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**TEACHER POLICY:  
QUALITY FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW**  
*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.

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SUMMARY *Teacher policy: quality for today and tomorrow*

Recommendations of the Education Council issued to the Minister of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs, dated 26 May 1999. Order number 990326/435.

## **TEACHER POLICY: QUALITY FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW**

### *Summary*

The policy document 'Tailor-made for tomorrow: the prospect of an open employment market', published in April 1999 by the Minister of Education, Science and Cultural Affairs, contains policy starting points for the medium term and measures to deal with the shortages on the employment market. The policy document indicates three ways in which teacher policy can be modelled in the future, namely according to the employment conditions policy, the quality policy and the training policy including professionalisation. Moreover, the document describes priority programmes intended to combat the acute shortage of teachers.

#### **Angle of approach**

The Council positions the policy document within current policy with regard to developments in the teaching profession and the quality of the teacher training courses. It considers that, in order for a proper assessment to be made of the policy measures for solving the acute shortages, it is first essential to gain insight into the medium or long term policy.

The angle of approach chosen by the Council was a further exploration of the (un)attractiveness of the profession of teacher. It has identified six clusters of factors which affect the dynamism of the education sector and the schools within this sector:

- the increasing number of tasks that teachers have to carry out;
- professionalisation and job differentiation;
- the (external) mobility in teachers' careers;
- pupil characteristics and the attractiveness of the learning environment;
- the development of the capacity of schools to implement policy;
- environmental changes which impose ever-increasing demands on the way in which teachers fulfil their tasks.

The above-mentioned factors play a role in teachers' perception of their profession. These factors are usually referred to negatively in terms of being a burden on the system. However, the Council believes that they can also be regarded as contributing to the sector's dynamism.

In relation to this, the Council notes that it regards the quality of education as a guiding factor for the assessment of policy in relation to teachers. One implication of this is that demands and tasks vis-à-vis the profession of teacher can be regarded from more angles than from the perspective of (prospective) teachers alone. The perspective of other parties involved, primarily the demanding party, namely pupils and their parents, are of equal importance.

It is the above-mentioned context within which, in the view of the Council, the current employment market problem needs to be placed. In the Council's view, an in-depth discussion is necessary of the demands made on teachers and the employment organisation in which they work.

#### **Situation on the employment market**

Employment opportunities are increasing in all three sectors of primary education, secondary education and vocational training and adult education, but the reasons vary per sector. The Council concludes that the increase in employment opportunities and the greater outflow of older employees in particular has resulted in an increased demand for teachers. It also states that the teacher training institutions will only be able to meet some of the demand. There is an imbalance in the relationship between supply and demand which affects special education, western areas of the country and certain subjects more than other types of schools, other regions and subjects. Schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils are also affected relatively more by the employment market problem than other schools.

#### **Quality requirements**

The Council assesses the policy intentions proposed in the policy document with regard to employment conditions and personnel policy, the quality of the profession, the horizontal intake into the profession, the teacher training institutions and the priority programmes partially against the backdrop of the identified core problems and contours of

the profession for the 21st century. By this latter, the Council means that developments in society must be reflected in education by innovating the contents and adaptation of the organisation. The demands which this makes on teachers' tasks and jobs constitute important points of reference in the assessment. In addition, the angle of approach of 'a life of learning' is important in this context, in connection with teachers' own professionalism.

The Council also lays great store by the fact that the school or institution develops into a professional modern employment organisation which will (have to) mean, among other things, differentiation in staff establishment.

### **Employment conditions and personnel policy**

The Council generally endorses the policy intentions with regard to the employment conditions and personnel policy. However, the Council does believe that a significant financial impulse is required to make temporary measures possible which can considerably increase the attractiveness of the profession in the current overstretched employment market situation.

It considers that the process of encouraging professionalism requires a powerful impulse.

The Council agrees with the idea of modernisation of personnel policy. It considers more tailor-made measures instead of generic ones to be a good solution for the problems, but in this context points to the constitutional responsibility of the minister for the quality of teachers. Improving the effectiveness of (in-service)training by making such training obligatory is regarded by the Council as being a move in the right direction. With regard to the pressure of work, a further differentiation of the staff establishment is a solution, dependent partly on the school's capacity to implement policy. It goes without saying that this entails an important relationship with the development of a Teaching Profession Act.

### **Quality of the profession (Teaching Profession Act)**

The Council supports the intention to produce a Teaching Profession Act. It agrees with the idea that the intended Act has to make the relationship between the different aspects of quality assurance clear and has to indicate which actors are responsible.

The Council does believe that the development and adjustment of the professional profiles and the professional standard can be a task for the professional group itself, given the desirability of placing a substantial part of the responsibility for professional quality with the professional group of teachers. None of this detracts from the fact that the government's responsibility entails that the profiles and the standard have to be based on the Teaching Profession Act.

