

Extended education

15 december 2010

Background

In the education debate, there is a strong focus on minimums. For instance, the minimum number of teaching hours is 940 in primary education, 1000 in secondary education, and 850 in senior secondary vocational education (MBO). Yet education is much more interesting and more important than this minimum standard could possibly express. In fact, pupils and students regularly spend more time learning, and schools and other education providers often offer more learning time and learning opportunities, but the debate on the minimum standard continues unabated. This focus on minimums actually serves to hamper any ambitious discussion of education. The Education Council proposes a more ambitious approach. In the State of Education in the Netherlands 2009 (*Stand van educatief Nederland 2009*), the concept of "extended education" was introduced. The point of this was to draw attention to the many educational activities that take place outside the regular curriculum. The underlying idea is that learning is not limited to the minimum number of hours in education, and that education could be put to better use. This is consistent with the ambition to make the Netherlands one of the top five knowledge economies, and the corresponding importance of more wide-ranging talent development. Following an invitation by the Minister, the Education Council examines this in more detail in this report by describing the supply and effectiveness of extended education more exactly and by answering the question of what measures schools and government could take to shape extended education more systematically and sustainably.

Findings

In the Education Council's view, extended education means that the school (or other education-oriented party) offers something extra which is aimed at 1) meeting the legal requirements, 2) the broader and deeper development of talent, and 3) broadening the views of pupils or students towards work and society. These three goals also reflect the three types of extended education that we can distinguish: extended education aimed at improving learning performance, extended education aimed at enrichment, and extended education aimed at providing an orientation towards work and society.

An online survey among school leaders showed that secondary schools in particular are currently actively working on extended education (76%), more so than senior secondary vocational (MBO) schools (60%), and certainly more so than primary schools (39%). The variety of initiatives and activities in all educational segments is particularly large. There is a particular diversity of activities that have an improvement or enrichment function, while activities of an orientational nature occur less frequently. The majority of the activities are aimed at pupils from deprived backgrounds. A small minority are focused on specifically motivated and gifted pupils.

Problems in organising extended education appear to lie, for instance, in the opaque system of temporary subsidies which can have an adverse impact on the continuity of the activities. Apart from these issues concerning the availability of funding, issues concerning the efforts made by teaching staff and by students and pupils also play an important role. Both have limits that need to be monitored.

The Education Council concludes that extended education is indeed an important addition to the mainstream education available to all pupils and students. But to achieve positive effects on learning performance or in areas such as general development, discipline and social skills, a number of requirements must first be met, such as having a quality, focused programme and intensive and enthusiastic participation. It has also been shown that disadvantaged pupils in particular can benefit from additional educational activities.

The conclusion is therefore that extended education is both important and desirable.

However, because of the importance and the potential added value of extended education for pupils and students, the Education Council believes that a significant expansion and improvement of extended education is desirable.

Furthermore, its organisation in terms of funding and administration could be simplified. In the Education Council's view, *all* pupils and students should have access to extended education. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, research into additional programmes show that these can help pupils and students from deprived backgrounds to reduce or close their learning gap. Secondly, in today's complex, knowledge-intensive society, it is important to develop talent in the broadest sense. Extended education significantly increases the possibilities for achieving this. Thirdly, extended education can also be used to encourage excellence in several areas, which is also an important ambition within society.

Recommendations: the Minister should facilitate and encourage, while schools should make conscious choices

The importance of extended education demands that the Minister should facilitate this, but also demands that schools should make conscious choices so that a more coherent approach emerges and far-reaching, sustainable initiatives are developed. The Education Council proposes a number of measures to achieve this.

Firstly, it is important that the Minister actively encourages extended education by removing the barriers experienced by schools and other organisations in terms of funding and administration. The role of the Minister as a facilitator could be filled, for instance, by bringing schools (demand side) and the external parties (supply side) together. One possibility would be to develop a digital portal, which would preferably also include a classification system to provide insight into the different types of activities and the quality of these. Activities could then be judged on proven effectiveness or other quality aspects. It is recommended that existing initiatives in this area are integrated or able to link into this.

Furthermore, the Minister could contribute to a more systematic approach in the provision of extended education, not least by ensuring that the education attended by pupils and students is made more visible. The Minister could also ensure that diverse types of activity can increasingly be placed within the same framework. This would ideally be accompanied by a simplification of the funding streams for these activities.

Furthermore, the Education Council proposes that the Minister launch a multi-year development project involving one hundred schools in the primary and senior secondary vocational education segments to make a start on a systematic approach to extended education, and to gain a better understanding of the success factors. The progress of this project and its results should be systematically monitored.

Another way to achieve a systematic approach to extended education and to encourage participation by pupils and students would be to formalise the completion of high quality activities in a visible way by their inclusion in a diploma supplement, for instance, or in an academic record. This is currently already done for performance-improving activities, but there is room for improvement in making participation in enriching and orienting activities equally visible. The role of the Minister in this should be to set a national framework, preferably in collaboration with the sectoral organisations.

One of the conditions for the effectiveness of extended education is that pupils and students participate frequently and for prolonged periods. This may mean that some schools, especially primary schools, might need to incorporate more flexibility and freedom into the teaching timetable, because the regular curriculum must not suffer as a result of extended education. Ideally, extended education will bolster the regular curriculum.

Schools should be asked to place the many activities that they already perform in a broader context, to make a conscious decision in favour of a programme of extended education, and to give shape to this in accordance with local circumstances. Given the limited time available to teachers and the professionalisation of the supply, it is recommended that third parties specialised in a wide variety of educational activities are hired. Other external parties, such as the social elite and businesses, could also contribute more to education than they may now perhaps realise. Herein also lies a role for the Minister to encourage these parties to invest in education.

Finally, sectoral organisations could play a role in encouraging and improving the supply of extended education. They could, for example, set up a central information centre to provide schools with answers to their questions or encourage information exchange among schools.