

Distinctive preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) with strong end-to-end learning pathways

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The position of preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) in the Dutch education system is at risk of being undermined. The decline in numbers of pupils makes it difficult to organise good quality education and there are concerns about the appeal of VMBO education. Its appeal suffers from its complex structure and its negative image. The following question was submitted by the Dutch House of Representatives: *How can the position of VMBO education within the Dutch education system be strengthened?*

Various innovations in education have taken place in VMBO education. These were aimed at improving the learning content and the quality of education. However, these did not solve the problems mentioned above. Based on the analysis made in this advisory report, the Education Council concludes that VMBO education can be strengthened by clustering learning pathways and profiling “craftsmanship” (Dutch term: “vakmanschap”).

The Education Council therefore recommends simplifying the structure of current VMBO programmes. It proposes to merge the basic and profession-oriented learning pathways to a single end-to-end learning pathway. The combined and theoretical learning pathways could be merged into a single junior general secondary education (MAVO) programme.

The Education Council recommends that the study programme that emerges from the clustering of the basic and profession-oriented learning pathways be profiled as a craftsmanship programme. This programme could be developed by using design principles derived from the “vakcollege” (“vakcollege” refers to a learning pathway within VMBO and MBO). To improve the image of vocational learning, it is of essential importance that the craftsmanship programme also provides access to the highest levels of senior secondary vocational education (MBO). The Education Council also calls for attention for retaining the broad, preparatory nature of the craftsmanship programme, and recommends that cooperation between educational institutions offering craftsmanship pathways, MBO programmes and businesses be facilitated.

The Education Council recommends that the study programme that emerges from the clustering of the combined and the theoretical learning pathway be profiled as a junior general secondary education (MAVO) programme that forms a starting point for end-to-end learning pathways. To improve transfer opportunities between MAVO and MBO programmes, the Education Council recommends that vocational subjects be included in the MAVO curriculum. To improve transfer opportunities to senior general secondary education (HAVO), the Education Council recommends that preparatory classes be organised for pupils who aspire to HAVO education.

The Education Council is in favour of the gradual introduction of the new programmes. The education sector must be given the space to develop the programmes itself. The recommendations given here do not therefore aim to set out a blueprint for how the programmes should be organised. The Education Council does, however, point out preferred directions that developments should follow, as well as some important points for attention.

The Education Council formulates two points of attention for the future. The question of the position of preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) cannot be regarded separately from the question of the position of senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university education (VWO) or senior secondary vocational education (MBO) within the system. This has been the source of much discussion within society. In the view of the Education Council, it makes no sense to tinker with the position of individual programmes without considering the impact on the entire system. The Education Council will therefore address this theme in future advisory reports on a resilient education system. The Education Council also believes that attention is needed for vulnerable young people following the craftsmanship learning pathway.