The Council points out, in anticipation of a broader assessment once the intentions are recorded in a draft bill, that it sets great store by the opportunity the Teaching Profession Act can offer with regard to attaching conditions to the maintenance of a registration procedure, with a view to the systematic monitoring, management and improvement of the quality of education. As far as a number of other aspects of the proposals are concerned, such as for example the level of registration and the possibility of including extra qualifications in the register, the Council cannot make any comment at this stage given that the proposals in question have not been developed sufficiently and that, in general, further study is necessary for the issues concerned.

### **Diversity of the professional group (medium term)**

The Council rejects the direct placement of unqualified staff (horizontal intake) into primary education. It is very important to be able to deploy personnel in primary education who have been extremely well trained in educational theory and teaching methods. After all, during that period, the basis is laid for pupils' later school careers and it will not be possible to rectify shortages and delays which have occurred during that period, or it will only be possible to rectify these with extreme difficulty. The Council believes that, as far as the (medium to) long term is concerned, teachers recruited into secondary education via horizontal intake, following an 'assessment' which is the responsibility of a teacher training institution, must complete a high quality, tailor-made and sound training course which should result, within a foreseeable period of time subsequent to their appointment, in an attainment of the intended qualifications. The 'assessment' must, in any case, reveal that the teachers have sufficient basic knowledge of their subjects, and an affinity with dealing with young people. Moreover, the school or institution should have a paid supervisor who can support the training course referred to above, on the basis of close cooperation with a teacher training institution.

Previously, the Council indicated that the preferred way of becoming a teacher is via a teacher training institution, although a 'second way' can have its attractions and that it would not reject the latter method out of hand. According to the Council, it is imaginable that the 'second way' can be pursued, subject to stringent conditions and with due regard for the constitutional duty to arrange such by law.

### **Teacher training institutions and new training routes leading to the teaching profession**

The policy document asks the teacher training institutions to adopt a new demand-oriented approach in order to help solve the employment market problem. The Council is pleased with the decision to assign a role exclusively to the existing teacher training institutions as far as the certification of training routes which provide access to the profession is concerned. The Council also supports the government's policy of assigning the assessment function for those recruited by means of horizontal intake to the existing teacher training institutions. The Council agrees with the government with regard to the maintenance of the demands relating to content as recorded in the (draft) initial skills requirements and shared curricula.

Although the Council applauds the fact that the government is temporarily providing additional resources to the teacher training institutions, the policy document does not sufficiently acknowledge the 34 complex adaptations requested of the teacher training institutions. The adaptation of the internal organisation, the development of a new training routes architecture, the development of teaching strategy innovations within the training courses through the introduction of ICT and the substantial advancement of the expertise of those who train teachers (by, among other things, the development of a register) demand that the core of the existing teacher training institutions be 'totally redesigned'. This not only applies to the initial part of the training, but equally to the development of related post-initial sections of the course within the framework of further (subject or job oriented) training, in-service training, retraining and support for teachers during their professional career.

In this context, the Council proposes that one should consider to what extent the success of these drastic changes within teacher training institutions can produce a qualitative impulse by also using, in a regional context, the available expertise of national and regional education institutions and educational partners from the universities. To this end, an administrative and, if possible, (new) institutional cooperation arrangement could be drawn up.

### **The short term**

Under the title 'All hands on deck: the provision of staff in education', the policy document details three priority programmes. The programmes relate respectively to the primary education, secondary education and vocational training and adult education sectors. They are intended to solve the quantitative shortages of teachers in the short term.

With regard to *primary education* the Council has established that shortages which have arisen and which are to be expected are a result of the reduction in class sizes policy measure. The Council fears that an attempt will be made to use unqualified staff (recruited via horizontal intake) in order to meet the need for teachers. This is a development which will not contribute to the objective of the measure referred to, namely an increase in quality. It emphatically rejects the deployment of unqualified staff. It urgently instructs the reductions in class sizes to be geared to the availability of sufficient qualified teachers.

The funds acquired by means of the proposed temporisation should, in the view of the Council, be earmarked for allocation to instruments which can, in the short term, encourage the realisation of the intended objective, namely an increase in quality, in a more effective manner. By this, it primarily means the implementation of ICT, the promotion of professionalisation (particularly by means of in-service training) and an improvement in employment conditions. The Council has established that the package of measures for *secondary education* is still undergoing considerable development, meaning that no final assessment can be made. The Council regards it as a step in the right direction that those directly concerned with the issue of shortages in practice will be involved. It believes that horizontal intake can only take place once the intended assessment instruments are operational. In addition, adequate supervision at school level should be guaranteed.

In the Council's opinion proposals put forward should be extrapolated seriously by schools and institutions as regards their effects from the educational and employment market points of view, such as for example proposals related to the shortening of the school week. The arrangement laid down in the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) for teachers recruited via horizontal intake should, in the Council's opinion, be an important point of attention within the framework of the evaluation of that Act.

Lastly, the Council points out that the necessity of investment in education is an indisputable fact. The overdue funding, as has been shown by, among other things, OESO comparisons during recent years, constitutes a serious threat in the long term to the level of education and with that the competitive position of the Netherlands in the global economy. It would seem to the Council that a substantial financial injection is sorely needed in order to stimulate all levels of education to maintain quality and continue improvements. An additional, but very important effect of this is that faith in the education sector would be restored.

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