

Good prospects for young generations

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The Council's second advisory report against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic deals with long-term consequences and approaches, i.e. the start of the new academic year and beyond. It covers all segments of the education system and sketches a way to conduct educational policies in these extraordinary times. It also offers an agenda for policies and investments in education. The pandemic has necessitated unprecedented measures, also within the education system. Schools, universities, and their staff have faced this situation with a lot of resilience and creativity. However, both the education community and the government still encounter many challenges to overcome the consequences of the crisis. The Ministry has asked the Education Council to help think of possible ways to deal with these challenges.

Next stage calls for strategic approach to educational policies

Most likely, the education community has entered a long era of uncertainty in which developments are highly dynamic and unpredictable. As the pandemic enters a new stage, a more strategic and coherent way of conducting government policies is called for. The government's responsibility for a well-functioning education as a whole should serve as a starting point. Professionals within the education community need room to develop solutions that are appropriate for their schools or study programmes, as well as for their pupils or students. On the other hand, the government is charged with watching over public values and supporting schools and universities. High levels of suspense necessitate open and learning modes of policy-making. It is essential that the government keeps a close eye on what is happening within the educational field and which approaches and interventions turn out to be effective. Therefore, the government should initiate research and knowledge dissemination. The Council stresses the significance of scenario-based approaches in which policy makers reckon with multiple possible courses both within education and in the societal environment of schools. Policy makers should also consider various interests and perspectives – ensuring that the educational perspective is given due regard as well at all times – and acknowledge that this crisis causes new forms of scarcity within education.

A policy and investment agenda for education

The Education Council formulates three principles for educational policies in the months and years to come:

1. Investing in education pays off.

Targeted investments are needed to uphold qualitative education in the long run. Education is crucial to guide the Netherlands out of this crisis. In addition, education offers young generations good prospects for the future as to chances at the labour market and participating in society at large.

2. Cherishing zeal and fostering learning will enhance education.

Throughout the pandemic, educational professionals have shown how much zeal is present within the education community. New experiences and creative solutions are manifold and progress has been made in developing skills. It is important to build on those experiences and solutions to improve education. Simultaneously, the crisis brought to the fore several vulnerabilities within the education system. Lessons can be learned from that as well.

3. Schools and universities also serve a social purpose.

Schools and universities are meeting places, venues to learn together and to learn how to live together, communities fostered by collective experiences. Personal contact and interaction are crucial to educational processes and to working on a wide range of educational and

pedagogical purposes. Policy makers should reckon with that when balancing interests and deciding on measures.

Furthermore, the Council identifies five strategic matters that already were burning issues prior to the pandemic. These issues directly strike at the core functions of education, and are probably augmented by the pandemic. They should guide educational policies to overcome consequences of the coronavirus crisis.

a. Invest in teachers and school leaders

Several segments of the education system struggle with staff shortages. Due to disease and increased work load, more people might drop out. It is of the highest importance to ensure that education remains an attractive field to work in.

b. Invest in equal opportunities

Unequal opportunities in education pose a manifest and enduring problem. Despite efforts by schools and universities, the coronavirus pandemic threatens to augment inequality of opportunities. Investments are needed to counter this.

c. Invest in reading skills

Literacy is of the highest importance. It is the key to comprehension in many other subjects, proficiency in digital skills and participation in society. It also renders people less vulnerable on the labour market.

d. Invest in labour market induction and lifelong learning

The pandemic's impact on the economy limits students' chances to find apprenticeships as well as fitting jobs after graduation and, hence, prospects of a successful start of their professional life. In addition, lifelong learning gains significance even more. There should be manifold opportunities to engage in further developing one's knowledge and skills.

e. Guarantee functions of tests and exams with respect to transitions within the education system

Tests and exams offer crucial standards for decisions on further steps in one's education. Pandemic measures undermine the functions tests and exams have with respect to transitions within the education system. To allow for successful continuation of pupils and students, more robust ways of organising tests and exams are paramount.