university education (VWO), the figures are 24% and 25%, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> For students entering from senior general secondary education (HAVO), the yields after five years are 61% for primary school teacher training and 32% for intermediate teacher training.

### *Measures needed and retain general right of access*

Given the high drop-out rates in the first year and the relatively low yield after five years, the Education Council believes that further policy measures are needed for the students with a senior secondary vocational education (MBO) background, and also for those with a senior general secondary education (HAVO) background. In the Education Council's view, there are insufficient reasons to amend the general right of access for those transferring from senior secondary vocational education (MBO), especially considering the general importance of this right. The difference in drop-out rates between students with senior secondary vocational education (MBO) backgrounds and those with senior general secondary education (HAVO) backgrounds is relatively small, and there is a lack of any further empirical evidence on the differences in yield between students who transfer to related sectors and those who transfer to unrelated sectors. Furthermore, the effect of the selective propedeutic year in higher professional education (HBO) provides a balance between the education of highly skilled professionals, on the one hand, and the importance of a general right of access, on the other. The Education Council believes that the general right of access can be maintained in the knowledge that recently initiated policy will ensure an increase in the quality of new entrants in the near future.

### **Recommendations**

#### *(1) Continue with policy measures*

The first recommendation relates to the actual implementation and evaluation of all initiated or proposed policies aimed at improving the standard of education (including the introduction of reference standards, and national examinations for certain subjects in senior secondary vocational education (MBO)).

#### *(2) Compile a transfer dossier alongside and in conjunction with the professional qualification dossier*

The second recommendation relates to the creation of a link between senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO) by using qualification dossiers. Qualification dossiers for most senior secondary vocational education (MBO) programmes now primarily contain the diploma requirements that are relevant from a labour market perspective: the professional qualifications dossier. The Education Council proposes that a transfer dossier be compiled alongside and in conjunction with this. It is intended that the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-Raad) and the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad) come together to take the lead on this. The transfer dossier includes a general intake profile for those entering higher professional education (HBO) from senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and senior general secondary education (HAVO).

#### *(3) Self-assessment for prospective students*

The general intake profile to be included in the transfer dossier could form the basis of a self-assessment procedure for prospective students.

The "agreement on starting levels in higher education" (AAHO) proposed by the Education Council complements the introduction of reference standards, but explicitly shifts the perspective from the school to that of the prospective student. The key to the AAHO is that it should serve the prospective student in the decision-making process. The results will support prospective students as they consider whether they are suitably prepared for their prospective studies. The AAHO is a series of tests that can be taken by prospective students in a web-based environment. It has four components: Dutch, English, arithmetic/maths, and study skills. It also has three levels: basic, standard, advanced.

#### *(4) Remedial and stimulating activities*

The Education Council explicitly states that the proposals set out here are in no way intended to initiate a discussion of the selection function of the propedeutic year.

#### *(4a) Support new students*

Specifically, this refers to helping new students fill any gaps in their knowledge on a voluntary basis. The Education Council believes it is important that these gaps are dealt with at the start of the study programme in a structured manner; we also believe that the institutions offering higher professional education are best placed to do this. The duration and intensity of these remedial activities depend on the extent of the gaps discovered, but it is possible

that they could span six months. What the Education Council has in mind in particular are the general subjects of arithmetic and language, as well as the other school subjects found in primary and secondary education. After the remedial period, students can then continue on the regular curriculum. To increase flexibility in the choice of starting moments, the Education Council proposes that pilots are launched to introduce in higher professional education (HBO) a second funding reference date (1 February) linked to the student start date, in parallel with developments in senior secondary vocational education (MBO).

The remedial support measure is a temporary one because the Education Council expects that the introduction of reference standards and centralised exams for language and arithmetic/maths in senior secondary vocational education (MBO) by 2014 will raise the educational standard of new students. The remedial programmes are intended for all weak entrants, and every new entrant will be 'diagnosed' on enrolment. This does not affect the measures taken in senior secondary vocational education (MBO) to equip students as well as possible by creating a 'top class', alternative preparatory learning pathways and a transfer group, for example.

*(4b) Small contact-intensive home bases for starting students*

This recommendation relates to increased attention for academic and social integration.<sup>3</sup> Improving academic integration refers, for example, to tailored teaching methods (more structure delivery of the academic content), and more active, more personal academic coaching with a lot of individual contact between the teacher and the student. More focused coaching during work placements should help the study programme from drifting. More attention devoted to an organised social life of the students, which includes extracurricular activities, will contribute to their social integration. 'Schools' within the higher education institution provide new students with a social mainstay. Following on from increased attention for academic and social integration, the Education Council believes it is important that the students form firm groups in the first two years of higher professional education (HBO) programmes, these being linked to a core group of teachers and mentors.

*(4c) Consideration of the reception and support culture within higher professional education and increased diversity in programme types*

The Education Council believes that a correct reception and support culture in the first year of study could help bridge the gap between senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO). It is important that the higher education institutions actually want to welcome new entrants coming from senior secondary vocational education (MBO). Also in view of the emancipating role of higher professional education (HBO), it is very important to offer support to new students who have not followed the well-established pathways (those with MBO level 4 and over-21s who have taken admission tests). The Education Council believes that studies should be conducted into the reception and support culture within the higher professional education (HBO) system.

The transfer to higher education does not have to be made immediately on completion of senior secondary vocational education (MBO). The Education Council therefore proposes that alternatives are created for the knee-jerk response of immediately transferring to a higher professional education (HBO) programme. The alternatives could include a combination of work and training. Students more focused on working could follow a two-track programme – along the lines of the primary school teacher training programme, where students are also appointed as teaching assistants. The Education Council recommends that policymakers and study directors develop this option for several higher professional education (HBO) programmes and offer it as standard to new entrants from senior secondary vocational education (MBO) programmes. We realise that this training variant is currently scarcely available; this is possibly due to a lack of staff and a lack of interest. The model offered by training in the classroom/in the work place could provide the foundation for this.

*(5) Active stance of senior secondary vocational programmes towards higher professional studies*

A good match between senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO) will demand a more robust effort from secondary schools. Regional Training Centres (ROCs) could develop teacher exchange initiatives between the ROCs and institutions offering higher professional education (HBO), initiatives to jointly discuss learning content, and involve tertiary level lecturers in senior secondary vocational education (MBO) examinations, and regional cooperation in the field of 'continuous learning lines'. Within the curriculum of the ROCs, various types of differentiation could be used with a view to the transfer to higher professional education. Specific facilities, such as the top class for teaching assistants who want to join a primary school teacher training programme, demand efforts from the ROCs. The development of a transfer dossier, as recommended in this report, offers the opportunity to work on this systematically.

*(6) Appropriate differentiation in primary school teacher training*

Finally, the Education Council recommends that further studies are conducted into differentiation in the training of primary school teachers. Students would then have to make a choice between focusing on young children (between 30-36 months and 8 years of age) or the older child (between 6 and 12 years of age). The Education Council expects that a programme for young children would particularly appeal to and motivate teaching assistants working with younger children. In this way, differentiation in the curriculum for primary school teacher training could contribute to better study choices and increase motivation while ensuring that quality remains stable. The government and programme directors should examine the extent to which this type of differentiation between younger and older children might have a positive effect on the study choices of trainee teachers and their motivation to continue with their studies beyond the first year.