

Nassaulaan 6

2514 JS The Hague

Telephone +31 (0) 70 310 00 00

Fax +31 (0) 70 356 14 74

E-mail secretariaat@onderwijsraad.nl

www.onderwijsraad.nl

**A LIFE OF LEARNING,
PARTICULARLY IN VOCATIONAL
AND ADULT EDUCATION**

Summary

The Education Council is an independent advisory body, set up by the act of 15 may 1997 (the Education Council act). The council advises, whether requested to or not, on the main features of the policy and legislation in the field of education. The council advises the ministers of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs and of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries. The upper and lower chambers of the states general can also request recommendations from the council. Local authorities can, in special cases of local education policy, call on the services of the Education Council. The council consists of nineteen members who are appointed in a private capacity.

*Education Council
Nassaulaan 6
2514 JS The Hague
tel +31 (0) 70 310 00 00
fax +31 (0) 70 356 14 74
email secretariaat@onderwijsraad.nl
www.onderwijsraad.nl*

SUMMARY *A life of learning, particularly in vocational training and adult education*

Recommendations of the Education Council issued to the Minister of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs, dated 31 March 1998. Order number 980173/195.

A LIFE OF LEARNING, PARTICULARLY IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND ADULT EDUCATION

Summary

The *Onderwijsraad* (Education Council) advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science on the subject of "A life of learning" with specific emphasis on the *BVE* sector (vocational training and adult education). The Council has formulated its recommendations on the basis of two questions posed by the Minister.

1. Which requirements must be met by the (key) qualifications aimed for during initial education, insofar as they are important within the context of "A life of learning"?
2. What functions can (key) qualifications have within the context of the employability of school leavers, and BVE graduates in particular?

Technological, economic and social developments force the educational system to adapt. Content and design of (vocational) education must continually be adapted to new contents and requirements made by vocational practice and other social activities. Furthermore, it is clear that a one-off qualification acquired at the beginning of a career no longer suffices; the rapid changes taking place in the labour market entail that knowledge and skills must be kept up-to-date, increased and even transformed. In both cases the required adaptations lead to adjustments in the qualifications or competencies that must be aimed for.

Policy development in terms of "A life of learning" fits in with a tradition of permanent education, recurring education or lifelong learning. This policy development was given a boost during the National Knowledge Debate. Based on the conclusion of this Knowledge Debate, the present cabinet introduced a national action plan "A life of learning" to serve as the basis for further policy development. The programme emphasises both the economic basis and the social importance of "A life of learning", with more attention being devoted to the economic aspect.

The Council is of the opinion that in view of "A life of learning" four types of competencies should be aimed for in education:

**Vocational competencies* (job profile-based competencies that allow wide employability within a vocational domain).

**Learning competencies* (competencies such as learning strategies, meta-cognition and learning attitude that form the basis for acquiring both specific expertise and more general skills).

**Career competencies* (knowledge, skills and attitudes that make it possible to operate successfully on the labour market).

**Citizenship competencies* (knowledge, skills and attitudes that make it possible to act autonomously in both a social and private environment).

As (in accordance with the request for advice) the Council mainly focuses on the employability of BVE graduates, its advice focuses on the first three competencies mentioned. The Council is of the opinion that these must fulfil the three functions below within the context of employability.

- a. The *fallback function*: the possibility to fall back on other jobs within the same vocational domain. The breadth of the qualifications and the standard are important here (as expressed in vocational competencies).
- b. The *broadening function*: ability to acquire qualifications for new vocations. Learning competencies play a conditional role in this respect.
- c. The *labour market function*: the conditions for this function are formed by career competencies to estimate the opportunities and threats on the labour market for someone's own career and to deal effectively with them.

The Council is of the opinion that within the context of "A life of learning" and more specifically in view of employability, the collection of qualifications to be aimed for should undergo the broadening as stated above. The Council recommends that the types of qualifications or competencies are operationalised in a feasible and well-considered system of attainment targets for each BVE course. According to the Council, the first step should be the evaluation of the current collection of attainment targets set against the background of the competency types given here.

The Council therefore recommends that the current qualification structure be evaluated in terms of the three aforementioned categories of criteria (vocational competencies, learning competencies and career competencies) and is adapted where necessary.

The Council realises that less gifted students (and graduates) will require extra attention; the proposed broadening with both learning competencies and career competencies will require considerable efforts from this group in particular. It is precisely this group, however, that will need these competencies most.

The proposed broadening of the qualification structure should have far-reaching consequences on ideas about secondary professional education and its incorporation in the syllabus. A departure from the 'monopoly' of profile-based vocational competencies demands a thoroughly developed and implemented policy.

Recommendations issued by the Education Council can be viewed and downloaded from the website:

www.onderwijsraad.nl

Review copies can be requested by telephone from mrs. B.C.M. Nout (information officer), tel +31 (0)70 310 00 15, or by email: c.nout@onderwijsraad.nl